

The James Irwin Charter Schools are “Cursive First” schools. Why?

The articles that are linked give unequivocal support for teaching cursive first, even in our high tech day and age. The articles describe how cursive:

- Stimulates the brain in important ways for cognitive development
- Combines sensory development, movement skills, and thinking development
- Activates areas of the brain more effectively than *both* printing and keyboarding
- Activates “massive regions of the brain involved in thinking, language, and working memory.”
- Causes students to produce better organized *content* of their writing.

Here are some specific FAQs that parents may have that focus on specific concerns. The linked articles will also give parents a wealth of information about the benefits of our Cursive First approach.

Isn't cursive more difficult than print? Give young children a crayon or piece of chalk, and they will draw loops and curves in continuous movements. This *is the natural movement* of the hand. Angles, “ball and stick” letters *seem* easier, but are much more prone to reversals, splitting in the middle of words, giving spacial challenges that lead to bad habits, frustration, illegibility and more.

If cursive is taught in a careful progression of skills, respecting the muscular development of our youngest students, and - *of course* - with tons of encouragement, they will learn cursive and feel proud of their accomplishment. By the end of kindergarten they will have learned all their small and capital letters. Cursive instruction is then continued every year in elementary school so that the good habits can be maintained.

What about students with dyslexia? I'm glad you asked! Cursive actually supports this student in the best way. The printed “b” and “d”, “p” and “q” are easily reversed, never in cursive. Think of the printed “h” and “n” and how easily they are confused. We see that the constant left-to-right direction required in cursive gives needed support in *left-to-right reading of words*. Dr. Klemm (cited in his first linked article) says, “...because cursive letters are more distinct than printed letters, children may learn to read more easily, especially dyslexics.”

What about students with motor-muscular challenges – should THEY be taught cursive, too? We have found teaching cursive is best for the students who have come to JICES with this kind of challenge. In meetings with parents involving students with special education concerns, occupational therapists from the district have assured parents that cursive “is THE best approach” for a student with physical challenges.

Another (private) physical therapist contacted us several years ago, describing how she had been extremely concerned for a young client of hers who was recently enrolled at JICES. She said she was surprised to see how quickly and easily he learned cursive and that she had changed her professional opinion about students with physical disabilities learning cursive first: she now supports it.

Parents can also go to the site, **Cursive is Cool**, where Sheila Lowe provides a wealth of information, <http://www.cursiveiscool.com/> which includes a video of a student without hands, doing cursive. In the 13-minute video on the site, the presenter cites research that supports the use of cursive to reduce ADD/ADHD. Here is a snapshot of one of her slides.

With all the use of computers, is it REALLY that important to learn handwriting? Yes, it is. Writing by hand engages the brain in much deeper processing of reasoning and using the information. Every article by the experts supports this. Also, just because *adults* often word process their writing does *not* mean that word processing is beneficial to young students who are just learning all their literacy skills. Please see the following articles:

- **“Biological and Psychology Benefits of Learning Cursive”** by Dr. William R. Klemm,ⁱ in *Psychology Today* in his “Memory Medic” blog, posted 8/05/2013. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/memory-medic/201308/biological-and-psychology-benefits-learning-cursive>
 - **“What’s Lost as Handwriting Fades,”** Maria Konnicova, New York Times article, 6.2.2014. <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/06/03/science/whats-lost-as-handwriting-fades.html?referrer=& r=0>
 - **“What Learning Cursive Does for Your Brain: Cursive writing makes kids smarter,”** by Dr. William R. Klemm, in *Psychology Today* in his “Memory Medic” blog, posted 3/14/2013, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/memory-medic/201303/why-writing-hand-could-make-you-smarter>
 - **“Ten Reasons People Still Need Cursive”**, posted in The Federalist by Jennifer Doverspike, February 25, 2015. <http://thefederalist.com/2015/02/25/ten-reasons-people-still-need-cursive/>
 - **“How Should We Teach Our Children to Write? Cursive First, Print Later!”** by Dr. Samuel Blumenfeld, September 1994, <http://samuelblumenfeld.com/cursive.htm>
 - **“The Benefits of Cursive Writing,”** Dr. Samuel Blumenfeld, 2005, <http://www.home-school.com/Articles/the-benefits-of-cursive-writing.php>
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