

## **Keeping Lost Art Alive** **Students practice handwriting – not keyboarding**

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HOLLAND, Mich. (AP) -- Each day, a group of fifth-grade students at Douglas Elementary use the first 15 minutes of Pam Wicks' class to practice their handwriting. They may represent a final effort to keep the art of cursive handwriting alive in public schools.

For as long as modern handwriting has existed, these schools have taught students how to make their cursive letters look good on a sheet of paper. Kids used those skills to write reports, answer essay questions and compose notes to friends.

These days, with the popularity of text messaging and the Internet, the classic combination of pencil and paper is slowly being overshadowed by the more modern keyboard and screen. Cursive "is really dying out for the most part," said Patricia Bloem, associate professor of English at Grand Valley State University. "Teachers say, 'Go type this paper. Go get on the computer.'"

Bloem said while elementary schools still use cursive writing, few middle schools and high schools require students to know it. School districts around the area still teach formal handwriting, administrators say, but the amount of time and methods are changing.

Wicks, a teacher at Saugatuck Public Schools' Douglas Elementary, said the school decided to use a new method to teach cursive writing. "We have actually adopted the Peterson Method of Penmanship" which says "penmanship is related to reader comprehension," she said. She said as students write more and more, they learn to better understand what they are reading. In her class, they have a program that teaches cursive, straight manuscript and the little-known slant manuscript.

Brian Davis, assistant superintendent of Holland Public Schools, said in October his district reviewed whether there was value in teaching cursive writing anymore. For now, no policy decisions were made. Many applications still exist, Davis said, that require the use of cursive writing. He cited the Michigan Educational Assessment Program test, which requires students to write out some answers to the test. "There is still some legitimacy and some credibility for students using that craft," Davis said.

However, Holland Public Schools building representatives and department leaders determined during their cursive writing evaluation session that additional high-tech training was necessary for students. "We need to assure students are beginning to receive more formal instruction in keyboarding skills," Davis said.

Bloem, an associate professor of English at Grand Valley State University, said handwriting was important when she lived in Slovakia and Austria. "In Europe it is still being taught to kids at a young age," she said, noting she remembers her sons learning cursive in first grade. Teachers there, she said, are strict when it comes to grading cursive writing. "The teachers place a high premium on carefully shaped letters and elegant-looking writing," Bloem said. Boys especially are taught to value it. "My son had to read and write in cursive," she said. Bloem said the tails of some cursive letters were much different than cursive letters in the United States.