



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: February 11, 2026  
To: Local Educational Agency Leads  
Route To: Principals, Assistant Superintendents of Curriculum and Instruction, Supervisors, Instructional Coaches, Teachers  
From: Jorden Schiff, Ed.D., Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Teaching and Learning Services  
Deadline: Beginning of the 2026-2027 school year

## Cursive Handwriting Instruction

On January 19, 2026, Governor Phil Murphy signed [P.L. 2025, c.284](#), which requires public schools to provide instruction in cursive handwriting for students in grades three through five. To support understanding and implementation of this law, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has issued the following guidance, which provides technical implementation details specifically designed for your curriculum and instruction staff, outlining expectations for districts as they incorporate cursive handwriting instruction into their curriculum for grades three through five beginning in the 2026-2027 school year.

### Requirements

- Instruction shall occur in grades three through five; and
- Curriculum shall include activities and instructional materials that help students become proficient in reading and legibly writing cursive by the end of grade five.

### Considerations for curriculum

The following considerations should be taken into account when incorporating cursive handwriting instruction into curriculum. Educators should:

- Review the foundational skills for writing letters included in the 2023 New Jersey Student Learning Standards for English Language Arts (NJSLS-ELA). Specifically, students are required to match upper and lowercase letters and write upper and lowercase letters with reference to a model by the end of kindergarten. First grade students are required to learn to write the upper and lowercase alphabets from memory. By the end of grade two, students are required to write legibly and with sufficient fluency to support composition;
- Cursive handwriting instruction in grades three through five should intentionally build upon these foundational skills and provide new instruction in cursive letter formation, connections, spacing, and fluency;
- Create explicit, systematic, developmentally sequenced cursive instruction with ample guided practices before independent application;
- Establish consistency in the cursive handwriting style and instructional approach across grade levels;

- Review appropriate instructional materials necessary for reading and writing cursive handwriting;
- Ensure letter formation is accurate, stroke patterns are automatized, and connections between letters are fluent prior to having students compose, reason, or record content in cursive; and
- Consider developing assessment(s) to measure students' proficiency in reading cursive and writing legibly in cursive.

### **Examples of cursive handwriting instruction**

The NJDOE is providing the following instructional examples to model best practices to support direct instruction:

- Letter formation lessons to model techniques may be followed by independent practice.
- Letter formation models are consistently available and actively referenced during instruction to support accurate stroke sequence, letter size, and connections.
- Instruction focused on reading cursive handwriting may include opportunities to examine cursive text (e.g., literature, developmentally appropriate primary source documents, and other authentic writing); however, such activities should complement, rather than replace, explicit instruction in writing cursive letters and words.

### **Opportunities for practice to build proficiency at grade 5 and beyond**

Practice within the current curriculum, through authentic reading and writing activities across all content areas, can support skill development. Integrating cursive handwriting instruction across content areas may be considered once mastery is demonstrated. For example:

- Recording science observations may be done in cursive handwriting as practice following explicit instruction and guided practice in letter formation;
- Structuring opportunities to apply cursive handwriting (e.g., brief reflections, labeled diagrams, or daily journaling) can support accuracy and legibility rather than speed or length; and
- Building proficiency through authentic cursive handwriting practice may occur at classroom learning centers for various content areas.

### **Accommodations and modifications**

Teachers should adjust instruction and materials to support diverse learners, ensuring students with varying needs can participate in cursive handwriting instruction. Examples include:

- Adapt instruction or modify performance expectations for distinct student needs. Some students' success may mean exposure, or guided practice, or the use of alternative response modes;
- Include access to assistive technology and alternative writing tools;
- Support students with fine motor differences, dysgraphia, and/or dyslexia;
- Collaborate with occupational therapists or other related service providers to inform instructional strategies, accommodations, and tools when appropriate for those students with disabilities receiving occupational therapy as a related service; and

- Align instruction and expectations with students' Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs), 504 plans, or other documented supports.

### **Resources**

CLIFTER ([Cursive Letter Identification and Formation for Transcription and Early Reading](#)): This free tool is designed to empower educators and caregivers in supporting students' cursive handwriting and early reading skills.

Stockton University Historical Studies [Handwriting \(Cursive\) Tutorials](#): Digital resources to support writing cursive and reading historical documents.

Rowan University – [Primary Sources by Subject \(Historical\)](#): Library and internet resources for primary sources.

### **Contact Information**

Questions regarding this guidance may be directed to the NJDOE's Office of Standards at [Standards@doe.nj.gov](mailto:Standards@doe.nj.gov).

c: Members, State Board of Education  
NJDOE Staff  
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