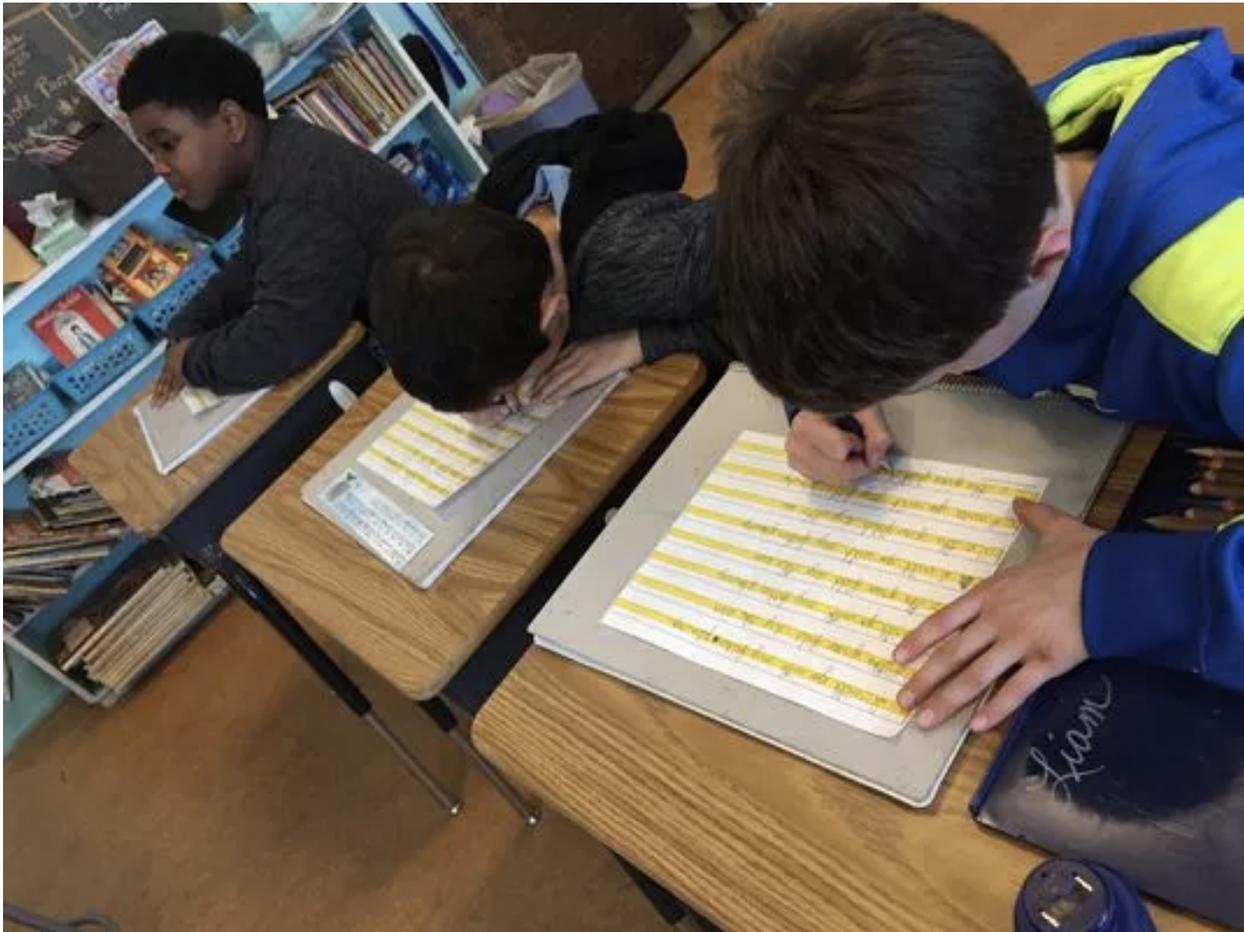


# The Detroit News

## Feighan: Detroit school charts own path with cursive

Maureen Feighan, [The Detroit News](#) 5:23 p.m. ET April 13, 2017



Linda Williams picked up a small piece of white chalk in her third-grade classroom in Detroit last week, bent to the board in front of her and began writing something almost unheard of in today's elementary schools: cursive letters.

Williams is a third-grade teacher at the Detroit Waldorf School in the city's Indian Village neighborhood where students don't just learn to use cursive writing. They practice it every day.

Cursive, says Williams, is more than writing. It's an art form that also connects us to our history. And studies show it helps students use a part of their brain that requires a higher level of thinking. Students also can be more fluid with writing when using cursive.

"It marries the brain and hand in such a way that you develop more fluency in your thought," says Williams.

Art form or not, in most Michigan public elementary schools, cursive is something else: a relic. As technology continues to play a bigger role in classrooms and teachers juggle limited time with higher academic expectations, cursive isn't taught in most schools anymore.

Michigan's Common Core standards don't require that elementary school students are taught cursive, instead focusing on the process of writing and communicating through written word and genres of writing.

That doesn't mean kids in public schools aren't writing. They are — just not in cursive. "We teach students handwriting in the primary grades and as students grow older they determine how their handwriting develops," says Amie McCaw, an elementary school principal in Vicksburg and board member of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association.

Still, technology has definitely decreased the amount of time students spend on paper-pencil activities, McCaw says, "but it is still something that students experience each day."

As a private school, Waldorf isn't handcuffed by state or federal standards. No wonder it walks to the beat of its own drum.

Like something out of a retro Wes Anderson movie, students learn knitting, crocheting and how to play the recorder. Waldorf, which has approximately 230 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, also is a tech-free school. It doesn't even have a computer lab.

Waldorf fourth-grade teacher Diane Reed believes there's a place for technology and teaching students keyboarding in schools, "but it's not here."

On a recent school day with the smell of cookies wafting down a first floor hallway of the 100-year-old building (students also bake at Waldorf), students hunched over lined paper in Williams' class, writing out a classic poem about farming by Joseph Campbell. Nearby, Williams demonstrated how to make the "waves" of the letter "l."

"Isn't it beautiful?" she asked.

In Reed's class, students write exclusively in cursive — and most seem to like it. Ten-year-old Mari Montgomery has gotten so used to writing in cursive that she prefers it to printing now.

"I stopped writing in print because you can't even read it," say Montgomery.

With their cursive but without technology, will students such as Montgomery be better prepared down the road? The writing isn't on the wall yet.

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