



HANDWRITING PROPOSAL

SECTION 1. BEN FRANKLIN ACADEMY

MISSION

The mission of Ben Franklin Academy is to develop young adults with character like America's founding Renaissance man, Benjamin Franklin: well-read, scientifically curious, and civically engaged.

VISION

Our students will excel academically through a challenging, sequenced curriculum that emphasizes math, science, and literacy. We will be a data driven institution, focusing on individual students. Our students, teachers, parents, staff, and leaders will be held accountable for the success of our school. Finally, we recognize that an education is incomplete without fostering the arts, sports, nature, and character.

SECTION 2. HANDWRITING

There are basically two types of manuscript handwriting. One is vertical, ball/stick, traditional manuscript and one is slanted, or italic manuscript. Zaner-Bloser is a commercial name for the traditional print manuscript and De'Nealian is the slanted manuscript.

We all agree that purposeful handwriting instruction will improve many skills that we are trying to build. Some schools have completely gone away from any handwriting. We know that this is not the direction we want Ben Franklin Academy to go.

The curriculum committee decided to go with De'Nealian handwriting. I believe the main reason behind this was the research that showed that De'Nealian made the transition to cursive easier.

TEACHER CONCERNS WITH DE'NEALIAN

It not developmentally appropriate for Kindergarten and 1st graders

It doesn't fit well with the other pieces of curriculum.

Transition to cursive is not impacted.

Typically, students in kindergarten and first grade have already mastered many of the strokes needed to create the alphabet. They already know how to make circles, vertical and horizontal lines. They have already developed some of the gross motor skills needed to create these strokes.

Zaner-Bloser handwriting is based on four strokes. These four strokes are used to make all the letters. Once the students learn the four strokes, they can put them together to form letters. De'nealian is made up of twelve different strokes, which are more difficult for the younger students to learn. Those twelve strokes require motor skills that some students haven't developed yet.

It is not impossible for young children to write in De'Nealian, but it can prove to be a difficult transition for some.

The biggest concern brought up by the staff has been that the other programs we are using to develop literacy skills use the Zaner-Bloser handwriting. All worksheets, picture books, testing material in Treasures reading, which we are also using for phonics instruction, use the traditional print. All letter cards and sound development practice is written in the traditional print. We would be teaching students to recognize letters one way, but asking them to write those letters a different way. This will cause confusion. For example, if a student is working on beginning sounds, they have a practice sheet that asks them to fill in the beginning letter. The worksheet shows how to make the letter, and we would be asking them to not to it the way the worksheet says, but do it the way we have been practicing. It will lead to teachers not being able to fully utilize the reading curriculum the way it was built. Environmentally, the students will experience mostly traditional manuscript.....trade books, road signs, assessments (AIMSweb uses only traditional print in their testing) and other materials. We are afraid that teaching a different handwriting, basically teaching it in isolation, will be counter-productive.

Studies have shown that students who learn traditional handwriting do not have a more difficult transition to cursive. Either handwriting style lends itself to cursive. Students who develop strong fine motor skills early will be able to make the transition.

COST/ORDERING

We have ordered all the De'Nealian materials. We can return any material that is unopened, or unused and get refunds for all the materials.

We can still use De'Nealian for 3rd-6th grades. We can use 2nd grade as a transitional year. By third grade, students are transitioning into cursive anyway.

The cost is very close. The practice books for Zaner-Bloser are actually a little cheaper. I think we can get a very similar deal, and keep the budget in line.

We will have to provide paperwork to CDE for the grant.

PRESCHOOL ISSUES

Neither program has a pre-school program, however I was able to find many resources for preschool instruction that utilizes the Z-B style of writing.

POTENTIAL CONCERNS

One concern brought to my attention is that maybe the teachers are just more comfortable using Z-B, that they haven't used De'Nealian before. I don't believe any of our kindergarten teachers have used De'Nealian before. However, I don't see that they are resistant to the program because they haven't used it. They are resistant to the program,

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because they don't believe it is in the students' best interest. We have outstanding teachers. We have a couple of kindergarten teachers who have over twenty years experience each. The fact that they haven't ever used this program, I think says a lot. They have had much success teaching kids to read and write using the Zaner-Bloser format. They have seen the results that come from that instruction.

RESEARCH

I do have research articles that support using traditional handwriting. Many other charter schools in the district (as well as traditional schools) use Zaner-Bloser. Platte River Academy, North Star academy and Sky View all use Z-B. It is a well documented, successful program that fits in with the rest of our curriculum.

I do not like changing horses mid-stream. I would recommend this change if I didn't feel that it is in the best interest of the students of Ben Franklin Academy.

RECOMMENDATION

It is my recommendation to change from De'Nealian to Zaner-Bloser handwriting in grades K-2.