

CLASS ACT

Rylee Kirk on a growing initiative across schools and libraries in the US

Cursive Club

Chris Kobara stood in front of an electronic whiteboard in his New York City high school, practising with a sloop of his pen the connection between the "a" and "r" in his name.

He stepped back and looked at the board with Suzanne Finman, his English teacher, who had been coaching him. "If it's readable, it's something," he said, displeased with his effort.

Kobara, 18, was one of six students who gathered after school in Finman's classroom at the Urban Assembly Early College High School of Emergency Medicine on a recent afternoon to practise signing their names in cursive.

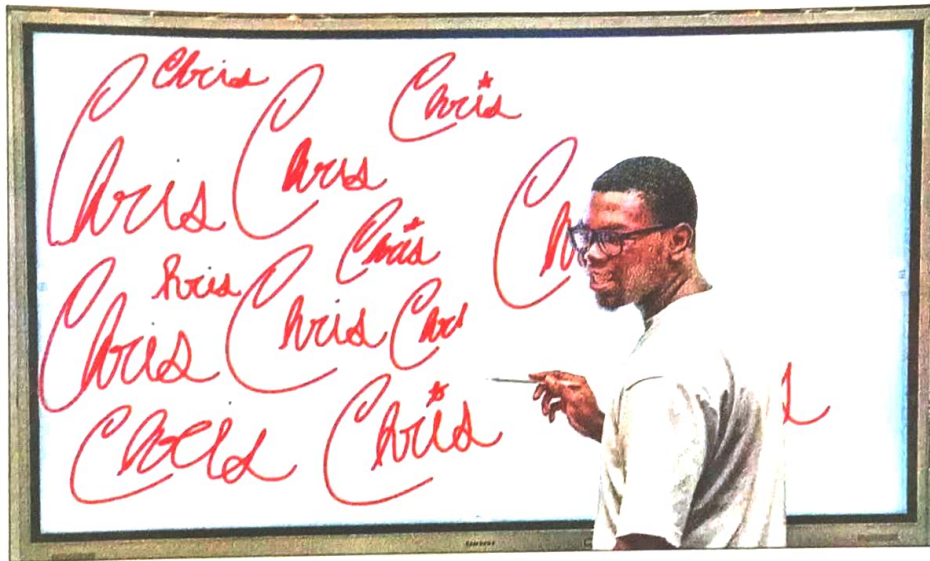
The students, all of them high school seniors, filled sheets with their names, at times comparing the flourishes they added to their letters. The club is one of several that have been established in recent years at schools and libraries across the country where children are learning cursive as an extracurricular activity.

Cursive was not included when the Common Core standards were adopted in 2010, and now many children can't sign their names, write checks or read historical documents written in cursive, such as the Declaration of Independence.

In a 2016 interview with Education Week, Sue Pimentel, who helped shape the Common Core state standards for English and language arts, said a higher priority had been placed on students learning how to use technology than learning cursive.

While some states have restored cursive writing to their curriculums, some students in states where it remains excluded have sought ways to learn the skill outside school.

"Knowing how to write



PATTERNS: High school student Chris Kobara practises writing his name at a New York City school while other members of the club look on



your name in script is really important," Kobara said. He's been practising his signature for several weeks after school, perfecting a loop in the "C" of his first name, and plans to write thank you notes to teachers in cursive.

It started with the students' curiosity. "When students see me take my own notes in cursive, they immediately ask me

to write their name in cursive, and then they ask me to teach it to them," Finman said. "This has happened a lot over the years, so I asked, 'Could I teach you this in a cursive club?'"

While some students are learning in extracurricular clubs at school, others are finding their penmanship lessons at libraries. Mandi Whipple, a librarian who specialises in

young adult books at the public library in Blackstone, Massachusetts, US, was inspired to start a cursive club last year after one of her colleagues observed that her grandchildren couldn't read cursive writing.

Now, a group of students meets at the library for an hour every Thursday to practise the looping script of their letters. "The ones that have stuck with it are now writing full sentences," Whipple said.

A cursive programme at Abington Community Library in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, US, has a defined curriculum that children follow for eight weeks, focusing on a few letters each week. "We show them how to do it, and they can

copy us on paper," said Leigh-Ann Puchalski, the children's librarian. "Then we do practice where they practise on worksheets. To make it fun, we add different sensory elements."

The children can trace letters in salt with their fingers, use magnetised drawing boards called Magna Doodles and write in gel pens to make it fun, Puchalski said. The programme has been so popular that it has had a waitlist, she said.

With the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence this year, Puchalski is emphasising the historical side of cursive and having children trace the Constitution. "For one of the sessions we'll use parchment paper," Puchalski said.

In Pennsylvania, cursive won't be a relic of the past much longer. Gov. Josh Shapiro signed a bill in February to reintroduce it in schools, joining at least 23 other states that have started to require that it be taught in schools. New Jersey is reintroducing cursive for the 2026-27 school year. Idaho brought it back last year.

Cursive is not just for signing checks. It also has a scientific advantage. "When you form those intricate letters, those motor patterns on paper, it actually requires much more of the brain, and the brain is much more active, and it's more stimulating for the brain than to type letters on the keyboard," said Audrey van der Meer, a brain researcher and professor of psychology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim.

Van der Meer conducted a study of 140 students who were quizzed after a lecture by their professor. Those who took notes by hand scored better on the quiz than those who typed their notes, she said.