

# School expands handwriting program

By Erin Borla  
Correspondent

Thanks to a grant from the Sisters Schools Foundation, Sisters Elementary School will be able to expand their Handwriting Without Tears program beyond kindergarten to first and second grade.

Tiffany Briggs, a parent at Sisters Elementary School, put together the grant for the Sisters Schools Foundation this past spring. Briggs writes, "Research has shown the benefits of handwriting go beyond penmanship. Handwriting skills help brain development, reading, writing, and critical-thinking skills just to name a few. When a student becomes confident in handwriting, they pay more attention to the lecture and retain more knowledge because they can focus less on their handwriting abilities."

The Handwriting Without Tears curriculum is designed to make handwriting easy to teach and easy to learn in 15 minutes a day. Each program follows three principles, including intuitive and engaging materials, active teaching, and teacher support. The program facilitates instruction

and engages children so they are active participants.

Handwriting Without Tears has shown an improvement in student test scores. When students can write more fluidly they are taking less time trying to figure out how to write the letters and are able to keep up with note-taking.

"Students can get bogged down with letter formation rather than focusing on the content of the lesson," says Kori Cantrell, a special education instructor at Sisters Elementary School.

With all of the upgrades in technology in our world, many believe handwriting is a lost art.

"Even in a world where we don't have to hand-write everything, there is still a need for this skill," says Katie Diez, occupational therapist that works with the Sisters School District from the High Desert Education Service District (HDES). "People still have to fill out forms, write within designated spaces, and even may have a job that requires legible handwriting."

Learning proper pencil grip is one of the most important lessons young children

can learn. Improper grip can cause cramping and strain on hands, which then leads to difficulty taking notes and falling behind in class.

"If students begin to learn to hold a pencil in an inefficient way they will end up with hand fatigue," says Diez. "Writing may become painful for them."

Diez recommends parents of young children work with small, golf-size pencils so children are encouraged to hold the pencil with the correct grip.

The grant from the Sisters Schools Foundation will help provide implementation of Handwriting Without Tears to current K-2 teachers. The program provides a multi-sensory approach to learning where students move, sing, talk, and experience each lesson. Teachers will have training, workbooks, online teaching tools and manipulative tools to use in the classroom.

One of the favorite methods to learn letters is "wet, dry, try" — where students use a small damp sponge to draw the letter on a small



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

Learning to write by hand remains an important skill in the digital age.

chalkboard, then dry the wet letter with a small paper towel, followed by a chance to 'try' the letter with chalk.

"We teach it as a mix of lines and curves — all on the same plane," says Diez. "Using small tools, the wet, dry, try method helps to teach a functional pencil grasp as well."

Teachers use the

manuscript style of handwriting throughout the program. This style uses basic line forms — horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and circular. Students learn all the capital letters first, followed by lower-case letters.

Handwriting Without Tears will be expanded beginning this upcoming 2016-2017 school year.

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