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Special Education Field Advisory

From: James P. DeLorenzo

Subject: Guidance for the Transition to Unified English Braille

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information to school personnel regarding their responsibilities for preparing students who use English Braille American Edition (EBAE) to transition to Unified English Braille (UEB) as well as to provide resources for teachers for professional development. Instruction in UEB should begin as soon as possible during the 2015-2016 school year. Use of Music Braille and Nemeth code for math, science and technical subjects should be continued.

In 2012, the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) voted to adopt UEB to replace EBAE in the United States, effective January 4, 2016. The project that led to the development of UEB was initiated in 1991 in an effort to preserve the use of braille worldwide. As of this "effective" date, UEB, Nemeth, Music, and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) will be the official braille codes for use in the United States. Materials that have been produced in other braille codes prior to the 2016 UEB implementation date will remain in circulation.

For many individuals who are blind and visually impaired, braille is necessary for the development of literacy. Students, teachers, braille transcribers, and parents and family members of individuals who read braille will need to learn UEB or update their knowledge of braille to include the rules governing UEB. The main aspects of literary braille which will be impacted by the change to UEB, resources to facilitate the transition to UEB, and implications for the production of materials in UEB to ensure that students receive adequate instruction in the new code are summarized below.

State assessments administered during the 2015-16 school year will continue to be provided in the EBAE format for individuals who need their assessments in braille format. NYSED is currently developing a transition plan for State assessments in UEB, in consultation with stakeholders, to ensure that assessments are appropriately aligned with instruction for students with disabilities who may be impacted by this transition. Sufficient

prior notice will be provided to the field prior to the administration of State assessments in the UEB format.

Summary of Changes to the Braille Code

UEB is based on current literary braille, which is the most widely used code internationally; is designed to be more "'computable' (i.e., easier to translate electronically), less ambiguous (i.e., with fewer exceptions and rules), and includes symbols for technical materials"[1]. This new code will standardize the codes used by other countries that use English Braille. The New York State Education Department has selected the option set forth by BANA to continue to use the Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science, Music Braille and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in conjunction with UEB. Although literary braille in UEB will retain many of the same basic structures as EBAE, BANA has identified changes to the following aspects of braille code:

- Elimination of and changes to contractions;
- Changes to punctuation and symbols;
- Spacing;
- Period, decimal, dot and ellipsis;
- Capitalization;
- Italics, bold and underline;
- Numbers;
- Web and email addresses, file names and Twitter handles;
- Accents; and
- Formatting.

More detailed information on these changes can be found on BANA's website at: http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb/overview_changes_ebae_ueb.html.

Training Resources

School districts, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), approved private schools, State supported schools and State operated schools should begin accessing training resources for their teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired as soon as possible. Teachers of the blind and visually impaired and other relevant staff will need to be given adequate time to attend professional development and training sessions on UEB. The following list includes some of the UEB trainings and resources for transcribers and teachers. Many of these resources are available at no cost.

- Information about the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) braille transcriber: https://nfb.org/braille-transcribing;

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[1] Unified English Braille Implementation Guide, Council Of Chief State School Officers, May 2015 http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/Unified%20English%20Braille%20Implementation%20Guide%20-%20Final%2005%2012%202015.pdf

- An Introduction to Unified English Braille, from the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired: http://www.wcbvi.k12.wi.us/outreach/professional-development/ueb-introduction
- The Canadian National Institute for the Blind's (CNIB) Transcriber's UEB Course: http://www.cnib.ca/en/living/braille/Pages/Transcribers-UEB-Course.aspx;
- The Hadley School for the Blind's UEB Courses: http://www.hadley.edu/UEBTransition.asp;
- UEB Online, a new online UEB course from the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) in Australia, designed for sighted readers: http://uebonline.org/;
- The Rules of Unified English Braille, Second Edition (International Council on English Braille (ICEB), 2013): http://iceb.org/ueb;
- BANA's webpage on UEB: http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb.html
- BANA's The ABCs of UEB: http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb/abcs/abcs-ueb.html;
- UEB Guidelines for Technical Materials (ICEB, 2008): http://www.iceb.org/Guidelines_for_Technical_Material_2008-10.pdf;
- BANA's guidelines for Nemeth Code within UEB Contexts: http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb/nemeth-provisional/guidance.pdf; and
- BANA's Frequently Asked Questions Braille Code Change for the United States http://www.brailleauthority.org/ueb/ueb-faq.html.

NYSED will provide notification on future training opportunities as they become available.

Instructional Materials in UEB Format

The transition to UEB affects the production of instructional materials, equipment and software. The American Printing House for the Blind, Inc. (APH) has released its position statement on the production of braille materials in UEB which can be accessed at http://www.aph.org/pr/20140724Policies-Regarding-UEB-Transition-at-APH.html. Schools that order materials from APH will need to be aware of their production timeline. The vendor who produces braille materials to be accessed by districts through the Resource Center for the Visually Impaired (RCVI) is prepared to supply materials in UEB beginning in January 2016. There are a significant number of other entities that also produce or supply braille materials for students. When accessing materials through these entities, districts may need to specify the appropriate braille code(s) for certain items. As noted above, materials that have been produced in other braille codes prior to the 2016 UEB implementation date will remain in circulation.

Questions regarding this memorandum may be directed to the Special Education Policy Unit at 518-473-2878. To ensure dissemination to appropriate individuals within a school district, I ask Superintendents to please share this memorandum with individuals such as Directors of Special Education, School Psychologists, Committee on Special Education and CPSE Chairpersons, Directors of Pupil Personnel and Parent Teacher Associations.