**MSB Reaching Out Newsletter**

**January/February 2019**



Happy New Year! **January** is National Braille Literacy Month. January was chosen for this celebration because it is the birth month of Louis Braille, the inventor of the system of raised dots that made it possible for people who are blind to read and write for themselves with independence and freedom. During National Braille Literacy Month, we want to share information to increase awareness about the incidence of vision loss and the importance of braille literacy for education, employment and life. Below are several interesting statistics and facts about braille literacy that I found on [www.Brailleworks.com](http://www.Brailleworks.com). Happy reading!

# Braille Literacy is Vital to Academic Improvement and Employment

Original post by Christine Sket, Published on June 24, 2015

* Each year 75,000 people lose their vision.
* The epidemic of diabetes (the number 1 cause for vision loss) and with aging Baby Boomers the cases of Americans losing their sight is expected to double over the next 10-years.
* Braille literacy is equivalent to print literacy in terms of student achievement. Braille literacy correlates to academic success, higher income and employment. Overall, literacy improves student success, confidence and independence.
* Vision loss is being linked to areas of severe poverty.
* Based on the improvements in academics, self-esteem and employment opportunities being linked to Braille literacy, it is imperative that more people with visual impairments learn to read and write Braille.
* An alarming fact is only 10% of students who have a visual impairment are literate in braille. More concerning is the number of students being educated in braille literacy has decreased since late 1960, among students who are blind.
* It’s tragic that more students are not becoming literate in Braille. There is a direct correlation to unemployment and dropout rates in persons who are blind.
* Technology might be the key to improving Braille literacy in students and adults.

**Timeline of Braille Literacy for Students who have Visual Impairments**

* **1869** – Braille Code was introduced.
* **1932** – Braille Code was adopted as the Standard English Code.
* **1932** to the late 1960’s – most students who were visually impaired were taught to read and write Braille.
* **1973** – Rehabilitation Act allowed for students with visual impairment to attend local public schools.  Braille was not being taught to all students in public schools.
* **1975** – Congress passed public law 94-142 The Education of All Handicap Children Act.  Free and Appropriate Education Act (FAPE).
* **1991** – The National Literacy Act defines “literacy” as “an individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society to achieve one’s goals and develop one’s knowledge and potential.”
* **1995 to 1996** – about 54,000 students were legally blind; only about 4,700 students were taught Braille in public schools.
* **1997** – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was revised to state: “(iii) in the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines, after an evaluation of the child’s reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child’s future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child.” 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(3)(B)(iii).
* **1997** – The IEP teams rarely determined Braille as the appropriate pathway to blind literacy.  This was mainly due to the lack of teachers able to teach Braille writing and reading.
* **1999** – Braille instruction was proposed as the pathway to National Literacy for students who are blind.  The move was contested as a violation of the students IEP; a mandatory requirement does not permit an individual education for students.

## Outcomes of Braille Literacy or Lack of Braille Literacy

* **2012** – 90% of employed persons with vision impairments can read and write Braille.
* **2013** – 60% of students who are blind dropout of school.  70% of adults who are blind are unemployed.
* **2014** – 85% of students who are blind attend public schools.  About 10% of the students with visual impairments are literate in Braille.  Each year there are fewer teachers
* qualified to instruct students in Braille literacy.
* **2015** – Each state has different requirements regarding Braille literacy.

Until next time,

**Renee**

 ***Upcoming Events*** 

* ***January Parent Informational Webinar***

**Thursday, January 24th, 2019 / 11:30 am – 12:30pm**

***“Saving Makes $ense: Maryland ABLE and Your Child’s Future” -*** *Presenter,* ***Chelsea Hayman****, Outreach and Communications manager,*

*We will discuss how* ***ABLE*** *can:*

* ***Provide your child with an avenue for increased financial independence***
* ***Help you and your child pay for current and future disability-related expenses***
* ***Serve as a tax benefit for contributors filing Maryland State Income Taxes***

***\*Please register prior to the event using the following URL:*** <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/24929aae9acda5bc7510d14dfea9e911>

* ***February Parent informational Webinar***

**Tuesday, February 26th, 2019 / 11:30 am – 12:30 pm**

***Project HEAL* *(Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law)* at Kennedy Krieger Institute** – Presenters, **Alyssa Navarrete**, Esq. and **Mallory Finn**, Esq. from ***Project HEAL*** (a community-based program of the **Maryland Center for** **Developmental Disabilities *(MCDD)*** at **Kennedy Krieger Institute)** will provide a comprehensive overview of special education law and the IEP process.

***\*Please register prior to the event using the following URL:***

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/fbf979e5c63af9428c34be5db4a05ad8>

* **Winter Reading Challenge 2019:**

**January 1st – January 31st**

**The Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically** **Handicapped (LBPH)** is participating in the Second Annual Winter Reading Challenge, a collaborative effort from **Mark** **Cuban** **(Shark Tank)** and **Beanstack**, a reading tracking website used by libraries to offer prizes and incentives for readers.

Patrons can easily participate in the challenge by tracking their minutes, either online or by calling the library’s youth services librarian, **LaShawn Myles**, who is heading up the challenge.

Ms. Myles can be reached at lashawn.myles@maryland.gov or 410-230-2455.

For patrons to participate in the challenge, register at [https://marylandlbph.beanstack.org](https://marylandlbph.beanstack.org/). Patrons can also call the library: 410-230-2424 for additional details.

* **Maryland Regional Braille Challenge:**

 **Saturday, February 9th, 2019**



The Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland School for the

Blind will be hosting the Maryland 2019 Regional Braille Challenge

**The 2019 Maryland Regional Braille Challenge is celebrating 10 years so**

**it’s time to boogie on over to the Maryland School for the Blind and be a**

**part of the disco theme! It’s going to be Dy-no-mite!**

Braille is an important key to literacy! It allows for the enjoyment of reading,

leads to school success, and opens the doors to future employment. Come

celebrate braille literacy with a day filled with fun, competition, learning, and

prizes!

The non-competitive program for ***Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning***

(***BELL***) will return again this year. Students will participate with peers and blind

adult role models in various fun activities which integrate braille. This is for

elementary aged students and the group size is limited to 10. This program is

designed for beginning braille readers who are learning the alphabet and some

contractions.

Students who read braille in grades pre-kindergarten through grade 12 are

invited to participate in the **Maryland Regional Braille Challenge** reading and

writing contests. Parents are invited to participate in workshops while students

are competing. Teachers and school staff are invited to assist with test

proctoring, scoring, and facilitating activities throughout the day.

Presentations include workshops to address ***independent and adaptive living skills*** and what it takes to ***be successful in college***. Our keynote speaker is **Sergio** **Oliva**, ***National Programs Director at Braille Institute.*** We hope you will join us for this exciting event!

To learn more about the **Braille Challenge** visit BrailleInstitute.org and to find

practice materials go to Braille Institute's Braille Challenge Information and

select the “Sample Contests” link.

* **Braille Challenge Art Challenge:**

Calling all Braille Readers and/or Braille Appreciators…

*Here is your chance to show your support of Braille and the* ***Regional Braille Challenge*** *by creating wearable art in the form of a T-shirt design !*

**Competition:**

1. Students in grades K– 12 create a design within the parameters of the attached paper that represents what Braille means to you. This design can be a literal or abstract design. Have fun with it!!
2. Your design can be up to 4 different colors, plus the white background of the t-shirt.
3. Make sure you sign your artwork and include your name, age, grade, school and title of your artwork on the paper attached.
4. Place your original artwork and the info page into an envelope large enough to accommodate braille paper 11-1/2”x11”. Seal envelope and send in the mail by **January 17th** to:

*MSB Outreach Art Contest*

*Renee Kirby*

*3501 Taylor Avenue*

*Baltimore, MD 21236*

The winner will be chosen and notified by **January 25th** along with all other entries.

A runner up and honorable mention will also be chosen. Regardless of your participation in the Braille Challenge, all 3 winners will be given a t-shirt with the chosen design.

\**Your artwork will not be returned, so please snap a picture prior to sending it to the above address.*

          

 ***If you have any questions about any of our programs or are in need of resources for your child or would like to be removed from our emailing list, please contact:***

***Parent Coordinator / The Maryland School for the Blind***

***3501 Taylor Avenue / Baltimore, MD 21236***

***reneek@mdschblind.org*** ***or 410-444-5000 ext. 1489***