Unified English Braille Implementation Plan For Virginia Public Schools

Background Information
Unified English Braille (UEB) is the revised braille code used internationally for transcribing braille in the English language. UEB is based on the previous international literary braille code, English Braille American Edition (EBAE), with the same alphabet and most of the same contractions and punctuation. UEB is a complete braille code encompassing revisions and extensions to EBAE that include symbols for technical materials (e.g., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). UEB is designed to be less ambiguous, with fewer exceptions and rules. Literary materials transcribed in UEB are easily read by most braille readers who are familiar with EBAE. Currently, UEB is an official braille code in eight English-speaking countries, including the United States.

On November 2, 2012, the Board members representing U.S. organizations for the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) adopted UEB as an official braille code to replace EBAE in the U.S. BANA also maintained the Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science Notation, the Music Braille Code, and the International Phonetic Alphabet as official braille codes. BANA established January 4, 2016, as the general implementation date for UEB in the U.S. States have independently developed timelines and procedures for implementing UEB.

In November 2015, BANA released the following statement:

The Braille Authority of North America (BANA) recognizes and appreciates the genuine concerns from the braille community regarding the transition to Unified English Braille (UEB). BANA stands by our original motion to adopt UEB as a complete code as well as the implementation statement issued in 2014 in which we expressed that the Nemeth Code remains integral to braille in the United States. The Board of BANA could not reach consensus regarding the establishment of a single standard code for technical materials for braille in the United States. The decision to use UEB or the Nemeth Code within UEB context for technical materials should be made based on braille readers' individual needs.

UEB Implementation in Virginia
During the 2013-2014 school year, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) facilitated the initial planning meetings to prepare for the transition to UEB with representatives from the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), the Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Vision Impairment at George Mason University (VI Consortium), the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB), and the Virginia Accessible Instructional Materials Center (AIM-VA). Throughout the continuous collaborative development of an implementation plan for Virginia, the VDOE leadership team also reviewed and considered information and input from visual impairment/blindness (VI) affiliated stakeholders, including teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired (TVI), school division administrators, parents, students, consumer organizations, transcribers, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and other U.S. state department of education representatives. Careful consideration was given regarding the need for appropriate information, training, and resources to continually support the current and future braille instruction and literacy needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. The resulting determination was for the statewide implementation of UEB as a

complete braille code for literary and technical instructional materials (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, science, and technology) for braille learners across all grade levels (K-12).

Factors that were considered for the UEB implementation process included:

- disseminating information;
- training for teachers and braille transcribers;
- aligning braille instruction to support the diverse needs of students who are blind or visually impaired, including those with multiple disabilities;
- producing instructional materials and statewide assessments;
- supporting forward and backward translation (e.g., print to braille and braille to print) for use in all digital environments; and
- preparing students for post-secondary education, independence, and competitive employment in a global society.

The UEB transition process will occur gradually over several years, with the anticipated completion of the full transition to UEB for braille instruction and the transcription of instructional materials and statewide assessments by the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Throughout the transition period, some instructional materials and statewide assessments will continue to be available in EBAE and Nemeth Code to address individual student needs, as determined appropriate by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Statewide assessments will be transcribed in UEB for literary and technical content areas (e.g., reading, mathematics, history/social science, science and end-of-course) according to the general statewide implementation timelines established for the newly revised Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) and the corresponding newly aligned SOL assessments.

Ongoing monitoring and review will occur throughout the UEB transition process with revisions to the implementation plan, as necessary. Information will continue to be disseminated to designated school division administrators and posted to the VDOE Web site: [Special Education-Sensory Disabilities-Visual Impairment](#).

UEB Implementation Timeline
2014-2015 School Year
- The VDOE and DBVI co-sponsored a two-day *Literacy Media and Braille Institute* for Virginia TVI and braille transcribers, which included a full day *Introduction to Unified English Braille* session, presented by F.M. D'Andrea.
- TVI individually participated in optional online UEB training/courses.
- The VI Consortium incorporated the UEB literary code into the braille courses taught to graduate students.

2015-2016 School Year
- The VDOE and DBVI co-sponsored a second *Introduction to Unified English Braille* training session in addition to a *UEB Numeric Mode* session, presented by F.M. D'Andrea, for Virginia TVI, DBVI staff, and a designated TVI workgroup.

- TVI individually participated in optional online training/courses in UEB.
- TVI began to introduce braille learners to UEB on an individual basis.
- Information was gathered through a survey of TVI regarding their training in UEB and suggestions for implementing UEB.
- Statewide assessments were transcribed in EBAE/Nemeth for all content areas and end-of-course (EOC) tests.
- The VI Consortium transitioned to instruction in the UEB literary code for the fall 2015 Braille Code course and integrated general instruction in EBAE to familiarize teacher candidates with this code and the transition process currently underway. The spring 2016 Braille Reading and Writing course was completely revised to integrate UEB technical transcription for STEM content and Nemeth code, in addition to other specialized and advanced braille codes.
- The Braille Praxis Proficiency Test was regenerated by ETS to align with the changes in the braille code. The new test was approved for individuals seeking an initial Virginia teaching license with an endorsement in Special Education-Visual Impairments PreK-12.
- The UEB Implementation Plan for Virginia Public Schools was finalized.

2016-2017 School Year
- The VDOE and DBVI co-sponsor a two-day *UEB Summer Training Institute* presented by F.M. D'Andrea*,* for TVI, VI paraprofessionals, and DBVI staff. The training is an extension to the previous *Introduction to UEB* sessions with simultaneous broadcasting from George Mason University to the regional VI Consortium sites.
- TVI individually participate in optional online training/courses in UEB.
- Regional TVI UEB workgroup sessions are held for additional training, as needed.
- TVI begin to provide braille instruction in UEB to braille learners (K-12) in specific content areas, as determined by the IEP team.
- Previously transcribed textbooks and instructional materials are available in EBAE/Nemeth through the AIM-VA/LRC ordering process. Requests for those materials and for new instructional materials (not previously transcribed) to be transcribed in UEB are reviewed on an individual student basis.
- Statewide assessments transcribed in EBAE/Nemeth are available for all content areas and EOC tests. Special testing accommodations for statewide assessments may be considered for individual students who require additional support, due to the changes in the braille code.

2017-2018 School Year
- TVI individually participate in optional online training/courses in UEB.
- Regional TVI UEB workgroup sessions are held for additional training, as needed.
- TVI provide braille instruction in UEB to braille learners (K-12) in specific content areas, as determined by the IEP team.
- Previously transcribed textbooks and instructional materials are available in EBAE/Nemeth through the AIM-VA/LRC ordering process. Requests for those materials

and for new instructional materials (not previously transcribed) to be transcribed in UEB are reviewed on an individual student basis.

- Statewide assessments are transcribed in EBAE/Nemeth for the current SOL math, reading, writing, and science tests, including EOC. Statewide assessments are transcribed in UEB for the newly revised SOL history/social science tests, including EOC. Special testing accommodations for statewide assessments may be considered for individual students who require additional support, due to the changes in the braille code.

2018-2019 School Year
- Regional TVI UEB workgroup sessions are held for additional training, as needed.
- TVI provide braille instruction in UEB to braille learners (K-12) in specific content areas as determined by the IEP team.
- Previously transcribed textbooks and instructional materials are available in EBAE/Nemeth through the AIM-VA/LRC ordering process. Requests for those materials and for new instructional materials (not previously transcribed) to be transcribed in UEB are reviewed on an individual student basis.
- Statewide assessments are transcribed in EBAE/Nemeth for the current SOL reading, writing, and science tests. Statewide assessments are transcribed in UEB for the newly revised SOL history/social science and math tests, including EOC. Special testing accommodations for statewide assessments may be considered for individual students who require additional support, due to the changes in the braille code.

2019-2020 School Year
- Regional TVI UEB workgroup sessions are held for additional training, as needed.
- TVI provide braille instruction in UEB to braille learners (K-12) for specific content areas as determined by the IEP team.
- Previously transcribed textbooks and instructional materials are available in EBAE/Nemeth through the AIM-VA/LRC ordering process. Requests for those materials and for new instructional materials (not previously transcribed) to be transcribed in UEB are reviewed on an individual student basis.
- Statewide assessments are available in EBAE/Nemeth for the current SOL science tests. Statewide assessments are transcribed in UEB for the newly revised SOL history/social science, math, reading, and writing tests, including EOC. Special testing accommodations for statewide assessments may be considered for individual students who require additional support, due to the changes in the braille code.

2020-2021 School Year
- Regional TVI UEB workgroup sessions are held for additional training, as needed.
- TVI provide braille instruction in UEB to braille learners (K-12) for specific content areas, as determined by the IEP team.

- Previously transcribed textbooks and instructional materials are available in EBAE/Nemeth through the AIM-VA/LRC ordering process. Requests for those materials and for new instructional materials (not previously transcribed) to be transcribed in UEB are reviewed on an individual student basis.
- Statewide assessments are transcribed in UEB for the newly revised SOL history/social science, math, reading, writing, and science tests, including EOC. Special testing accommodations for statewide assessments may be considered for individual students who require additional support, due to the changes in the braille code.

Reference

D'Andrea, F.M. (2015). Unified English Braille Implementation Guide. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. May 2015.

For additional information, please contact:

Wanda Council, Education Specialist
Office of Special Education Instructional Services
Virginia Department of Education
Wanda.Council@doe.virginia.gov
(804) 371-4059

Lia Mason, Alternate Assessment Specialist
Division of Student Assessment and School Improvement
Virginia Department of Education
Lia.Mason@doe.virginia.gov
(804) 225-2102

Barbara McCarthy, Director
Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired Library and Resource Center
Barbara.McCarthy@dbvi.virginia.gov
(804) 887-7327

Kimberly Avila, Vision Impairment Consortium Coordinator
George Mason University
Kavila@gmu.edu
(703) 993-5625