

BANA's Braille Unification Efforts

A Position Statement of
the Braille Authority of North America

Adopted April 2007

BANA's mission is to assure literacy for tactile readers through the standardization of braille and/or tactile graphics.

BANA's purpose is to promote and to facilitate the uses, teaching and production of braille. It publishes rules, interprets and renders opinions pertaining to braille in all existing and future current codes. It also deals with codes now in existence or to be developed in the future, in collaboration with other countries using English braille. In exercising its function and authority, BANA considers the effects of its decisions on other existing braille codes and formats; the ease of production by various methods; ease of teaching and learning; and acceptability to readers.

Throughout the twentieth century, various committees and groups existed in the United States to work on aspects of tactile codes, including greater compliance between codes used in the English-speaking world. An official braille authority was created in the 1950s with representation from only a few organizations from the United States. In the mid 1970s, this braille authority decided to expand its representation not only within the United States but to include Canada. Thus in 1977, the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) was born. (See the BANA History document for more details.) Its areas of expertise were in English braille, not in French or Spanish.

Very soon after its establishment BANA contacted its United Kingdom counterpart, the Uniform Type Committee (now called the Braille Authority of the United Kingdom, or BAUK), to begin a co-operative effort to standardize English braille. These efforts realized two conferences with representation from several other

English-speaking countries: the first in 1982 in Washington, DC; and the second in 1988 in London, England. There was desire on everyone's part to standardize English braille as much as possible and to investigate possibilities for standardization in other codes, like mathematics.

As a result of these conferences some instances of standardization were accomplished. For example, the UK agreed to use the "ar" contraction in the letter group "ear" instead of the "ea" which they had been using; BANA agreed to use a letter sign before any letter (capitalized or not) following a number. However, differences remained. At that time, one of the big differences between the two systems of English braille was the representation of capitals in the BANA countries and their non-representation in the UK. (Capitalization is now optional in the British Braille Code.) The technical codes were also different in both jurisdictions. The process was very slow but all countries were committed to the principle of working towards a braille system which all could share.

BANA initiated standardization of its own codes, literary and technical, late in 1991. The idea of an expanded project to include all the English codes was offered to the International Council on English Braille (ICEB) by BANA and accepted in 1993. By 1995 the nucleus of a unified code, Unified English Braille (UEB) had been developed. UEB is one braille code based on literary braille which encompasses all the signs needed to produce and read technical material as well. In 2004 at its General Assembly ICEB accepted UEB as sufficiently complete to be considered for adoption as a national standard for braille by their member countries. To date, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Nigeria have adopted UEB.

BANA has not considered the adoption of UEB but is monitoring the results of the introduction of UEB in other countries. It is also continuing to participate in the final stages of UEB development and refinement. Visit the BANA web site,

www.brailleauthority.org, to read about the research projects BANA was able to mount regarding UEB.