# ICEB Country Report from the United States

**April, 2024**

The United States has now been using Unified English Braille (UEB) for new transcriptions for almost a decade (implementation started January 2016). The Braille Authority of North America (BANA) member organizations report that use of UEB has progressed well. Indeed, new transcribers and teachers have only been taught to UEB rather than *English Braille, American Edition* (EBAE) and while there are still some books being used in the old code by individual schools and agencies that can't seem to throw away a braille book, new readers are learning UEB. More than 1,850 individuals have now obtained original or updated certification in UEB through the Library of Congress braille certification program for transcribers and proofreaders. The Nemeth Braille Code for Mathematics and Science Notation remains an official code in the United States, as is the Music Braille Code (the International Phonetic Alphabet, IPA, is the fourth official code). Certificates in Music braille have continued to be issued. An updated course for certification in the Nemeth Code has been completed, and testing for certification under the new rules has recently resumed as of this writing. An additional certification course has been developed that will focus on technical transcriptions in UEB and will be available soon.

The use of electronic means for reading and writing braille continues to be essential for braille readers to access information and communicate with others in increasingly prevalent digital environments. The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) has implemented free loans of two different refreshable braille display reading devices that were specially designed for patrons to use to access NLS materials. The implementation of this service has added a valuable option for readers who prefer braille over audio materials; these readers can now access a large number of texts in one small device at no cost. The NLS collection of books in Unified English Braille has grown to 4,635 thanks in large part to implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty, which came into force in the United States in May of 2019.

As previously reported, procurement or production of braille materials for school children is handled at the individual state level. As both UEB and Nemeth materials are available for use for transcriptions of technical materials, BANA recommends that the decision to use UEB or the Nemeth Code within UEB context for technical materials should be made based on braille readers' individual needs. Some states have issued guidance documents to help educational teams make decisions as to which code to use for instructional materials and assessments. Sicence of reading:

## BANA Publications

Since the last GA, the BANA Board and committees have been very busy completing several new or updated codebooks and guidelines. Many of these documents have been in the works for years and their publication is the cause of great celebration! These publications represent thousands of hours of work by talented and dedicated volunteers. The content of all these documents was created and reviewed by subject matter experts and is a testament to the passion and dedication of dozens of people who care deeply about creating standards that meet the needs of braille users and allow for high-quality and unambiguous braille production.

The *Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science Notation, 2022*, is now available on the BANA website in print and braille formats. The updated code provides rules and examples of how to embed Nemeth materials within UEB text, replacing the old codebook which coordinated with *EBAE.*

Similarly, BANA has just published *Chemical Notation Using the Nemeth Braille Code 2023* which not only updated the 1997 version but also added a new section providing guidelines for creating tactile graphics of chemical equations and images. The BANA chemistry committee worked with the American Chemical Society's Committee on Nomenclature, Terminology, and Symbols (NTS) to ensure that the terminology and examples are up to date. Both the Nemeth and the Chemistry codebooks are available on the BANA website; hard copy braille and print will be available for purchase from the American Printing House (APH).

The BANA *Tactile Graphics Guidelines, 2022* was recently posted on the BANA website as well. The newly revised guidelines include examples in both UEB and Nemeth codes. Hard copy print and braille editions will be published by APH along with a supplement of examples.

Other recent documents have been updated to align with UEB or with new policies and regulations. These include:

• *Guidelines for Braille Transcription of Languages Other Than English*,

• *BANA Guidance for the Creation of Braille Signage*,

• *Guidelines for Brailling Business Cards,*

• *Guidelines for Transcribing Knit and Crochet Patterns.*

## BANA Membership and Other Activities

After several years of meeting virtually because of the COVID pandemic, BANA resumed meeting in person for semi-annual meetings in fall 2022. BANA's current membership includes 15 member organizations in the US and Canada, along with four associate members.

While many of the new BANA publications focus on braille as produced for fixed-size braille pages such as BRF or paper versions of textbooks, magazines, books, or other documents, the Board and committees recognize the importance of attending to dynamically-generated braille as well. A major focus of BANA's committee for Electronic Braille Translation relates to issues around accuracy of print-to-braille and braille-to-print translation. BANA is also a member of the DAISY Consortium's e-braille working group, helping to develop a file format that offers the advantages of both page-based (i.e., BRF) *and* dynamically-generated braille.

The BANA General Committee on UEB has been following the discussions about the use of grade 1 indicators in technical transcriptions with great interest. The guidance document, *Provisional Guidance for Transcribing Mathematics in UEB*, is still in effect but will be revised as needed in accordance with ICEB rulings.

BANA's Outreach Committee has produced a series of podcasts highlighting member organizations by interviewing their representatives who serve on the Board. These have been well-received by our constituents.

*The Darleen Bogart BANA Braille Excellence Award* was presented to Dr. Sarah Morley Wilkins at the Getting in Touch with Literacy Conference held December, 2023, in St. Pete Beach, Florida. Dr. Morley Wilkins was recognized for her work in tactile graphics and as Director of the National Centre for Tactile Diagrams for RNIB where she conducted important research about techniques for creating and interpreting tactile graphics, with and without audio description. She most recently has served as Project Manager for the DAISY Music Braille Project. Dr. Morley Wilkins accepted *in absentia* by providing a pre-recorded acceptance speech that was played at the conference.

Submitted by:

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