# ICEB Country Report from the United States

**August, 2020**

The United States is now almost five years into its implementation of Unified English Braille (UEB). Overall, the implementation has been progressing well with the assistance of BANA member organizations and national and state groups that support braille transcription, production, and instruction. The Library of Congress braille certification program for transcribers and proofreaders has now issued nearly 750 new UEB certificates for transcribers and proofreaders as well as approximately 450 letters of UEB proficiency to continuing transcribers and proofreaders. Certificates in Nemeth Code and Music braille also continue to be issued. An additional certification course has been developed that will focus on technical transcriptions in UEB and will be available soon.

With the increasing availability of lower-cost refreshable braille displays, the appeal of reading and writing braille electronically is growing in many arenas. The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) is piloting two refreshable braille display reading devices that will be available for free on loan to patrons of their regional libraries. NLS has produced more then 1,700 books in Unified English Braille.

While the federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), mandates that students with visual and/or other disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education, each of the 50 states is responsible for its own system of education. As a result, procurement or production of braille materials for school children is handled at the state level. Both UEB and Nemeth are official codes in the US and are fully available for use for braille transcriptions of technical materials. BANA's recommendation is 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. To date, approximately 17 states are reporting that they are providing mathematics and science materials in both codes upon request. Other states are using primarily Nemeth code. According to the National Center on Educational Statistics, the United States has approximately 13,600 school districts, and close to 131,000 public and private schools that serve children from kindergarten to 12th grade. Obviously, not all schools include braille readers, but it is a reminder that implementation of code change in a country as large as the US simply takes some time.

## BANA Publications

The BANA Nemeth Code committee has embarked on a full revision of the *Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science Notation*, incorporating rules and examples for switching between UEB and Nemeth. The committee's *Guidance for Transcription Using the Nemeth Code within UEB Contexts* has been quite helpful. Similar guidance was created regarding BANA's Chemistry code, an offshoot of Nemeth Code. The BANA Chemistry committee is also at work updating the full BANA Chemistry code.

The BANA General Committee on UEB created a *Provisional Guidance for Transcribing Mathematics in UEB* and is gathering comments. The document was designed to supplement the Rulebook and provide some practical suggestions to increase uniformity of transcriptions particularly for standardized tests.

A document with guidance on the production of early literacy materials has been approved by the BANA board and is being prepared for publication. Likewise, guidance for braille producers and software developers on the use/non-use of Computer Braille Code was approved and will soon be released.

An update of the BANA *Tactile Graphics Guidelines* to align with UEB is still in progress but is close to completion. The tactile graphics committee meets regularly to discuss issues that arise in this alignment; the revision will include examples in both UEB and Nemeth codes.

## BANA Membership and Other Activities

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on non-profit organizations in the US. Two organizations will no longer be members of BANA because they have ceased braille production. This brings membership to 16 member organizations in the US and Canada, along with three associate members.

BANA presents a biannual award to recognize outstanding contributions to braille. The award was renamed in spring 2019 to *The Darleen Bogart Braille Excellence Award* in honor of the retirement of long-time CNIB representative Darleen Bogart, who had served on the BANA Board for more than 40 years. The recipient of the 2019 Award was Dr. Robert Englebretson, Associate Professor and Department Chair, Linguistics at Rice University in Houston, Texas, USA. Dr. Englebretson was recognized for his development of the internationally-recognized braille International Phonetic Alphabet.

Submitted by Tamara Rorie, Chair, Braille Authority of North America; Jennifer Dunnam, Immediate Past Chair; Frances Mary D'Andrea, ICEB Secretary; Judy Dixon, ICEB Executive Committee member at large