# ICEB Country Report from the United States

**May, 2016**

On November 2, 2012, the United States members of the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) voted to adopt Unified English Braille (UEB) to replace English Braille American Edition in the U.S. Based on extensive dialog and planning that involved more than 30 organizations as well as individual consumers, teachers, and transcribers, BANA established January 4, 2016, as the date by which the United States would implement UEB. As of the implementation date, UEB, Nemeth, Music, and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) are the official codes for use in the United States. A single standard for mathematics braille in the United states has not been established.

Timelines for UEB implementation have varied according to the needs and resources of the different entities and jurisdictions within the US. However, the basic framework/timeline for implementation of UEB has been expected to occur in four phases:

I. 2013: Information year—BANA developed and disseminated information about UEB and gathered input from constituents.

II. 2014: Infrastructure year—BANA and other organizations planned for procurement and production of braille materials in UEB and developed training materials.

III. 2015: Instructional year—Readers, producers, and educators worked to become proficient in UEB.

IV. 2016: Implementation year—new transcriptions will be produced in UEB; educators will teach the code. Devices and software will fully and accurately incorporate UEB.

The decision to adopt UEB has brought about a great deal of activity in the four years since the last ICEB meeting. A "UEB task force," consisting of seven members of the BANA board, was formed to lead the development, delivery, and communication of implementation plans for the United States, in collaboration with other key organizations and agencies. Among other activities, the task force conducted a day-long "UEB transition forum" in each of the years 2013, 2014, and 2015, with plans for the final one to occur in October 2016. Almost 50 delegates representing 31 different organizations attended these events. Prior to the meetings, we elicited information from each organization about the systems they have in place to make the transition, what they need to help them, what BANA can do, who they can collaborate with, and what types of support and resources their organization can offer. The agendas included updates from the various groups and discussion by facilitated workgroups about major issues such as UEB training, transition issues specific to various groups, and sharing of resources.

The task force also coordinated the presentation of dozens of workshops at state and national conferences for transcribers, educators, and braille readers. All involved have been greatly encouraged to witness the journey from widespread trepidation about UEB to greater understanding, acceptance, and participation in implementation efforts.

BANA assisted the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with a project involving collection of information from the fifty states about their implementation plans, conducting of three national webinars, and development of an "implementation guide" reporting the results and suggestions. The project was time consuming but ultimately quite helpful in gathering a snapshot of what is happening in the United States regarding the UEB transition as far as instructional materials, state-wide assessments, and training issues for teachers, transcribers, and proofreaders. CCSSO is a national non-profit membership organization that has a number of committees and projects designed to support state education agencies and leaders, including state superintendents, testing coordinators, and other administrators.

## BANA Publications

Soon after the adoption of UEB in the US, BANA released a ten-page reference document providing a brief overview of the differences between EBAE and UEB. There followed additional reading example documents, tips regarding UEB and technology, and a longer work, *The ABCs of UEB,* to provide more details for transcribers and proofreaders. The "UEB Reader," a small compilation of some of these resources intended for braille readers without electronic access to braille documents, was widely requested and disseminated through the mail. In 2014, BANA released guidance for the use of the Nemeth Code within UEB contexts, which has since been refined and improved based on feedback from the field. A preliminary version of guidance for handling foreign languages was created and is also now being updated. A brochure was published to answer frequently asked questions about braille signage and included information about UEB.

A new version of the Music Braille Code, revised to include of additional modern music notation and to align with Unified English Braille, was approved in 2015 and will be published soon. This enormous international effort spanned many years and represents a tremendous amount of work by dedicated volunteers.

The BANA publication, *Braille Formats: Principles of Print-to-Braille Transcription,* last released in 2011, was also revised to align with UEB during this period—another of the many BANA publications which take countless volunteer hours to prepare. Approval of the revised Braille Formats is anticipated at the spring 2016 BANA board meeting.

An updated version of the *Guidelines and Standards for Tactile Graphics, 2010* document is also in progress.

## Other Crucial Resources

BANA member organizations and numerous others have assisted with the heavy lifting that has been required to make the implementation of UEB in the United States a reality. The breadth of resources increases constantly as time passes, so here are just a few examples. Essential instructional materials for teacher preparation have been updated for UEB, as have reading instruction manuals for new braille learners of all ages. Several online and correspondence courses are available to assist braille readers and teachers familiar with EBAE with making the transition. The Library of Congress certification course for transcribers and proofreaders has been updated, and updates to the other courses are underway. A new credential, "Letter of Proficiency in UEB," is available to transcribers and proofreaders who were certified by the Library of Congress under EBAE; more than 110 individuals have obtained the letter and over 300 more have indicated they are prepared to take the examination. Other certifications for teachers have also been updated.

## BANA Membership and Other Activities

The membership of BANA has experienced growth, now with a roster consisting of seventeen full member organizations and three associate member organizations. I wish here to express special thanks to Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT) for their decades of involvement with the work of BANA. Their support of braille in North America since the 1960s—long before the founding of BANA as we know it—have helped make our work possible. Although they will no longer be with us formally as an associate member, we appreciate their continuing expression of support and look forward to working with them as colleagues in ICEB.

BANA Committees have continued to devote many hours to working for BANA. In addition to the efforts previously mentioned, the maintenance and revision of our Web site, preparation of approved publications, maintenance of our organizational bylaws and policies, and more have been ably handled by committed volunteers to whom we are indebted.

We acknowledge with gratitude the immense and lasting contributions of two individuals in particular who passed away since the time of the previous general assembly. Dr. Abraham Nemeth, a blind mathematician and college professor, created the widely used system for braille mathematics that bears his name, and also assisted with the development of Unified English Braille. Robert Gildea, a blind programmer, developed the precursor to several early braille translation programs (including the Duxbury Braille Translator) and was instrumental in both the founding of BANA and in the way of thinking that gave rise to Unified English Braille.

BANA has continued to present the Braille Excellence Award to recognize outstanding contributions to braille. The award is given every two years if a worthy recipient is nominated. The recipient of the 2013 Award was the CBA-BANA Joint Tactile Graphics Committee for their work preparing a comprehensive set of guidelines for the production of tactile graphics. In 2015, the award was presented to Darleen Bogart, international braille advocate, braille transcriber, braille teacher, and Canada's National Braille Convenor, for her various contributions to braille over many decades. The announcements of the awards, with more details about the vast contributions of the Tactile Graphics committee and of Darleen Bogart can be found at <http://www.brailleauthority.org/pressreleases/pr-2014-1-6.html> and <http://www.brailleauthority.org/pressreleases/pr-2015-11.html> respectively.

Submitted by Jennifer Dunnam, Chair, Braille Authority of North America