



SenseAbilities

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION ABOUT VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS AND DEAFBLINDNESS FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS

Fall 2007

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Nicole Slaughter, who is seen in this self-portrait, has discovered that photography is something she loves, and she dreams of making it her profession. Find out why this mom is proud to call herself a photographer in her article, “The Blind Photographer: Finding beauty through the eyes of an unlikely shutterbug,” found in the Family Matters section starting on page 2.

The Blind Photographer: Finding beauty through the eyes of an unlikely shutterbug

Story & photos by Nicole Slaughter, Photographer/Stay-at-Home Mom, northern Indiana

Abstract: The author relates how she uses photography as a way to see the intricate details of the world and to share that beauty with others.

Keywords: Family wisdom, visual impairment, albinism, photography, career, art

Editor's Note: We're thankful for Nicole's permission to include her article in TX Sense-Abilities; a version of it had previously been published in Albinism InSight, Summer 2007. All photos © Nicole Slaughter. We invite you to spend some time on Nicole's personal website at <www.whitepegasus.com> to see her other beautiful works of art.

I absolutely love photography and I'm proud I can call myself a photographer. I got into photography after the birth of my second daughter in December 2004. With the birth of our first daughter I was afraid to even touch the camera. I thought I might break it or something silly like that. So my husband did almost all of the photograph-taking. As he was working part time, it worked out well. But when our second daughter arrived and he was working full time, someone had to capture the special moments. So I forced myself to pick up the camera on Christmas Eve and have not put it down since.

Right about now, you might be wondering why I titled this "The Blind Photographer."

I was born with a condition called Albinism. This condition is recessive, inherited, and affects my hair, skin and eyes. Albinism affects about 1 in every 17,000 individuals in the US. This number varies around the world. The two main types of albinism are Ocular Albinism, which effects mainly the eyes, and Oculocutaneous Albinism, which affects hair, skin and eyes. There are varying degrees, types and severities of albinism—way too many to try and list here.

While in the womb, our eyes need pigment to develop correctly. In a person with albinism, the pathways do not develop correctly due to the lack of, or little pigmentation, resulting in loss of vision capability.

Visual acuity ranges from as good as 20/60 to as bad as 20/400 (or blind). I myself am considered 20/200 on the eye chart. This means I see at 20 feet away what a "normal" sighted person can see at 200 feet away. Quite a difference!

Some common eye problems caused by albinism include:

- 1) Nystagmus, irregular rapid eye movement back and forth, or in a circular motion;
- 2) Strabismus, which is eye misalignment or otherwise know as crossed eye - lazy eye;



- 3) Photophobia, sensitivity to bright light and glare;
- 4) Astigmatism, refractive error;
- 5) Optic nerve hypoplasia, underdevelopment of the optic nerve;
- 6) Nearsightedness, inability to see things in the distance. (read street signs etc);
- 7) Farsightedness, can't see things up close (when reading a book need to hold it far away from them).

Persons with albinism generally cannot really correct their vision much (if at all) very easily. Persons with albinism have to find an eye doctor willing to work closely with them in order to have any hopes of helping their vision. Even then there are no guarantees. This could be another story by itself.

Now enough of the biology lesson, as there is so much more I could add, but it is irrelevant to the story at hand. So if you wish to know more about albinism please visit <http://www.albinism.org> or <http://www.positiveexposure.org>.

I have encountered all kinds of responses to my albinism and visual acuity (sight). But the ones I have received about me being photographer are perhaps the most amusing. People seem to think that just because I am considered "legally blind" that I can't see. I have been asked questions like "How are you able take good photographs?" and "You took this?" People seem to have this misconception that if you are legally blind that you are totally blind and that it is all or nothing. This simply is not true.

I was doing a wedding for a family member of my husband's last summer and got the comment, "You're visually impaired right? So you can actually take good pictures? You can see through the camera?" And all I could think was, "they would not have asked me to do it otherwise". I told her my portfolio speaks for itself. But still,

that she would even think to say something like that to me is amusing.

What I see? I see beauty and color in life. I can see everything you see, just maybe a little differently. Or maybe a lot differently, but I think even normal sighted persons all see things differently. I often get asked if things are blurry, and for me the answer is no. My vision cannot be compared to someone with normal vision. I am a very visual person despite my disability.



About a few weeks ago my husband and I went to a local conservatory and had fun shooting flowers. There was a flower there called Anthurium. I had no idea the detail that was on the flower. I pulled it onto the computer, zoomed in and wow was I amazed. I would have never seen the intricate detail on the piece of the flower sticking up, had it not been for my camera and magnification on my computer.

That same day we took our girls to the park and I had the opportunity to shoot a squirrel that was on the tree close to the swings when our girls were playing. While I could not see the expression on his face I could see where he was, and I could tell if he was looking towards me. I think my husband thought I was crazy while looking through the photographs on my computer



because I was so amazed by the squirrel hanging off the side of the tree. I never realized how long their little fingers or claws were until then. It's the fine detail that my vision misses every day.



It's amazing the detail that can be seen in a child's eyes. I never knew the amazing detail and shading in my daughter's eyes until I learned to use my camera. Kids move so fast that my eyes capturing that detail, as I want to see it, is not easily possible. That's where my camera comes in.

Water drops can have cool reflections in them. I can see the water drops and they are in focus to me. But as far as detail goes, like seeing great detail of the reflection in the water drop, I can't see that very well. Thanks to my camera, I get to see those awesome reflections, colors and details.

I am very thankful for the digital age. If it were not for the digital camera I would not be able to do this. I'm free to take several shots of each image, without worrying about the cost of developing film. I couldn't afford it otherwise. I know some think the first shot should always be perfect. I do try to do so, but let's be real; that's impossible in reality, or that is my opinion anyway. Visually impaired or perfect vision, there is too much that comes into play.

There's so much beauty in the world and I don't want to miss it all. Capturing my daughter's lives is amazing and fun. I love every moment of it and am glad that I am able to document them.

Photographing other people's lives is my honor and my pleasure. Capturing someone's wedding, pregnancy, family and so on is something I truly enjoy. I have found what I want to do in life besides being a wife and mother. I'm glad to have the vision that I have, I think it allows me to do what I do. Perhaps gives me a different

perspective on things. Albinism does not define me nor does it decide who I am. But

it does help make me who I am through my experiences. It challenges me as a person and a photographer.



My camera goes everywhere I do. I think my work speaks for itself. I can take good photographs and love every moment of it. I think that all of the TLC I put into my work shows, and sets me apart from some of the other photographers. I will never stop learning and have so much to learn. But being “legally blind” or “visually impaired” will not stop me from accomplishing my dream of someday being a professional photographer.

A Quest for Focus: Lubbock’s Ninth Annual Family Conference

By Christina Weller, Blind Children’s Specialist, Division for Blind Services, Amarillo, TX

Abstract: The author highlights a family conference held in West Texas that gave family members the opportunity to gain insight and experience on expanded core curriculum areas for students who are visually impaired.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, blind, visually impaired, family training, expanded core curriculum, core services

“This conference seemed to open all our eyes to the fact that we can accomplish more as a family unit than we can by ourselves.”

“This conference has brought our family closer together and that has been such a relief. I feel that if I had not attended that my husband may still feel that it is something that he is not 100% a part of.”

“We really enjoyed this conference. My other child was able to learn more about how vision loss really affects life. Terrific training.”

These are just a few of the comments received from the Ninth Annual Family Conference, A Quest for Focus, which was held in Lubbock last spring. Over 300 blind and visually impaired children, teenagers, and family members participated in this unique

hands-on opportunity to gain knowledge about blindness and to learn about the skills and techniques that help people who are blind be productive and independent.

The program featured 16 sessions that ran concurrently throughout the day, and during the program simulators were available that allowed parents and siblings to personally experience each child's particular visual condition. These sessions were designed to give parents and siblings multiple opportunities to learn about various low vision and non-visual techniques for independent living. For example:

- Future chefs had the opportunity to learn adaptive techniques to prepare and eat food;
- Parents learned practical skills to help their children become better organized;
- The families enjoyed a fun and unique O&M lesson by traveling through obstacles, including tunnels where everyone had to get on their knees and crawl; and
- The conference participants explored practical ways to identify money and manage their personal finances.

To the glee of the parents, one session was devoted to techniques that will enable their blind or visually impaired children to perform all kinds of chores around the house (sorry, kids). Another session delved into the mysteries of the Davinci...oops, sorry...the Braille code. Who knew it could be so easy!

And don't we all love those devices that make our lives easier? Consumers and family members were able to compare and contrast a wide array of low vision devices that ranged from over-the-counter devices to prescription items. Additionally, the conference was a great opportunity for everyone to see some of the more high tech devices

such as computer access utilizing screen enlargement, screen reading software, and notetaking devices. Families were also able to examine several low tech adaptive devices that can be useful for individuals with orthopedic and cognitive challenges as well as visual disabilities. It is amazing what is available at your local hardware, discount, or toy store!

This is all good for the here and now, but what about the future? Well, one session gave participants the opportunity to identify their strengths and assets while learning ways to plan for the future by developing transition notebooks and personal resumes.

What about dating, relationships, or even marriage? Yes, there was even a session on building important social and relationship skills. Families even had the opportunity to learn grooming skills, make-up application, and the importance of appearance for social and vocational success.

And what about recreational skills, you ask? Conference participants had the opportunity to express their artistic creativity utilizing clay, drawing with different types of textures and mediums, weaving, and collage. Families also had the opportunity to compete in sporting activities and games that were adapted for blind and visually impaired individuals.

The conference ended on an upbeat note with a panel of young adult consumers who inspired families by recounting their experiences and successes in high school, college, and work.

The conference was an overwhelming success! Families were able to gain new skills and knowledge, and they had the opportunity to network with the parents and siblings of children with similar disabilities.

Kindness is the language the deaf hear and the blind see. - Mark Twain

Finding a Tele-Support Group

By Michele Chauvin, Parent, Sugar Land, TX

Abstract: The Jewish Guild for the Blind sponsors tele-support groups for parents of children with visual impairments. They are open-ended, informative and supportive discussions of issues and topics of concern for parents raising children with visual impairments. These groups are composed of parents with children who have the same eye conditions. They are professionally facilitated and are offered at no cost to parents. They meet by phone on a weekly basis. A mother shares how participation in this group helps her to find answers to unique questions about raising a child with retinopathy of prematurity.

Keywords: parent support group, blind, visual impairment, retinopathy of prematurity

Our daughter, Lauren, arrived by emergency C-section at 26 weeks, weighing only 1 lb. 2 oz. She spent 5 months in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) and received supplemental oxygen. During that time, Lauren developed ROP (retinopathy of prematurity). Although she had several eye surgeries, Lauren lost her vision completely because her retinas formed scar tissue and detached from her optic nerves. As first time parents, we brought our baby girl home uncertain of her future. The next few months felt like a whirlwind, as we visited numerous doctors, therapists and specialists. Lauren also received Early Childhood Intervention services. Eventually she attended PPCD (Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities) for several years at a public school near our home. This fall she will go to an inclusive public Kindergarten class. Over the years, raising a child who is blind, mobile and will be a Braille reader has posed many challenges.

In the past, we participated in several BVI (blind & visually impaired) events and groups to gain more insight into Lauren's world. We greatly valued this time with other BVI families. Recently we heard that the Jewish Guild for the Blind (JGB) provides parent tele-support groups for BVI families. In the spring of 2006, I joined a JGB support group for parents of children with ROP. Through this group I met other parents across the US with children who are blind and who were also premature, like

Lauren. Although we live near a large city, we had yet to meet other families with a child who is totally blind due to ROP. We had met other children who were visually impaired due to ROP, as well as others who were functionally blind due to different eye diseases. So this was the first time to truly connect with other families sharing similar challenges we thought were unique to us.

Even after attending numerous workshops, conferences, and local and state parent meetings, we still did not have the answers to some of our questions. Topics that seemed simple to parents of sighted children often confused us. By connecting with this support group, we are learning there are other families experiencing similar issues and celebrating similar milestones. When will my child zip by herself? Will dental visits ever go smoothly? What toys will interest her? How do we teach her to make her own meals, dress herself, or brush her teeth? Now we have a wonderful resource for information and encouragement specific to our concerns.

The ROP parent group has weekly phone discussions, which are professionally facilitated and free. I enjoy the convenience of visiting with other families by phone from home, as traveling to meetings is not always possible. We also have frequent guest speakers join the discussion, and I appreciate the opportunity to consult with numerous professionals who work specifically

with BVI populations. So far we have talked with an APE (adaptive physical education) teacher, an O&M (orientation & mobility) specialist, a director of a school for BVI, an OT (occupational therapist), a speech therapist, a BVI college graduate and more.

In a nutshell, the JGB parent tele-support group for ROP has been a huge blessing in regard to raising our daughter who is blind. This weekly dialogue and consultation session provides us an open format for questions and answers, with new insights gained weekly through sharing and listen-

ing to others who have similar situations and challenges. What a comfort to know we are not alone. Thank you to our facilitator, Susan Barron, and to the Jewish Guild for the Blind for providing this invaluable service.

For additional information, you can visit <www.jgb.org/programs-parent-tele.asp>.

To request additional information, or to make a referral, please contact: Daniel Callahan by phone: 212-769-7815 or e-mail: <parent-groups@jgb.org>.

Meet Texas Parents of Blind Children (TPoBC)

By Laura Weber, President, Texas Parents of Blind Children, Friendswood, TX

Abstract: Learn about the newest family organization in Texas for parents who have children who are blind—a state chapter of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children. A membership form is included as an insert with this issue of TX SenseAbilities.

Keywords: Family Wisdom, family organization, National Federation of the Blind, state chapter

Texas Parents of Blind Children (TPoBC) is the state chapter of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children (NOPBC). Our state chapter was formed last fall at the National Federation of the Blind of Texas State Convention, and we'd like to invite all parents, relatives, educators, blind adults, and others interested in promoting opportunities for blind children in Texas to join with us to achieve our goals:

- to create a climate of opportunity for blind children in home and society;
- to provide information and support to parents of blind children;
- to facilitate the sharing of experience and concerns among parents of blind children;
- to develop and expand resources available to parents and their children;

- to help parents of blind children gain understanding and perspective through partnership and contact with blind adults; and
- to function as an integral part of the National Federation of the Blind in its ongoing effort to eliminate discrimination and prejudice against the blind, and to achieve for the blind security, equality, and opportunity.

It is our sincere belief that our kids can do anything and that by joining together, we can make a difference in the future of all blind children. The NFB is changing what it means to be blind. Our philosophy is:

The real problem of blindness is not the loss of eyesight. The real problem is the misunderstanding and lack of information that exist. If a blind person has proper

training and opportunity, blindness can be reduced to a physical nuisance.

The TPoBC board is made up of five Officers who are all parents of blind children

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 832-971-7571
 laura.weber@comcast.net

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 281-692-1180
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and four Advisors who are blind adults active in the NFB. Please feel free to contact any one of us to join TPoBC or to ask any questions you may have.

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It's FREE!

By Laura Weber, Texas Parents of Blind Children President, Friendswood, TX

Abstract: As a parent of a blind child, the author shares with other parents numerous blindness specific resources that are available for free.

Key words: Family wisdom, blind, free resources

Raising a child is expensive. Raising a child with special needs is *extremely* expensive. As the mother of a 5-year-old daughter who is blind due to Leber's Congenital Amaurosis (LCA), I found out very quickly that items made for low incidence disabilities such as blindness are often outrageously priced since they can't be mass

marketed. What follows is a brief list of things that I have found that are *free*. Most of this information is directly from the websites listed. I know that I'm probably only touching the tip of the iceberg on free materials available, and I encourage other parents and professionals to e-mail me other free or low cost items for children who are

blind or visually impaired, to be published in a follow-up article. My e-mail address is <laura.weber@comcast.net>. Good luck on your search to find great materials to educate and entertain your children!

THE ROSE PROJECT AND ANNA'S BOOK ANGEL PROJECT

Seedlings Braille Books for Children is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to increasing the opportunity for literacy by providing high quality, low cost Braille books for children.

They have two programs that offer *free* Braille encyclopedia articles and books for children.

The Rose Project

World Book Encyclopedia articles in Braille. A free service for blind students in grades 1-12.

Anna's Book Angel Project

In loving memory of Anna Kirstina Bonde, hundreds of Braille books have been made in her name, which we are giving away free. Online registration is available for this program! You can use our online form to enter your child's name in the drawing to win one of these free books! Effective January 2006: every child is eligible to win at least one free book per year (please re-register each year, even if you previously received an "Anna" book.)

Contact information

Seedlings Braille Books for Children
P.O. Box 51924
Livonia, MI 48151-5924
(734) 427-8552 or (800) 777-8552
<info@seedlings.org>

<<http://www.seedlings.org/special.php>>

THE READBOOKS! PROGRAM

ReadBooks! is a national children's Braille literacy program to encourage families with blind children to read print/Braille books together. National Braille Press, along with Seedlings Braille Books for Children, is distributing attractive Braille book bags to families with blind and visually impaired children, ages birth to seven, across the country. The distribution process is a collaborative effort with educators and early intervention professionals. Parents may order the book bags themselves, or go through their child's certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) or DARS Division for Blind Services (DBS) caseworker.

Each bag contains:

- an age-appropriate print/Braille book for three age groups: birth-3, 4-5, and 6-7 in English or Spanish;
- a Braille primer for sighted parents entitled *Just Enough to Know Better*;
- a colorful print/Braille place mat;
- print/Braille bookmarks;
- *Because Books Matter*, a guide for parents on why and how to read books with their young blind child;
- a gift coupon redeemable for another print/Braille book or Braille/large print playing cards; and
- print/Braille magnetic letters.

Contact information

888-965-8965, ext. 34

<<http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/readbooks/request.html>>

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND (NFB) KERNEL BOOKS / BLINDNESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Right now all Kernel Books are *free** in all formats. Books are available in large print (P), Braille (B), and on cassette (C2 - two-track) or (C4 - four-track), as noted.

(* Kernel Books deal is available while supplies last.)

Contact information:

410-659-9314, ext. 2216 (between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern Time)
<materials@nfb.org>

<<http://secure.nfb.org/ecommerce/asp/default.asp>>

DOTS FOR TOTS

Dots for Tots is a series of multisensory storybooks designed specifically for visually impaired preschoolers as part of both our Special Collection and Partners in Literacy programs. Each kit combines print and basic Braille so parents can help their blind children begin their journey into reading.

What's in the Kit?

Each kit includes:

- a popular picture book with uncontracted (grade 1) Braille overlays; and
- a descriptive audiotape of the story.

How Does It Work?

Two new Dots kits will be offered each catalog season. When you are enrolled in the Special Collection Program you have the option of selecting one Dots kit instead of the three Braille-only book selections. If you are a Partners in Literacy subscriber, one Dots for Tots kit is the equivalent of three Braille-only book orders.

Who Is Eligible?

Any visually impaired child who is living in the United States or Canada and is between the ages of 3 and 18 is eligible for the Braille Special Collection program. Please note: the Special Collection program is designed for individual children and can only be sent to a child's home or residential school address. Schools and libraries may

participate through our Partners in Literacy program.

Contact Information

To sign up for the Braille Special Collection, go to <<http://www.universalmediaservices.org/SpecialPrograms/SpecialCollectionSignUp.htm>> or send an e-mail to <ums@brailleinstitute.org> with your child or student's name, age, home address, and telephone number. You can also call us directly at (323)906-3104 or toll free at 1-800-BRAILLE (272-4553) Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Pacific Time.

<<http://www.universalmediaservices.org/SpecialPrograms/DotsforTots.htm>>

TALKING BOOKS PROGRAM

The Talking Book Program provides free library services to Texans who are unable to read standard print material due to visual, physical, or reading disabilities—whether permanent or temporary. In FY1999, the program served 22,131 Texans either individually or through institutions (schools, nursing homes, hospitals).

Eligibility

The Talking Book Program is available not only to Texans with visual impairments, but also to those who have physical or learning disabilities that prevent them from using standard print.

Qualified patrons include Texas residents of all ages who:

- are legally blind (vision in the better eye is 20/200 or less after correction, or the widest diameter of visual field is no greater than 20 degrees);
- have prescription glasses, yet are unable to read standard print material without additional magnification devices;

- have physical limitations that prevent them from holding books or turning pages; or
- have reading disabilities due to an organic dysfunction, as certified by a medical doctor (M.D. or D.O.).

To Register

To begin using our free service, you need to complete an application and have it certified; eligibility requirements are listed above.

If you need more information or an application, please call us toll free at 1-800-252-9605, or in the Austin area at 512-463-5458. Write to us at P.O. Box 12927, Austin, TX 78711-2927, or send an e-mail message to us at: <tbp.services@tsl.state.tx.us>.

Our Collection

Like a public library, we have 80,000 thousand titles available in a wide variety of categories, including classics, romances, science fiction, mysteries, westerns, children's selections, and more. Our books, however, are provided in different formats, mainly on cassette, but also in Braille and large print.

In addition, we have magazines in special formats. You may choose from more than 80 different magazines: Reader's Digest, Newsweek, Guideposts, and Texas Monthly, to name a few. Plus, we have a special collection of books by Texas authors, books about Texas, and books in Spanish.

Best of all, our books are delivered right to your door. All of the items are sent and returned through the mail free of charge. Make your selections from a variety of catalogs or let one of our reader consultants assist you. You may contact us by phone, mail, or e-mail.

Equipment

We provide special playback equipment that is needed to listen to our recorded books and magazines. The equipment is on loan to you for as long as you use our service.

Machines may also be purchased from other sources. For information on purchasing machines, call the Disability Information and Referral Center toll free at 1-800-252-9605, or in the Austin area at 512-463-5458, or go to the NLS fact sheet "Sources for Purchase of Cassette Players and Player-Recorders Compatible with Recorded Materials Produced by the National Library Service (NLS)" at <<http://www.loc.gov/nls/reference/factsheets/sources.html>>.

Contact Information

Talking Book Program
TX State Library & Archives Commission
PO Box 12927
Austin TX 78711-2927

1-800-252-9605 (in Texas)
512-463-5458 (in Austin)
512-936-0685 (fax)

Email: <tbp.services@tsl.state.tx.us>
<www.tsl.state.tx.us/tbp/engbrochure.html>

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF PARENTS OF BLIND CHILDREN (NOPBC) SLATE PALS

Slate Pals is a pen pal program for blind youth sponsored by the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children.

Pen pal programs are lots of fun. They help students find new friends all over the country—sometimes all over the world. Students who would never have a chance of getting to know each other can become pen pal friends by writing letters to each other. Of course, they don't know each other at first. Pen pal programs take applica-

tions from students and use them to find pen pal matches. After a match is made, the student gets the name and address of their new pen pal. It is then up to the students to begin writing letters to each other.

Slate Pals is a pen pal program for blind Braille reading students who want to write Braille letters to other students. It is called a Slate Pal program because slates are a handy, cheap, and easy way of writing Braille, just as pens are a handy, cheap, and easy way of writing print. (If you haven't learned how to use a slate and stylus yet, ask your teacher or your parents about it. It's fun to do and easy to learn.) All kinds of kids of all ages sign up for the Slate Pal program. Sometimes blind kids from foreign countries want a Slate Pal. Sometimes sighted kids who want to learn Braille write and ask for a blind Slate Pal. But most are kids who just want to write to someone their own age. It's especially neat to write letters—and get letters—in Braille. It's also great to have someone to talk to about things that only another blind kid can understand.

If you would like to be a Slate Pal just fill out the Slate Pal Profile you can find on the web at this address <http://www.nfb.org/nfb/NOPBC_Slate_Pals.asp?SnID=2>. There is no cost, but be ready to wait several weeks while a match is found. Once a match is made, each applicant will get a copy of his or her new Slate Pal's Profile. The rest is then up to you!

Contact Information

Debbie Kent Stein
5817 North Nina Ave.
Chicago, Illinois 60631

Phone: 773-631-1093
E-mail: <dkent5817@att.net>

<http://www.nfb.org/nfb/NOPBC_Slate_Pals.asp?SnID=2>

HADLEY SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND COURSES

Hadley has a course for you if you are:

- a blind adult (14+ years of age);
- a relative of a blind or visually impaired child;
- a family member of a blind or visually impaired adult; or
- a professional in the blindness field.

The Hadley School for the Blind offers more than 90 distance education courses to eligible students completely free of charge. From "Braille Literacy 1" to "Birdsong Tutor," you can select from a wide variety of Hadley courses. You can study in the comfort of your own home at a time convenient for you. Course materials arrive in the mail or online, and for students in the U.S. and Canada, instructors are just a toll-free call away.

The Family Education Program focuses on independent living, technology, advocacy, and adjustment to blindness issues. While some of the courses were written for adults who are blind or severely visually impaired, they also contain important information for a family member. Other courses have been developed specifically for family members. The first five courses are listed in a recommended sequence for parents of young children. The remaining courses may be of interest to all Family Education Program students.

Contact information

Hadley School for the Blind
700 Elm Street
Winnetka, Illinois 60093 - 2554

Phone: (847) 446 - 8111
Toll Free: (800) 323 - 4238

Email: <info@hadley.edu>

<www.hadley-school.org>

A Note From the Texas Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (TAPVI)

By Shawna Tausch, TAPVI President, Lockhart, TX

Abstract: President of a state parent association tells about her family. Texas Association for the Parents of Children with Visual Impairment (TAPVI) schedules monthly membership meetings.

Keywords: parent association, visual impairment, blind, TAPVI

Hello to all. It has been a busy summer and is shaping up to be an even busier year. Let me introduce myself. My name is Shawna Tausch and I will be your TAPVI president for the 2007-2008 year.

TAPVI



My husband, Eddie, and I currently have seven children in our household. We are a foster family, so the number changes periodically. There are two girls and five boys that range in age from 13 years to 8 months. Two of my biological children are visually impaired. Ben and Logan are ten- and eight-years-old. Both boys inherited the gene for x-linked recessive juvenile retinoschisis from me. Ben also has a prosthetic eye (with which he has developed quite a comedic following).

Those that know me will attest to my talkative and outgoing nature. If you have any questions about the boys' condition or any other aspect of our family life, feel free to ask. I am not shy about sharing.

Professionally, I am a parent. I serve on several educational advisory committees as well the board of directors for AVIT (Association of and for Visually Impaired Texans). I also volunteer to assist parents in preparing for ARD meetings.

Now that the introductions are out of the way, I want to share with you my vision for TAPVI this year, as well as the years to come. As most of you know, TAPVI membership requirements have changed. If

you have any questions regarding the dual TAPVI/NAPVI membership please call me. I also want to establish a support group in each region. TAPVI decided in the beginning that we would establish our regions to match the ESCs in Texas. That means we will need 20 regional representatives. If you are interested in fulfilling this role, or assisting in any way, call me.

Ultimately, I would love to see TAPVI host a family conference in addition to being able to sponsor families at the NAPVI family conference in Los Angeles, during the summer of 2008. We are going to need everyone's help to build a strong family network.

The toll free number 1-877-55TAPVI (82784) is up and running. It rings directly to my cell phone between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. *Use it!!!!* I want to hear from our members. Without your input we will go nowhere.

We will also be conducting monthly one-hour conference calls for the general membership. These conferences take place on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. (October 17, 2007, November 19, 2007, December 17, 2007, January 21, 2008, February 18, 2008, March 17, 2008, April 21, 2008, May 19, 2008.) For those wishing to participate, an 800 number and password will be posted on the family listserv, <<http://lists.topica.com/lists/txvifamily/>>. Please join us when you can.

I look forward to working with all of you. It's going to be a great year.

Informed Choices: Accountability and Individualization

By Millie Smith, Consultant for Students with Visual & Multiple Impairments, Dallas, TX

Abstract: This article discusses the implications of current federal legislation on the development of individualized education programs for students with severe disabilities. By law, academic instruction will be a part of the educational programs of all students with severe disabilities. The mandate that IEP teams determine priority educational needs for each individual student is still in place.

Key Words: state-wide assessment, IDEA, legislative mandate, federal acts, standards-based IEP, research-based instructional strategies, severe disabilities, embedding, accountability

Individualized education programs for many students with severe disabilities are going to change, if they haven't changed already. What are these changes? How are they going to impact students? How are IEP teams going to maintain the focus of instruction on the priority educational needs of individuals? What decisions made by local school districts are mandated and which ones are open to informed choice making?

WHAT ARE THE CHANGES?

Special education providers across the nation have been very busy in the last few years. They have been designing and implementing procedures to administer state-wide academic achievement assessments to special education students with severe disabilities. Students who previously met the federal requirement for statewide assessment by participating in what many school districts called "locally determined alternate assessment" (LDAA) began to participate, instead, in a single statewide assessment. Now, for the first time, many students with severe disabilities are taking part in an assessment of skills with a uniform structure and mandated academic content.

HOW ARE LDAA AND STATEWIDE ACADEMIC ASSESSMENTS DIFFERENT?

IEP teams decided what the LDAA should be. One of the most frequently chosen op-

tions was a portfolio assessment. Using this procedure, teachers kept work samples, pictures, video clips, and narratives as a record of student accomplishments. Other frequently used options included criterion-referenced curriculum-based checklists, developmentally-normed assessments, and various need-specific tools such as communication checklists. In most schools, content areas assessed were not academic and the IEP team determined adequate progress for each individual without comparing performance to a state standard.

In order to comply with legislative mandates in two federal acts, No Child Left Behind or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA, 1111(h)] and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA, 612(a)(15)], state education agencies must have two things:

- high academic standards for content and achievement; and
- a single statewide accountability system which will be used to report to the Department of Education results showing to what degree all students, including those with severe disabilities, have made adequate yearly progress toward achieving academic skills at established state standards.

For instance, in the spring of the 2006–2007 school year, Texas implemented the TAKS-Alt assessment. It tests only aca-

demics linked to age-equivalent grade-level academic content in the general education curriculum, and it does so with a uniform procedure so that each student can receive scores that can be compared to state proficiency standards. The driving force for this type of academic achievement testing is No Child Left Behind. This legislation is due for reauthorization by the United States congress and there are efforts from various consumer groups to try to influence legislators to change some of the testing rules.

HOW IS THIS GOING TO IMPACT STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES?

Students with severe disabilities are going to receive more academic instruction during the school day. ESEA and IDEA have required for several years that all students have access to the general education curriculum. Now, students with severe disabilities will be assessed in the same academic areas as their enrolled grade-level peers. The areas tested usually consist of some combination of reading, math, writing, and science depending on the grade level. In Texas, which also assesses social studies, students will be assessed on six outcomes for each academic content area. In a given year, the minimum number of outcomes assessed for a student will be twelve. The maximum will be thirty. If academics have not been a part of students' programs before, they will be now.

ARE ACADEMIC SKILLS PRIORITY NEEDS FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES?

Priority needs are still determined by IEP teams. However, IDEA says that all children with disabilities must have IEPs that contain *functional* and *academic* goals (IDEA 300.320). Every IEP must contain academic goals whether the IEP team thinks they are a priority or not. The IEP team's responsibility is to use their knowledge of the student to make informed choices about how many academic goals there should be, and

to include those that are potentially the most meaningful. There is no mandate, nor does anyone advocate, that all tested academic skills should appear in the IEP. The IEP is not an academic curriculum. The IEP team must determine what other kinds of goals need to be included and in what proportions. The legislative mandate for individualized education programs that address unique needs identified by IEP teams has not changed (IDEA 300.320 through 300.324).

SO, WHAT SHOULD IEPs FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES CONTAIN?

IDEA says that IEP teams must evaluate students to determine two things.

- Does the student have a disability?
- If so, what should the content of his or her IEP be?

In order to make this determination, they must use a variety of tools to gather the following:

- functional and developmental information; and
- information related to enabling the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.

Three broad skill areas are mentioned in this part of IDEA having to do with gathering information to determine the content of the IEP: functional, developmental, and academic (300.304).

Dr. Diane Browder, a specialist in severe disabilities currently on the faculty at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, suggests that IEPs should include goals related to academic skills aligned with state standards, functional skills, social skills, therapy needs, and parent concerns. In this model, developmental needs might be addressed through "therapy" goals in areas like speech, OT, and PT. Many schools re-

fer to these as “related service” rather than “therapy” goals, and include goals in the areas listed under “special factors” in IDEA (300.324). These include behavior, vision impairment, communication, auditory impairment, limited English proficiency, and assistive technology. Dr. Browder and her co-author, Ginevra Courtade-Little, give the following example.

Suzanne is in 5th grade and her IEP will be different this year. While she will continue to have goals related to her expanded use of an augmentative communication system, Suzanne will now also pursue goals that focus on her acquisition of daily living skills, like putting on her coat and personal grooming. In addition she will learn to participate in her IEP meeting by helping to choose her own goals and signing her name. What also will be different is that for the first time Suzanne will have some academic goals that promote her participation in the 5th grade curriculum. While Suzanne has had academic goals before- she learned to select a dollar for a purchase she wanted to make and was able to read pictures/ sight words on her schedule- now she will have academic goals that focus on her state’s standards for 5th graders. For example, her new goals will help her gain meaning from chapter books read by peers and find solutions for everyday math problems. These changes will prepare Suzanne to participate in her state’s alternate assessment... (Courtade-Little, G., and Browder, D., 2005, p.7)."

WHAT IS A STANDARDS-BASED IEP?

A great deal of training is going on and a lot of literature is appearing referring to “standards-based IEPs”. In fact, this term is a little misleading. Only the academic goals in IEPs are aligned with state academic standards for grade-level achievement [ESEA, 1111(h) and IDEA, 612(a)(15)].

There are no state standards for functional or developmental skills. Some curricula in these areas give age norms indicating the age at which a typical child would have developed a certain skill. IEP teams use a variety of strategies to determine which skills in these areas are priority needs and should, therefore, be included in the IEP. They may choose a skill that would have been acquired by a typical child at a much earlier age because that skill is attainable at the current time when for some reason it was not before. Or, they may include it because it is an important skill and instruction is resulting in progress, but at a significantly slower rate than would occur for a typical child. In Courtade-Little and Browder’s example, Suzanne is a ten year old 5th grader who is learning to put on her coat. Putting on a coat is a skill acquired by typical children when they are about three years old. Suzanne’s IEP team has selected it as a priority for her even though it is not an age-equivalent peer skill. They may have done this because it is a parent concern, because her motor skills have improved to the point that she is now ready to advance to this skill level, or because the skill has never been addressed before but is attainable.

When basic developmental and functional skills are chosen for the IEP of an older student, the materials and the activity used for instruction must dignify the student. A ten year old student may be expanding his understanding of the cognitive skill of “cause and effect” by learning that a fan can turn a pinwheel during a science lesson on wind generated energy. No one wants this student to be stuck with a Fischer-Price Busy Box or a switch adapted drum-playing bear. However, it is equally disrespectful to expect this student to remain alert and cognitively challenged while sitting and listening to a peer read to him from the fifth grade science book, when his communication level is non-symbolic or early symbolic. The student with severe cognitive disabilities may enjoy the sound of his peer’s voice.

That would make this a nice leisure activity, but it would not make it a learning opportunity. These are two extreme examples of ways to go wrong. Informed choices involve taking the best approaches and adapting them to come up with good individualized instruction. Hands-on manipulation of objects is the best way to learn cause and effect. Peer reading is a wonderful social opportunity. A peer could read a modified text about fans making wind and wind moving pinwheels. The short text could be read after each trial using the fan and pinwheel. The result could be learning a new cause and effect relationship, and expansion of vocabulary related to learning verbal labels for objects like “fan” and “pinwheel.” All learning is wonderful and valuable, even when it is delayed and non-academic!

IF STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS ONLY ASSESS ACADEMIC SKILLS, HOW ARE SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL AND FUNCTIONAL SKILLS?

There are two ways that achievement of developmental and functional goals are addressed.

- IDEA requires that in interpreting evaluation data, each agency must include information on aptitude and achievement (300.306). The achievement referred to here is inclusive—not limited to academics. Teachers in many schools use the assessments that are part of developmental and functional curricula to address the achievement part of this mandate. Results from earlier evaluations can be compared to results from current evaluations as IEP teams conduct their annual reviews.
- A more specific way to be accountable for progress on developmental and functional skills is the measurable annual IEP goal. For students with severe disabilities, IDEA is very clear that goals are to be written so that progress can be measured throughout the

year through the use of benchmarks, or short-term objectives, resulting in achievement, according to the specified measurable criterion, in one year.

IEP teams using annual reviews of the achievement evaluation to show progress in developmental and functional skill acquisition may have some difficulty showing progress for learners with severe disabilities. Many of the curriculum-based assessments in these areas have skills listed in increments too broad to show increases from year to year. Students with severe disabilities often end up with a lot of “emerging” skills and very few “mastered” skills. These curricula are extremely helpful to IEP teams when they are identifying areas of need, but any given item may need to be broken down into smaller increments of development in order for a student with severe disabilities to demonstrate achievement of that skill in a year.

There are no restrictions in ESEA or IDEA on the use of developmental or functional curricula. In Texas, educators often use the phrase, “There is only one curriculum.” They are referring to Texas senate bill 815. It states that school districts must use the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) when teaching the entire required general education curriculum, including both foundation and enrichment content areas. Previously TEKS was required for foundation areas like math and reading and was a “guideline” for enrichment content like health and fine arts. So, in Texas, there is only one general education curriculum. It is TEKS and, by law, children with disabilities must have access to it and they must be tested on academic achievement aligned with its content in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.

IEP teams using annual goal progress as the accountability tool for developmental and functional skills need to make sure that they identify very specific skills in small, at-

tainable increments as well. Old bad habits may need to be overcome. For many years, many schools have ignored the legislative mandate that annual goals be measurable and achieved in one year. Many IEPs contained annual goals like “Johnny will improve eating skills,” or “Johnny will feed himself independently.” In the first case, there is nothing to measure, and in the second, no chance, for Johnny, that the skill can be accomplished in one year. A real annual goal for Johnny might be something like “Johnny will self-initiate ten scoops of soft foods using an adapted spoon and dish during breakfast and lunch.” Progress milestones, benchmarks or short-term objectives, might include:

- “Johnny will self-initiate ten scoops... with hand under hand assistance;”
- “Johnny will self-initiate ten scoops... with a touch prompt at the elbow;” and
- “Johnny will self-initiate ten scoops... with a point cue.”

In this example, benchmarks relate to the research-based instructional approach of “scaffolding”, or support reduction, leading to higher levels of independence. If Johnny isn’t self-initiating scoops with an elbow prompt by the end of the second quarter, the IEP team will need to revise this goal. Revision could mean changing the goal, but it could also mean changing other things as well. Perhaps Johnny’s instruction has been in the school cafeteria. He is simply too distracted and/or stressed by the noise, movement, and smells in that environment to maintain attention on his scooping task. His team decides to take Johnny to the cafeteria ten minutes before the other students arrive. During this time he practices his scooping, and then he eats the rest of his meal with his peers. He is still a little bothered by the smells, but the lack of movement and noise is enough of an improvement to allow him to make steady progress on his goal.

SHOULD THE IEP TEAM TRY TO ENSURE THAT ALL INSTRUCTION IS RELATED TO THE ACADEMIC CURRICULUM?

Literature and training in the field of special education and in the area of severe disabilities is prevalently oriented toward academic instruction in regular classrooms with typical peers. Part of the reason for this emphasis is that many students with disabilities have been denied these learning opportunities for many years. They have been segregated and, depending on the quality of the instruction in the self-contained environment, possibly under-challenged. Special education professionals in university pre-service programs, state departments of education, and many local school districts would like their students with severe disabilities to have high achievement standards and access to instruction in regular classrooms. Each IEP team must use both knowledge of the student and of research-based instructional strategies to make sure that one aspiration does not compromise the other. Decisions for individual students must be made on the basis of their unique needs. If the programs for two individuals with severe disabilities are exactly the same, somebody’s unique needs are not being met. That is why “special” education is provided.

WHAT ARE THE RESEARCH-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT ARE IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES?

Some of the strategies that work for students with severe disabilities have been well researched and have been used for many years. Examples include the following (Orelove, 2000).

- *Multiple trials* – several repetitions of a desired behavior. In other words, practice. The most effective practice is that with short spaces between repetitions during which something else occurs (distributed trials).

- *Slower pacing* – allowing more time for sensory, motor, and cognitive processing.
- *Clutter reduction* – elimination of elements in instructional materials and the ambient environment that compete with the student’s ability to maintain his attention on the desired element.
- *New material presented within the “zone of proximal development”* – the best instruction starts with an established skill and adds a little bit more. The “not too easy, not too hard” rule.
- *Scaffolding* – every trial is successful because the level of support needed for success is always provided. Gradually, levels of support decrease until maximum independence, whatever that might be for each individual, is achieved.
- *Decreased stress* – stress inhibits memory function and the ability to maintain attention. Stress can come from physical factors like hunger, illness, or discomfort and from emotional factors like separation anxiety, confusion, and boredom.
- *Highly structured rather than random learning opportunities* – expectation and predictability are essential to learning. Brief and “out of the blue” experiences don’t work well for skill acquisition, although they might be fun.
- *Increased motivation* – instructional materials and social interactions are attended to and activity with them is maintained when they are pleasant and interesting.
- *Active participation* – “doing” results in better learning than “watching” or “listening.”

IEP teams must identify the priority learning needs of the individual for whom they are planning a program. Then, they must think about the instructional activities and the settings that will support achievement of those skills. In every setting, a skilled

professional will need to make sure that the instruction provided is highly effective in line with the research described above. Whether it is in self-contained special education classrooms or in regular classrooms, instruction provided for students with severe disabilities must be highly effective in order to develop skills.

IS INSTRUCTION WITH TYPICAL PEERS IMPORTANT FOR ALL STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES?

Access to typical peers is important. Typical peers and children with disabilities should know and enjoy each other to the fullest extent possible. A clear commitment has been made in the professional community to try to make sure that highly effective instructional strategies are provided for students with severe disabilities in activities they share with typical peers as often as possible. Typical peers are not the providers of highly effective instruction, but they may have a carefully chosen and well-prepared part in that instruction. IEP teams must use their knowledge of individual students to determine who their instructional partners should be. They must watch carefully to evaluate how the quality of learning is affected by participation with various partners.

Making an assumption that peer access should be primary for all students with disabilities may be disrespectful to some special needs students. This kind of global assumption ignores a very real group of individuals who are not at the same level of social development as the students who are described in many of the examples of typical and disabled students engaged in co-operative learning. According to most developmental scales, showing interest in the activities of peers does not develop in typical children until about two years of age (Greenspan, 2004). Before interest in peers develops, there is an incredibly important stage of development in which children establish secure attachments with adults.

They need this social/emotional foundation in order to be stable enough to grow in many areas of development. Early communication skill development is particularly dependent on healthy adult attachment (Chen, D., & Dote-Kwan, J., 1995). For some students with severe disabilities, strong attachments with adults in the school environment may be essential to their ability to develop skills.

THEN WHOM ARE WE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE SAY "STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES"?

The words "significant" and "severe" mean different things to different users. Sometimes the words are used somewhat interchangeably when referring to students with cognitive disabilities. "Significant" often replaces "severe" when people consider it to be less stigmatizing. But, sometimes one or the other word is used more intentionally to refer to a distinct group of individuals. Unfortunately, the words are not used consistently to describe the same groups. "Significant" and "severe" are used frequently to refer to students who do not have severe mental retardation as traditionally defined.

Two examples illustrate this point. First, in the training module for the Texas alternate assessment, a student with "the most severe cognitive disabilities" is shown using a calculator, number cards, and an equation template to reduce a recipe. Second, in one of many journal articles giving examples of students with "significant" disabilities participating in academic instructional activities with their typical peers, Cushing, et al, describe the following:

For example, in a third-grade language arts lesson during which the teacher expects all students to develop oral language and listening skills, the teacher may read an excerpt from a book and ask students questions related to the material. In this classroom, a student with significant cognitive disabilities

also listens to the story, but he or she benefits when the teacher breaks each section down into smaller components and asks questions more frequently or poses them in a simplified manner. Moreover, the student may use an augmentative communication device or other alternative response format to answer the teacher's questions. (Cushing, L., Clark, N., Carter, E., & Kennedy, C., 2005)."

The use of the word "severe" and the substitution of the word "significant" for "severe" when referring to students with mild and moderate mental retardation is a problem because students with severe mental retardation become invisible. In workshops with titles like "Aligning IEP's with State Standards for Students with Severe Disabilities," presenters tend to give many detailed examples of the application of their strategies for students at the mild and moderate levels of mental retardation and few, if any, examples of applications for students with severe mental retardation. Everybody would like to stay away from stigmatizing vocabulary. At the same time, every effort must be made to be sure that all levels of learning are acknowledged and respected by receiving the attention they deserve.

It may be helpful to look at the way "significant" and "severe" are used in law and resources.

- First of all, clarity about whether "significant" and "severe" are being used to describe cognitive disabilities or some other type of disability is important. A student with severe motor disabilities may have normal or above intelligence. Steven Hawking, one of the world's most renowned physicists, is medically fragile. A severely disabled body does not necessarily contain a severely disabled brain. Students with cerebral palsy are often served in self-contained class-

rooms with students with severe cognitive disabilities because there is no way to find out what they know. Many of them cannot use motor or vocal responses with the degree of consistency that would allow them to demonstrate proficiency by most assessment standards. Their responses may seem to be random. It is very difficult to determine whether the inconsistency reflects lack of understanding or changes in brain activity affecting motor functioning.

- If the terms are used in reference to cognitive disabilities, definitions of mental retardation become important. The Office of Special Education allows states to use terms other than “mental retardation” in their state rules for eligibility as long as they don’t change the definition of what is meant by the substituted term as contained in IDEA (300.7). About eighteen states use a substitute term such as “cognitive disability” or “intellectual impairment” (Posney, 2006).
- IDEA (300.7) says that the criterion for eligibility as a child with a disability in the category of mental retardation is “significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.” In this definition, “significantly” is used to describe all students with mental retardation including those with mild and moderate functioning levels. The student described above who is listening to and answering questions about a 3rd grade language arts story has this kind of “significant cognitive disability.”
- “Significant” is used again in the language in the Department of Education amendment to ESEA to describe students who will take alternate assessments. The Department of Education defines students with “the most significant cognitive disabilities” as those who cannot take grade-level tests even with accommodations. The fact that they add the words “the most” is a little ambiguous, but it seems to mean something more than mild sub-average functioning. Accordingly, the student reducing the recipe with her calculator is a student with “the most significant cognitive disabilities” because she participates in an alternate assessment.
- Several years ago federal money became available through IDEA for the funding of a national network of technical assistance providers for students with “low incidence disabilities.” Each state tends to define the students to be served under this designation a little differently, but the word “severe” shows up frequently. In California, it is used in reference to students with severe orthopedic impairments. In Texas, and many other states, it refers to students who have severe cognitive disabilities.
- The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSMR), fourth edition, defines four levels of mental retardation.
 - o Mild (85%): Individuals who acquire academic skills up to about 6th grade level and who function in the community largely independently with intermittent support.
 - o Moderate (10%): Individuals who carry out work and self-care tasks with moderate supervision, acquire communication skills in childhood, and live and function successfully in the community with limited support.
 - o Severe (3-4%): Individuals who have basic self-care skills and some communication skills and require extensive support throughout life.
 - o Profound (1-2%): Individuals who have some basic self-care and communication skills and require pervasive support throughout life.

The following (also illustrated in the chart below) shows how the words “significant” and “severe” are used by various users related to levels of mental retardation.

User: IDEA eligibility criterion for mental retardation

Term Used: “significantly sub-average...”

Mental Retardation Levels Included: Mild, moderate, severe, profound

User: Department of Education amendment to ESEA for alternate assessments

Term Used: “the most significant cognitive disabilities”

Mental Retardation Levels Included: Moderate, severe, and profound

User: Texas Education Agency, Assessment Division

Term Used: “the most severe cognitive disabilities”

Mental Retardation Levels Included: Moderate, severe, and profound

User: Low Incidence Disabilities (LID) networks in Texas and many other states

Term Used: severe cognitive disabilities

Mental Retardation Levels Included: Severe and profound

User: Most journal articles and workshop presentations

Term Used: significant disabilities

Mental Retardation Levels Included: Mild, moderate

Students with severe mental retardation are equal and important members of the educational community whose needs, if addressed effectively and appropriately, result in learning as important as that of any other student. Most people would agree that academic skills increase the quality

User	Term Used	Mental Retardation Levels Included
IDEA eligibility criterion for mental retardation	“significantly sub-average...”	Mild, moderate, severe, profound
Department of Education amendment to ESEA for alternate assessments	“the most significant cognitive disabilities”	Moderate, severe, and profound
Texas Education Agency, Assessment Division	“the most severe cognitive disabilities”	Moderate, severe, and profound
Low Incidence Disabilities (LID) networks in Texas and many other states	severe cognitive disabilities	Severe and profound
Most journal articles and workshop presentations	significant disabilities	Mild, moderate

of life of typical students, plumbers earning more than teachers notwithstanding. Functional skills improve the quality of life for everybody. College students who have these skills don't have to bring their laundry home for Mom to do, all the time at least. The post-secondary success of students with mild and moderate disabilities in both living and work environments is highly related to their functional proficiencies. Students with severe disabilities live higher quality lives when they attain developmental and some functional skills to the highest levels possible. Some educators minimize the importance of the life-long instruction of these kinds of skills. Perhaps this is because they feel that the degree to which they can be acquired is not significant. Sometimes lack of progress in these areas has been a result of poor instruction, not inability. And, sometimes, educators have failed to appreciate the dramatic impact of what appears to them to be a very small gain. Expansion of developmental skills can be horizontal as well as vertical. A student who uses an object to request an activity can vertically expand to using part of the object or a picture of it to show his communication partner what he wants. But, the student who continues to use objects for requesting can also develop new skills. He can learn to use objects for requesting what he wants in more and more activities and in all areas of his life. That is horizontal expansion and it increases the quality of life of not only the learner, but all of his partners as well.

IS THERE SOME WAY TO COMBINE ACADEMIC, FUNCTIONAL, AND DEVELOPMENTAL SKILLS IN IEPs AND INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES?

IEP teams have been using the strategy of "embedding" for many years. In the 1980's, educators were encouraged to shift the emphasis of IEPs from developmental skills to functional skills. Teachers and related service providers started embedding developmental skills in functional contexts.

A student who had an annual goal that targeted the developmental motor skill of grasping and releasing might switch to a functional domestic goal of washing dishes. Clearly, grasping and releasing is part of washing dishes. Addressing the skill in this way helped to assure that students didn't get stuck spending hours putting poker chips in a jar day after day. By listing the occupational therapist as one of the team members responsible for the instruction of the dishwashing goal, IEP teams ensured that instruction on, and adaptations for, grasping and releasing would be part of the dishwashing activity. Grasping and releasing would probably be an embedded developmental skill that would naturally occur in many functional skill activities.

IEP teams are encouraged to address academic skill instruction in two ways. The first is the one that has been discussed so far. That is, participating in the instruction provided for typical peers with appropriate adaptations and supports. The second is to embed the academic skill in a functional context. In Texas this is called "integrated" academic instruction. The student using a calculator to do operations with numbers in her classroom integrates that academic skill when she calculates the cost of her meal at a fast-food restaurant. Academic skills are also taught in functional activities by embedding. A student at the non-symbolic cognitive level who participates in a snack preparation activity every day might have an embedded science skill that requires him to show understanding of the life cycle of plants and animals by selecting ripe from unripe strawberries and by using the ripe berries to make a smoothie. This academic science skill embedded in a functional activity can still be aligned with state standards by making sure there is a clear link to the age-equivalent grade-level science content of the general education curriculum. In Texas, those links are described in the Framework document provided by the education agency.

The importance of functional skills for preparing students with disabilities for post-secondary environments is recognized by most educators and is acknowledged in legislation (IDEA, 300.320). Another reason functional skills are likely to continue to be a part of programs for students with severe disabilities is that they provide interesting, pleasurable contexts for embedding both developmental and academic skills. For students with severe disabilities, functional skill goals rarely aim at full independence. Rather, the goal for students with severe disabilities is to participate in these activities with the important people in their lives at the highest possible level. The most significant skills in these interactions are often the communication and social skills that allow the learner and his partner to collaborate to accomplish the given task. Functional skill activities may be a better medium for embedding than academic activities for some students with severe disabilities simply because they tend to be more concrete rather than abstract. They may also contain learning media that has more motivating sensory characteristics. That is to say, functional skill activities are more often about common objects in natural contexts while academic activities tend to be about more abstract concepts represented symbolically. The wonderful thing about every student having access to both kinds of instruction is that it is a safeguard. The accurate assessment of the aptitude, learning potential, of students with multiple impairments, especially those who have severe motor and sensory impairments, is extremely difficult. Some of those students have been waiting for the opportunity to show us what they can do given appropriate challenges.

WHAT DOES ACCOUNTABILITY MEAN FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES?

Legislatively, it means school districts must show they are providing instruction that enables students to make progress

toward performing academic skills at established state standards of proficiency. Schools are trying harder than ever to improve the quality of the instruction provided to students. Now, students with disabilities are part of that effort and, as a result, they are receiving instruction that includes academic learning opportunities. The challenge to special educators is to make sure that they are equally committed to accountability for achievement related to all legislatively mandated priority needs—developmental, functional, and academic—in individualized programs providing appropriate education to each unique student.

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Nemeth Braille Translation Technology

Holly Cooper, Ph.D., Texas Deafblind Project, TSBVI

Abstract: This article is a brief overview of some current braille technology which manages Nemeth code. New features available in widely used blindness technologies make the production of Nemeth and Nemeth to print translation easier, but still problematic.

Keywords: braille, nemeth code, braille math, nemeth code translation

Educational institutions are some of the biggest consumers of blindness related technology products today, but most products are still developed with the needs of adult blind users as the standard which the products aim to address. Since the use of mathematics notation in the everyday life of most adults using technology is limited, many of these technology products include few math related features. Most note-takers and braille translation software applications allow users to directly input any characters via braille keyboard or 6 key home row entry (letters s, d, f for dots 3, 2 and 1, and j, k, l for dots 4, 5 and 6.) However, translation of print characters to Nemeth Code and back translation of Nemeth Code to print which can be easily read and understood by a math teacher is very limited. Since most students in grades kindergarten through twelve, and many in the first two years of college, participate in some type of mathematics instruction every day, math notation in braille and translation between braille and print is an on-going daily need. Much of this work is still carried out manually by teachers of students with visual impairments (TVI's) and brailleists. When students leave the relatively more supportive setting of public school for the more independent setting of college, there may be no one with braille skills to help with translation. However some technologies are including more features related to Nemeth Code and math. This article is an attempt to survey some of the more commonly used technologies in public schools in Texas and the math related features they include.

A WORD ABOUT MATH AND COMPUTERS

Computers were originally developed for mathematics calculation; they were intended for use as "number crunching machines." Only later in their development did computers include the capability for handling text. Early computers were programmed by writing specific words, variables and operators in programming languages which looked much like math notation written out in linear sentences.

Braille translation software interfaces well with word processing software. Text can be imported or copied and pasted from word processing documents to braille translation software, and translated with the click of a menu choice. However, most such software treats numbers as literary characters and do not translate them into Nemeth Code, but literary braille. For a braille translation program to treat these characters differently, the user must indicate the characters are math. In addition, many word processors don't offer the variety of mathematical operation characters needed even by middle school math students.

Characters such as superscripts (exponents), subscripts (algebra), fractions containing variables and operators, and geometry symbols are sometimes difficult to manage in word processors. In addition, science uses equations and notations which may be more spatial and less linear in their presentation of information. Molecular diagrams, for instance represent the structure of atoms in a molecule. The methods of displaying such information on computers

use the languages LaTeX, XML and MathML to tell the computer how to display the numbers and characters on the screen in a format visually familiar to scientists and mathematicians. XML and MathML developers were interested primarily in displaying visually correct math and science notation on the internet. These systems use a code which looks a lot like HTML, the computer language used to lay out web pages. Just as you no longer have to know HTML to create a web page since we have software to do that for us, you don't really have to understand what LaTeX or XML is and how to use it to create math and science pages. One of the more commonly used commercially available computer software applications used to generate math and science work is Scientific Notebook. Scientific Notebook is a math editing tool much like a word processor which includes menus from which you can select numbers, mathematical operators, Greek characters and a variety of other special symbols. Scientific Notebook generates LaTeX files which are displayed in a familiar mathematical layout. Other editing software such as MathType is used to generate MathML and XML formatted files.

DUXBURY

Duxbury Braille Translation software (DBT) versions 10.4 and later will translate LaTeX files. Usually these are created using Scientific Notebook. Completed files can be imported into DBT and translated into grade two braille and Nemeth Code. It is usually necessary for a knowledgeable brailist to check the braille file for accuracy, and to correct character errors with 6 key entry before embossing the final document. Back translation from Nemeth to print is not consistent in DBT at this time. In addition, Scientific Notebook is not accessible to blind users with screen reading software such as JAWS.

MEGADOTS

MegaDots 2.3 has an integrated data entry/translation system called MegaMath, which produces Nemeth Code. The data entry is not graphical, and you cannot generate a print copy of the math notation. However, with some practice, it can be a very efficient way of entering a broad range of mathematical symbols. MegaMath is built into each copy of MegaDots 2.3, and does not cost extra. MegaMath does not provide a usable print copy and is less user friendly than DBT. It is accessible to both sighted and blind users.

METROPLEX VOICE COMPUTING

Although Scientific Notebook is not accessible to blind users, Metroplex Voice Computing has a voice recognition package called MathTalk/Scientific Notebook with a read-back feature, which will allow blind users to access many of the Scientific Notebook features, including producing a print and Braille copy of their results.

BRAILLE 2000

Braille 2000 is a braille translation software we see used less frequently in Texas than Duxbury and Megadots, but it is becoming more well known here. The current version of Braille 2000 allows direct 6 key entry of Nemeth code and will display an on-screen back translation of braille into print for proofreading. This visual display shows typographically correct math expressions when braille in Nemeth, but Nemeth to print output is not available. Print to Nemeth translation is also not currently available in Braille 2000, but developers are working on a subset of Nemeth to be available in upcoming versions. Braille 2000 does not import Scientific Notebook files, but work is in progress for Nemeth translation of XML.

MOUNTBATTEN BRAILLER

Aside from using the Perkins or other manual braille production methods, the Mountbatten Braille is one way for blind students to produce math in a tactual format they can read themselves. With the new Mountbatten Learning Center model, users can use the keyboard to directly write braille in Nemeth code using a horizontal or a vertical format. Nemeth braille entry does yield accurate voice output of numbers and operators, but back translation from Nemeth to print is not currently available. Using an attached computer keyboard with the Mountbatten in forward emboss mode does not produce accurate Nemeth.

BRILLENOTE

Both BrailleNote and PAC Mate are not currently able to produce braille to print translations of Nemeth files. Some users and teachers produce usable print files by using selected computer braille symbols instead of standard Nemeth code symbols. With these symbols, a math teacher without knowledge of braille can read the student's math work by drawing on commonalities between math notation and computer programming languages.

BrailleNote introduced a Nemeth tutorial program in the spring of 2007. This program is accessed via the BrailleNote, and teaches users the basics of Nemeth code via the braille display and voice output features of the BrailleNote. Presented in a self-paced set of learning modules, the tutorial guides the users step by step through Nemeth Code from beginner to college level mathematics. Designed for adults who may have had only minimal access to Nemeth braille instruction, it could be used by younger students with support from a knowledgeable teacher. Educators supporting students learning math can also benefit from the tutorial. This tutorial is not intended to teach mathematical concepts, only knowledge of the code.

THE TIGER EMBOSSEY AND SOFTWARE

The Tiger embosser produces math using the same software as other braille printers. In addition it can utilize files generated in MathType. MathType is an equation editor bundled with both MS Word and Corel WordPerfect. A separate professional version of MathType is also available. Similar to Scientific Notebook, it is used by sighted scientists, engineers, and educators to author documents that include equations. Files generated by MathType can be exported in LaTeX and MathML documents. These files can then be used to emboss documents in Nemeth or DotsPlus (at tactual spacial math format) using the Tiger software. Currently, MathType is only accessible to sighted users.

RESOURCES

Braille 2000

www.braille2000.com

Duxbury Systems, Inc (Duxbury and Megadots)

www.duxburysystems.com

Design Science (MathType)

www.dessci.com/en/products/MathType

Freedom Scientific (PAC Mate)

www.freedomscientific.com/index.html

Humanware (BrailleNote)

www.humanware.com/en-usa/home

MacKichan Software, Inc. (Scientific Notebook)

www.mackichan.com

Metroplex Voice Computing

www.metroplexvoice.com

TSBVI Mathematics website

www.tsbvi.edu/math/index.htm

ViewPlus (Tiger Embossers)

www.viewplus.com

Blind Children's Program: Challenges Ahead

By Barbara J. Madrigal, Assistant Commissioner, Division for Blind Services

Abstract: This article reviews changes in purchasing guidelines for DARS-DBS Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, Blind Children's Program, purchases, services, Transition services

In the field of government, we are accustomed to dealing with challenges on a daily basis. I suspect this is true of all fields of endeavor, for to accomplish something real and worthwhile in the world always requires one to overcome challenges.

In this fiscal year, the Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program is facing the challenge of a budget shortfall. Although the budget for the Blind Children's Program has not been reduced, operating costs have risen in recent years and, as a result, some very difficult and unavoidable decisions became necessary.

The primary change is that, effective September 17, 2007, the Blind Children's Program will no longer be able to purchase services for consumers whose vision is better than 20/70 in the better eye. Examples of purchased services which the Blind Children's Program has previously provided for these consumers include glasses, registration fees and travel expenses to attend conferences, support to attend DBS trainings, registration fees and travel expenses for camps, developmental equipment, and developmental toys.

With the exception of these purchased services, children whose vision is better than 20/70 in the better eye and who are certified as visually impaired by the local education agency will continue to be eligible for all other services provided by our Blind Children's Specialists. These services include needs assessment, information and referral services, ARD preparation and support, and counseling and guidance services.

BCP Specialists can also provide assistance with locating comparable benefits for services we are no longer able to purchase.

A second change will result in purchase limitations for consumers whose vision is 20/70 or worse. The following changes will also go into effect on September 17th.

- Out-of-state conferences will be limited to only those where in-state training is not available.
- Support will be provided to families to attend only one conference per year.
- Durable equipment purchased by the Blind Children's Program must be specific to the loss of vision; DBS Specialists will assist in locating resources to provide equipment such as wheelchairs, strollers, or other items over \$100.

This shortfall will also impact other budget areas within DBS, including staff training and administrative purchases.

This is, unfortunately, a situation that the Children's Program has encountered in the past. For example, an article published in the *See/Hear* newsletter in 2001 <www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/seehear/summer01/creative-thinking.htm> guides parents in locating additional resources in the community.

I would like to reassure you that our core services to blind children and their families are still strong. Our DBS Specialists are knowledgeable about the impact of visual impairment on child development, and they

remain available to help children and their parents learn and build new skills. They also still assist consumers and families to participate in training opportunities, and to obtain the techniques, tools, information, resources, and support that will enable consumers to reach their fullest potential.

Additionally, the DBS Transition Program continues to work with blind students starting at age 10. Almost exactly four years ago, the Texas Division for Blind Services became the first Vocational Rehabilitation agency in the country to work with 10-year-olds. At that time, Commissioner Terry Murphy stated, "We have no doubt that earlier, positive vocational involvement with young people via [DBS's] knowledgeable transition

specialists is appropriate and necessary in today's economic and social environment to reduce the high unemployment rates still prevalent among the blind population. The earlier young people who are blind experience empowering skills, the better prepared they are for the various transitions between youth and life as an adult."

Our Children's Program and Transition Program provide a unified and seamless service system that emphasizes confidence, high expectations, and empowerment. We remain firm in our commitment to assist all of our consumers in their efforts to be independent and productive, and we look forward to working with you toward that goal.

Looking Forward at TSBVI

By William "Bill" Daugherty, Superintendent,
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Abstract: Bill Daugherty, the new Superintendent for TSBVI, introduces himself and talks about his background and TSBVI.

Key Words: Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, TSBVI, Superintendent Phil Hatlen, Superintendent Bill Daugherty, blindness, visual impairment, News & Views

My name is William "Bill" Daugherty, and as the new Superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), I am so pleased to have a regular opportunity to provide the readership of *TX SenseAbilities* an update about our school's campus and statewide activities. I previously worked at TSBVI until 1993, and for the past 14 years have served as the Superintendent of the Kansas State School for the Blind. Returning to my hometown of Austin, and to what is regarded by many as the finest special purpose school of its type in the country, is both a thrill and a great honor.

You have to leave Austin and Texas for a while to fully grasp how large this city and

this state looms in the public imagination. Likewise, TSBVI is widely discussed within our field as an important national resource and as a source of key leadership to the profession. Much of that recognition has been due to the service of Dr. Phil Hatlen over his past 17 years as the TSBVI Superintendent. Phil has demonstrated a unique ability to unite our field around unifying themes and principles that made sense to people. The Expanded Core Curriculum is but one example. But TSBVI's national and international prominence has also evolved as many of its teachers and specialists grew to become the very best in the country at what they do. Current and former TSBVI staff form an extensive A-List of authors, presenters and consultants on every

specialization related to Visual Impairment. Their influence and contributions flourished because TSBVI over the past three decades or so has placed a value on creativity that is reflective of the city in which our school resides.

I've had opportunity to travel around the country quite a bit, and I cannot think of another state that has a better network of services to students with visual impairments. Our fine school in Austin with its highly diversified service delivery options on its campus and statewide, combined with two teacher training programs and the many TVIs and COMS working across the state in the ESCs and ISDs, form an unparalleled opportunity for partnerships. A major interest of mine will be to build upon the existing collaborations and find new avenues of action that will help ensure every student in the state has adequate access to professionals who can support their needs as a learner. At my recent attendance at

the state ACB conference in Austin, I heard comments that were clear reminders that independence, employment and empowerment are still more journey than destination. Every possible option needs to be on our collective table, and every tool in the box needs to be brought to bear in meeting our common goals for all our students across Texas.

I'll close with an update about our school in Austin. TSBVI's 91 year-old campus is in the midst of being completely rebuilt over the next 5 years. What will emerge from this project is a fine new facility that will serve the state for many decades to come. TSBVI will continue to adapt and change to better meet on-going needs and to proactively address whatever emerging trends may arise. Those of us who have been professionals in this field for a while know to expect the unexpected. But in what better enterprise to be involved? This is very good work to be associated with.

Short-Term Classes for Academic Student at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

By Lauren Newton, Principal, TSBVI Special Programs

Abstract: this article describes how TSBVI short-term programs can provide specialized skills needed to access the Texas school curriculum.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, TSBVI, Short-Term Programs

Academic students with visual impairments require specialized tools and strategies in order to access the regular school curriculum (TEKS). Short-term classes at TSBVI offer 3 to 5 days of intensive instruction in various areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum for Visually Impaired students, such as technology, math and graphics tools, readiness for work and college, low vision strategies, self-determination, travel skills, Braille, etc. Participation in Short-Term Classes can provide knowledge and skills needed to access the Texas school

curriculum. Students also receive training in skills of independent living during the after-school components of the program.

Please go to www.tsbvi.edu/school/special/short-classes.htm for a calendar and description of classes for the 2007-2008 school year. You are also encouraged to call the program's principal for information about how to enroll a student in one of the short-term classes: Lauren Newton, 512.206.9119, laurennewton@tsbvi.edu.

Book Reviews

Wrightslaw: Special Education Law, 2nd Edition, and Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy, 2nd Edition, by Peter W. D. Wright and Pamela Darr Wright

Reviewed by Tricia and Calvin Luker, parents and advocates, Royal Oak, MI

Abstract: this book review by Tricia and Calvin Luker discusses the valuable information provided in these books that were awarded the Exceptional Parent Symbol of Excellence.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, Wrightslaw, Peter and Pamela Wright, Exceptional Parent, IEP, special education, IDEA, No Child Left Behind, advocacy.

It is the night before Jessica's first big IEP Team meeting and her parents are scrambling to find something – ANYTHING – that can help them prepare for the meeting. Try *Wrightslaw*. Sally's advocate is packing her briefcase as she heads out the door for the IEP Team meeting. She checks for her most critical resource. *Wrightslaw*. Susan, a school district attorney, checks her bag before heading off to her next meeting. Yup. *Wrightslaw*. Is there no one who hasn't heard of *Wrightslaw*?

Actually, we are sure that many readers have not, so today we review two new books from *Wrightslaw*. Both are second editions of books Pam and Pete Wright first released several years ago. The Wrights have updated both books to reflect the 2004 changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] and its implementing regulations. We use both books in our regular course of business and highly recommend them to parents, educators, advocates, attorneys and anyone else who has a need for quick but comprehensive manuals on special education law.

Wrightslaw: Special Education Law, 2nd Edition [Wrightslaw] is a wonderful and ready resource for all who want to be able to find and then quote chapter and verse of IDEA law and regulations. The book includes the complete text of all four parts of IDEA as enacted in December, 2004. *Wrightslaw* also contains the complete implementing

regulations for IDEA that became effective in August, 2006. These texts alone are worth the cost of the book.

But *Wrightslaw* does not stop with the IDEA statute and its implementing regulations. *Wrightslaw* also includes the complete text of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA]; the text to Section 504 [the Rehabilitation Act of 1973]; and the text of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. These inclusions ensure that the *Wrightslaw* user always has the key educational laws right at her fingertips at a moment's need. We have cited our *Wrightslaw* at IEP Team meetings, due process hearings, client meetings and the like.

Pam and Pete Wright make *Wrightslaw* even more valuable by including commentary on how to apply the included laws to typical special education circumstances. They talk about the No Child Left Behind Act and show how it fits into the special education law scheme. They cite and include the text of the major court cases that have shaped how special education law should be interpreted and implemented. And they have included a glossary of special education terms and acronyms with a user-friendly index.

We regard *Wrightslaw* as an essential resource in our practice. We believe the book should be part of every parent's (and

educator's, advocate's, attorney's) special education library because of its rich and vital contents.

We also heartily recommend Pam and Pete's second book, *Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy, 2nd Edition*. The Wrights call this book "The Special Education Survival Guide." And well it is. The Wrights designed this book primarily for parents who need a one-stop how-to resource that will teach them to be strong and effective advocates for their children.

We cannot say enough about the contents and organization of this book. The Wrights have divided it into five sections. Section One helps parents to organize their thoughts and ideas, creating a mind-set for them in their undertaking as advocates for their child. Section Two highlights the practice of advocacy, outlines the players, identifies common traps, and provides strategies for resolving conflicts and managing crises. Section Three gives parents nuts and bolts information needed to make parents experts on all facets of their child's education; from file organization to testing to writing strong IEP's. Section Four walks parents through the broad principles

found in IDEA's major provisions, touching on Section 504 and the No Child Left Behind Act. Finally, Section Five shows the now-well prepared parent how to advocate in the trenches: at the IEP Team meeting, collecting and documenting information; and managing and winning disputes.

We like *From Emotions to Advocacy* because it is loaded with sage advice that most parents will find easy to understand and apply. We especially like that the Wrights pull no punches in telling parents what they are in for as their child's advocates. Their "Rules of Adverse Assumptions," discussed in Chapter 21, are particularly powerful and to the point—don't expect others, especially educators, to see things your way. Plan and prepare to win your case on your own, using your own wits and resources. They then show you how.

Through *Wrightslaw* and *From Emotions to Advocacy* Pete and Pam Wright have provided a great service to parents, educators, advocates, and attorneys, providing them with hands-on resources that pack power to the punch. We proudly award both books the *Exceptional Parent* EP Symbol of Excellence.

New Resources from NCDB

From announcements by the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB)

Abstract: There are two new resources available from the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness

Key Words: blindness, deafness, deafblind, visual impairment, National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness, Harmonious Interactions, ADAMLS

The National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness is pleased to announce our newest publication, "Harmonious Interactions". It describes the importance of teaching families and educators the techniques to create and maintain high-quality interactions with children who are deaf-blind, and is based on research and training activities conduct-

ed by Marleen Janssen, Marianne Riksen-Walraven, Jan van Dijk, and Bernadette van den Tillaart.

This is the first of series of NCDB publications, entitled *Practice Perspectives*, designed to expand and broaden the use of current information resources. The docu-

ment is available at: <<http://www.dblink.org/pdf/harmonious-interaction.pdf>>.

In addition, as part of a Practitioner Developed Product initiative, DB-LINK has partnered with TSBVI's Deafblind Outreach Specialist Robbie Blaha and DARS/DBS Deafblind Specialist Brad Carlson in the formatting and dissemination of their tool, *The Assessment of Deafblind Access to Manual Language Systems (ADAMLS)*. ADAMLS is a resource for educational teams who are responsible for developing appropriate adaptations and strategies for children who are deafblind and are candidates for learning manual language systems. It includes

strategies for organizing the assessment process, assessment questions with considerations for adaptations, and a tool for organizing and summarizing the results. It is available as a pdf document found at <<http://www.dblink.org/pdf/adamls.pdf>>.

We hope that you will find it to be useful and welcome your comments and feedback. For more information contact:

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness
Voice: 800-438-9376
TTY: 800-854-7013
E-mail: info@nationaldb.org
Web: www.nationaldb.org

Announcement of Competition to Attend International Congress

by Kathleen M. Huebner, Ph.D., Chairperson, North American and Caribbean Region, International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), Professor and Associate Dean, Pennsylvania College of Optometry

Abstract: An essay competition is being held to identify participants for the International Congress for Blind and Partially Sighted Children in Pontevedra, Spain in March, 2008.

Key Words: blindness, visual impairment, World Blind Union (WBU), Spanish National Organisation of the Blind (ONCE), workshops, Pontevedra

Are you between 14 and 16 years old? Would you like to join other visually impaired teenagers from all over the world for five days in Spain? If so, take part in our easy-to-enter competition and you may be selected to participate in the first-ever International Congress for Blind and Partially Sighted Children in Pontevedra, Spain, in March next year.

Listening to the Children:
International Congress for Blind and
Partially Sighted Children in
Pontevedra, Spain, March 25-29, 2008.

The congress is organized by the World Blind Union (WBU) and the Spanish National Organisation of the Blind (ONCE) in partnership with Unicef, ICEVI and Save the Children. Twenty-four visually impaired teenagers representing all six WBU regions

will come together for three days of activities including:

- Debates and discussions on the status of blind and partially sighted teenagers in the world today, focusing especially on education, the family and relating to your peers;
- Intercultural workshops;
- Recreational and sports activities;
- Excursions in and around the beautiful Galician city of Pontevedra.

To enter the competition, submit an essay on one of the following by December 31, 2007:

- Your life as a visually impaired teenager (in a creative form, perhaps a poem, a letter or a newspaper article);

- Your experience with children’s rights in your community, country or region;
- One of the three areas to be addressed during the congress (the family, education and relating to peers).

To obtain an entry form, please contact:

- Beth Dennis, Blind Children’s Program-Consultant, Texas DARS/DBS Blind Children’s Program, 512-377-0578, <beth.dennis@dars.state.tx.us>; or
- Kathleen M. Huebner, Ph.D., Professor and Associate Dean, Pennsylvania College of Optometry, Chairperson for North American and Caribbean Region of International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment, 215-780-1360, <Kathyh@pco.edu>.

Entries should be no longer than 1500 words and may be submitted in English or Spanish and in print, braille (grade 1), electronic format, mp3 or any other suitable format. Please indicate clearly “Listening to the Children” on the envelope if submitting by post. For more information contact the Secretary General’s Office.

Entries should be sent by post, fax or E-mail to:

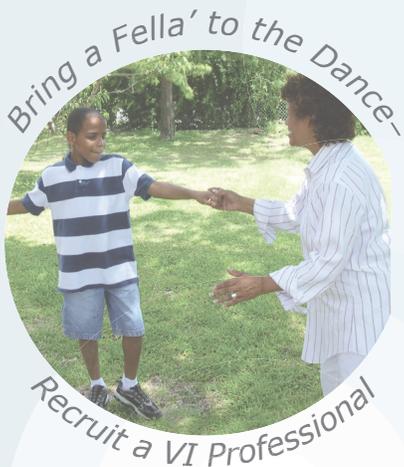
Enrique Pérez, WBU Secretary General
C/o ONCE
C/ Almansa 66
28039 Madrid
Spain

Tel: + 34 91 589 45 33
Fax: + 34 91 589 47 49
E-mail: umc@once.es

Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired – Outreach Program Honors

Texas Fellows

Recognizing VI Professionals in their Role as Recruiters



Texas Fellow

Caren Hodges
Karen Mascho
Christy Finstad
Kristin Holton
Cynthia Mullino
Meagan Matkin
Juan Dennett
Jesse Melgoza
Kathy Rodriguez
Susan Matlock
Brenda Snow

Candidate

Donna Nunn
Tanya Cook
Kara Chumbley
Mona Stavinoha
Amy Jo Stavinoha
Heather Janek
Jesse Melgoza
Donna Wagner
Susan Dunlop
Donna Wagner
Alice McCallum



For more information about becoming a Texas Fellow or working as a VI professional contact KC Dignan at <kcd@tsbvi.edu>.

BulletinBoard

Announcements / Regional, State, and National Training and Events

Mail or email your item for the Bulletin Board to Beth Bible:
TSBVI Outreach, 1100 W. 45th Street, Austin, TX 78756 or <bethbible@tsbvi.edu>
An up-to-date Statewide Staff Development Calendar is posted at
<<http://www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm>>

**The Virginia Murray Sowell Center
for Research and Education in Visual Impairment**

9th Annual Sowell Center Distinguished Lecture Series

Dr. D. Jay Gense & Ms. Marilyn H. Gense
Autism Spectrum Disorders and Visual Impairment

November 10, 2007
Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

For more information, call Robin Rekieta at 806-742-1997 ext. 251,
or visit the Sowell Center web site: <www.educ.ttu.edu/Sowell2/default.htm>.

The 8th Biennial

Getting In Touch With Literacy Conference: ***Charting A Course To Literacy***

Nov. 29 – Dec. 2, 2007
TradeWinds Island Grand Resort, St. Pete Beach, FL

Learn to Chart a Course to Literacy for Students with Visual Impairments
in a casual, tropical setting.

- International experts on literacy
- Strategies for providing literacy instruction for **all** students

For updates and more information go to: <www.gettingintouchwithliteracy.com>

Phone: (813) 837-7829 Fax: (813) 837-7979 E-mail: <kratzlaff@fimcvi.org>

THE MAGIC OF TECHNOLOGY

Adaptive Technology Training for Teaching Deaf-Blind Individuals

December 3 – 7, 2007

Helen Keller National Center, Sand Point, NY

The information explosion created by ever advancing technology has affected everyone. It has impacted the deaf-blind population on every level from living independently and safely in their home to better jobs and careers at the worksite to increased socialization and access to information. This seminar demonstrates the technology, the software and the methodology for teaching a wide variety of adaptive equipment to consumers who are beginners and/or advanced students in the world of technology. Vendors will demonstrate the latest state of the art technology and participants will have access to availability and funding resources. CEU credits are available.

For addition information, e-mail Deborah Harlin at <deb.harlin@hknc.org>, or Anindya Bhattacharyya at <anindya.bhattacharyya@hknc.org>.

<http://www.hknc.org/images/2007SeminarBrochure2_1_2007_with_links.htm>

TSBVI On - Campus Workshops 2007 - 2008

One-day workshops are \$50. Two-day workshops are \$75. Paraprofessionals free. All workshops will start at 9 AM and end at 4:30 PM at the TSBVI Conference Center. Lunch on your own. Make their own reservations at a hotel of your choice. Registration may be limited and is first-come, first-served.

For information about any of these workshops, contact:

Kate Moss, Statewide Staff Development Specialist
Outreach Department, Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired
512-206-9224 — <katemoss@tsbvi.edu>

Aligning IEPs for Students with Visual Impairment to State Standards

Ann Adkins, VI Education Specialist,
TSBVI Outreach and
Debra Sewell, Director, TSBVI Curriculum

November 16, 2007

Developing appropriate IEPs for visually impaired students is often challenging; aligning them to state academic standards, even more so. Explore ways that TVIs can make the state academic standards (TEKS, TAKS, general ed curriculum, grade level content, etc.) meaningful and accessible for VI students. The presenters will examine the "evaluation to IEP to instruction" cycle and present ways to align both academic and expanded core areas to state standards at the student's assigned grade

level. CPE credits offered. Academy CPUs pending.

Learning to Facilitate Personal Futures Planning

Eva Lavigne, VI Transition Specialist,
TSBVI Outreach and
Kate Moss, Statewide Staff Development
Coordinator, TSBVI Outreach

January 25, 2008

Personal Futures Planning is a form of person-centered planning pioneered by Beth Mount in the 1970s-80s. This workshop is meant to introduce a group of individuals to this valuable planning tool for helping individuals with blindness or deafblindness and their families plan for the future.

TSBVI Outreach TETN - Distance Education Broadcasts

2007-2008 School Year

Please contact your Regional Education Service Center Consultant in the area of visual impairments to participate in these broadcasts. Sorry, but at this time the distance education broadcasts can only be viewed in real time and within the state of Texas

Access to the General Education Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments

Ann Adkins, TSBVI VI Outreach Consultant

November 7, 2007 (1:30-3:30)

This TETN offers a brief overview of issues facing VI professionals in helping their students with visual impairment to access the general education curriculum. CPE 1.5 will be offered.

Finding Your Own Replacement Part

KC Dignan, TSBVI Outreach, Personnel Preparation Consultant

December 5, 2007 (1:30-3:30)

The TVIs and COMs of Texas are aging out leaving a critical shortage of teachers for the future. This TETN offers a brief overview of the issues facing our profession and ideas for recruiting others to replace you in your job when you choose to leave. CPE 1.5 will be offered. Academy CPU pending approval.

Adaptive PE for Students with Visual and Multiple Impairments or Deafblindness

Dr. Elina Mullen, TSBVI Adaptive PE Teacher

December 12, 2007 (10:00-12:00)

This TETN session will be of special interest to adaptive Parents, PE teachers, COMS, and TVIs. Dr. Mullen will provide specific information about how to adapt a wide va-

riety of recreation and leisure activities for students with visual and multiple disabilities or deafblindness. She will also share information on the importance of considering communication and concept development through the use of the activities. CPE 1.5 will be offered. Academy CPU pending approval.

The Role of the TVI in Consultation

Rona Pogrund, Professor Texas Tech University

January 17, 2008 (1:30-3:30)

A TVI faces many challenges in consulting with all of the other professionals serving children with visual impairments. This session will give a brief overview of the role they have and offer resources for helping the TVI become a more adept consultant. CPE 1.5 will be offered. Academy CPU pending approval.

Usher Syndrome

Peggy Miller, TVI/Speech-Language Therapist, Texas School for the Deaf, Austin, TX

January 30, 2008 (1:30-3:30)

This TETN will focus on the unique needs of the deaf student with Usher Syndrome, the combination of hearing loss and Retinitis Pigmentosa leading to deafblindness. Participants will learn about how a diagnosis is made, some of the basics of the syndrome, and how to support the student and family through the diagnostic process. Educational implications will also be discussed briefly and resources will be provided.

Orientation and Mobility for Non-mobile Infants

Ruth Ann Marsh, TSBVI Outreach O&M Consultant

February 13, 2008 (1:30-3:30)

This TETN will focus on promoting the development of skills in non-mobile infants that lead to the exploration of (orientation) and movement through (mobility) a child's environment. This will include a discussion about developing body awareness, promoting the exploration of near space, and developing awareness and use of the other senses. The participants will learn instructional methods and techniques to promote the development of a child's awareness of the environment, his relationship to it, and ways to interact with it.

Research/Evidence-Based Practice for the VI Student

Nancy Toelle, VI Consultant TSBVI Outreach

April 16, 2008 (10:00-12:00)

CPE 1.5 will be offered. Academy CPU pending approval.

Transition Discussion

Discussion Facilitators: Eva Lavigne, TSBVI Outreach VI Transition Specialist and Kate Moss, TSBVI Outreach Statewide Staff Development Coordinator

April 23, 2008 (2:30-4:00)

This TETN is the second in a series of two facilitated discussions on transition issues facing students with visual impairments and deafblindness. Teachers, TVI, O&M, and parents can learn and share ideas for helping to work for more successful outcomes in the adult transition from school to adult life. CPE 1.5 will be offered.

Data Analysis of the QPVI Master List

Nancy Toelle, TSBVI VI Outreach Consultant

May 14, 2008 (10:00-12:00)

Analyzing your Master List of Students can be a helpful part of a programming accountability process. We will represent your Master List data graphically for ease of analysis and presentation to peers and administrators. CPE 1.5 will be offered. Academy CPU pending approval.

CHARGE

Presenter: To be Announced

May 21, 2008 (1:30-3:30)

CHARGE is a very complex syndrome that requires extensive modification to the educational program for the child. Family members are intensely involved in on-going medical management. They also may need to be intensely involved with their educational team in providing appropriate programming. This broadcast will share some basic information about the syndrome, discuss statewide and national resources for parents, and briefly discuss educational issues that must be addressed for these children.

Keeping an Eye on Texas

There are dozens of additional training activities listed on the statewide staff-development calendar found at the TSBVI website. Look for more training opportunities in your area by visiting:

<www.tsbvi.edu/Outreach/vi.htm>.

If you know of any trainings to list on the calendar, contact Kate Moss at:

(512)206-9224, or
<katemoss@tsbvi.edu>.

TX SenseAbilities

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