

AFB Solutions Forum Proceedings

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Welcome to the AFB Solutions *Forum Proceedings*

Once again, the AFB Textbooks and Instructional Materials Solutions Forum brings you the *Forum Proceedings*. The purpose of the proceedings is to highlight information from the Fall 2004 meeting of the Solutions Forum which was held October 13, 2004 in Louisville, Kentucky. We were pleased that, once again, we had an extensive number of people participating by phone.

This was the seventh year that the AFB Solutions Forum brought stakeholders

together in Louisville to address issues of providing the “right book at the right time” to students who are blind or visually impaired.

Highlights of this year’s fall meeting included discussion of instructional materials accessibility policy issues and state advocacy efforts, the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS), critical highlights of a recent national survey, and training efforts related to providing accessible instructional materials and textbooks.

In the afternoon, work groups met to develop a collaborative response to the issue of a national file repository and to refine the final version of a guideline document that will assist states as they implement strategies to ensure instructional materials accessibility. Look for more details about each of these activities in the *Solutions Forum Proceedings*.

— Mary Ann Siller, Director,
National Education Program,
AFB

Instructional Materials Accessibility—Policy Discussion and State Advocacy Efforts

Mark Richert, Executive Director of AER and Facilitator for the

Breaking News!!!

On November 17th, 2004, the House-Senate Conference Committee approved H.R. 1350, the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, with important provisions for accessible materials. The reconciled legislation includes:

- A mandate for states to adopt the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) as a source file for provision of student-ready accessible materials to students who are blind or are print disabled.
 - A mandate for SEAs and LEAs, two years after the date of enactment, to ensure the provision of accessible instructional materials in specialized formats for students with print disabilities, either directly through the state or through the National Instructional Materials Access Center.
 - The Establishment of a National Instructional Materials Access Center at American Printing House for the Blind to process NIMAS versions of Print Instructional Materials.
- It is believed that this legislation will positively change the provision of alternate format materials to students who are blind or are print disabled for years to come and bring timely delivery of these materials, in the appropriate medium, closer to reality.
- Learn more about this “revolutionary” development at: www.afb.org/idea.asp



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Evolution of a Guidelines Document: Suggestions for States Developing/Reviewing Delivery of Textbooks and Instructional Materials to Children with Visual Impairments

The AFB Solutions Forum has worked to create a document that can be used as states review how accessible textbooks and instructional materials are made available to their students with visual impairments. In March, as AFB Solutions Forum participants reviewed the Guidelines Document, their comments and suggestions were incorporated into a “final draft” which was reviewed by participants in the October 13 meeting.

Based on the earlier suggestions of the broad group of stakeholders, the guidelines document has been set up as a checklist. AFB Solutions Forum

participants, those on-site as well as the individuals who participated by phone, were asked to review the checklist in preparation for final edit suggestions to be made in the afternoon work groups. Individuals participating by phone were instructed to email their suggestions to Jim Allan, Facilitator for Electronic Files and Research and Development Group, and Jim passed those along to Lorri Quigley, Production Group Facilitator, and Larry Brown, Training Group Facilitator. Quigley and Brown led on-site participants in discussion of the checklist and summarized the notes to be incorporated in a

final document.

AFB Solutions Forum participants suggested that having the checklist available soon, even in a basic form, would be helpful as states work to ensure timely delivery of accessible textbooks and instructional materials to students who are blind or have low vision.

The next step will be to take the draft document to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) for their input and ideas for dissemination to state educational leaders.

Training Issues—Update

Even as the potential looms for a national repository to facilitate acquisition of publishers’ files in a standardized format, production of braille materials will require the skills of individuals certified as braille transcribers. Two major training initiatives which will help strengthen the pool of certified braille transcribers were discussed during the AFB Solutions Forum meeting of October 13.

The American Foundation for the Blind will introduce an online training course for braille transcribers in February 2005. AFB is pleased that the National Center on Low-Incidence Disabilities (NCLID) has provided the design expertise for

the web course. Susan Christensen was the primary author of the program which will assist transcribers in learning how to effectively use publishers’ files and how to move away from “paper-to-paper” braille transcription. Content specialists for the 3 units also included Diane Spence from Texas and Joanna Venneri from California.

Unit 1 will focus on comparing print page to the electronic file provided and the different aspects of publishers’ files; Unit 2 will take the learner through features of Microsoft Word that are critical to electronic transcription; and Unit 3 will focus on using braille translation software. The team

noted that publishers’ files and braille translation software will make the process easier, but the knowledgeable braille transcriber is still a critical part of the formula for transferring text into braille.

Mary Ann Siller reviewed Vivian Seki’s report about the Northwest Vista College program for training braille textbook transcribers. The pilot year of the program was completed in August 2004. AFB and the Texas Education Agency are looking for partners in local community colleges to further replicate the program in other parts of the country.

National Repository or Access Center for Publishers' Files

George Kerscher, Open eBook Forum, and Steve Driesler, Association of American Publishers, reported on a summit held October 4, 2004 to discuss a national repository or access center to house electronic files from publishers. The purpose of a national access center would be to store, catalog, and disseminate publishers'

electronic files so they are available to authorized entities for preparation in accessible format for students with print disabilities. It is expected that files submitted to the access center would meet National Instructional Materials Accessible Standard (NIMAS) criteria. The meeting, which included representatives of

publishers, authorized agencies, and consumer organizations, included several members of the AFB Solutions Forum as well. In preparation for the summit, Mary Ann Siller and Mark Richert had gathered feedback from AFB Solutions Forum partners through a conference call.

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AFB Solutions Forum Work Groups

- Electronic Files and Research and Development
- Legislative and Policy-Making
- Training
- Production
- Communication and Collaboration

For more information or to volunteer for one of the work groups, contact:

siller@afb.net

Collaborative Response to the National File Repository Initiative

One focus of the afternoon AFB Solutions Forum work group was development of a collaborative response to an access center. The group discussed the features which would define the structure and function of a national file repository/access center, key legal issues of a national file repository, and points to consider to ensure maximum availability of materials through authorized entities.

Mark Richert facilitated the discussion which featured the following points:

- The scope of files which will be housed by the access center must be clearly defined and a determination made on the type of information that will be maintained.
- A determination must be made whether to charge authorized entities a usage fee for repository files, and if so, how such a fee will be set.
- A clear definition of "authorized entities" must be communicated. Who decides who can access files from the national repository?
- Accountability for timely delivery of files to users and maintaining a system that ensures student access to information which appears in the final print copy of a textbook is important.

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Legislative Update—continued

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AFB Solutions Forum stakeholders must communicate with their Senators and Congressman about access to textbooks. In fact, efforts to do so have already been under way as evidenced by reports from Jim McCarthy, National Federation of the Blind and Melanie Brunson, American Council of the Blind. Both McCarthy and Brunson noted with concern that

National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) and the creation of a national repository or access center for publishers' files must be part of the final reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Representative Thomas Petri, (R., WI) is not a member of the conference committee.

Steve Driesler, Association of American Publishers and Paul Schroeder and Alan Dinsmore with the American Foundation for the Blind also noted the critical need for individuals to communicate - very soon - with their representatives, especially those on the conference committee, in order to help them understand why a national repository for publishers' files is important to students with visual impairments. Some efforts to establish a voluntary repository for K-12 and post-secondary files have emerged, but participants were reminded that this should not replace the mandated K-12 repository.

State advocacy and networking efforts will continue to be important as AFB Solutions Forum stakeholders work together to accomplish this important component within the

Reauthorization of IDEA. Gene McMahon with the New York Institute for the Blind discussed strategies they have used to communicate that the blindness community is united in their support of a national repository. He noted that grass-roots appeals are often effective and suggested that AFB Solutions Forum participants identify a passionate person within their state to make legislative contacts. McMahon reminded the audience that it is helpful to report to the Solutions Forum about legislative contacts that were made and the results of the contact.

Pamphlets for the grass-roots effort, *Choices for Children*, were distributed and individuals were invited to return them at the end of the day in order to be put into the system to receive legislative updates related to education of students who are blind or have a visual impairment.

Production Issues—Update

Dr. Rob Wall presented a preliminary summary of the results of a new survey conducted by the AFB Solutions Forum Production and Training Work Groups. Dr. Wall noted that 47 out of 50 states responded to the survey which expanded upon questions from two separate surveys done in 2000. *

Preliminary results of the 2004 survey indicate that:

- 19 states reported having depositories and production capabilities
- more publishers' files are being used than ever before
- there is evidence of an overload of work for production centers

- most staff need more training

The latest survey will also include narrative responses from random interviews being done with parents, students and teachers.

* Results of the 2000 surveys appear in JVIB, Volume 96, Number 4 - April 2002

National Repository (continued)

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Kerscher and Driesler provided a summary of the October 4 meeting. Representatives were grouped into categories of K-12 and higher education, and participants were asked to develop a list of problems each group faces in dealing with textbooks.

The idea of a voluntary repository that would serve all groups (K-12 and higher education, as well as broader disability groups) was discussed. Concerns expressed by participants in the October 4 summit were about the business format a voluntary repository would take, the

accountability and liability of such a model, and whether the additional area of higher education would create new problems because of the increased number of publishers and the different business models they use.

A national repository, or access center, would store, catalog, and disseminate publishers' electronic (NIMAS) files.

Collaborative Response (continued)

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- Liability protection for the repository for claims made under IDEA is a concern.

The group noted that information about the timelines for receiving and disseminating files would be useful to repository users, and it would also address issues related to accountability. The question was asked about how accountability and timeliness of service could be ensured if the access center/national repository is managed as a volunteer agency.

Suggestions were offered for service components of an access center that would

enhance the process of getting accessible textbooks into the hands of students with print disabilities. One participant noted that because NIMAS files have had human intervention, the availability of PDF files would be a helpful addition. Others posed the idea that the access center should incorporate notations from publishers about differences in various ISBN copies of a book, style information or notes specific to state editions of a particular text in order to compare copyright compatibilities. It was suggested that the access center could collect data from

its users on what was done with the file "whether it was transcribed into braille or how it was accessed by a student with print disabilities".

As the process of developing an access center or national repository moves forward, it is expected that the AFB Solutions Forum stakeholders will be represented. The suggestions and feedback provided by the work group were collected and will be used as the AFB Solutions Forum participates in this important development.

Speakers and Panelists

- **Mary Ann Siller**, Director, National Education Program, American Foundation for the Blind (AFB); Coordinator of the AFB Textbooks and Instructional Materials Solutions Forum
- **Mark Richert**, Facilitator for the Legislative and Policy-Making Work Group; AER Executive Director
- **Jim Allan**, Facilitator for the Electronic Files and Research and Development Work Group; Texas School for the Blind Webmaster
- **Marie J. Amerson**, Facilitator for the Communications and Collaboration Work Group; representative for AER
- **Larry Brown**, Facilitator for the Training Work Group; Oregon
- **Lorri Quigley**, Facilitator for the Production Work Group; Director, Utah Educational Resource Center
- **George Kersher**, Open eBook Forum; Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic
- **Steve Driesler**, Executive Director, School Division, Association of American Publishers
- **Laurie MacDonald**, National Center on Low-Incidence Disabilities
- **Diane Spence**, Education Service Center, Region IV, Texas
- **Susan Christensen**, Braille Transcriber, Wisconsin
- **Joanna Venneri**, Braille Transcriber, California
- **Rob Wall**, Western Michigan University
- **Vivan Seki**, Northwest Vista College, Texas

The American Foundation for the Blind Textbooks and Instructional Materials Solutions Forum is a collaborative national effort on behalf of children who are blind or visually impaired. The 44 stakeholders represent textbook publishers; educators; access technology specialists; producers of braille, large print and recorded textbooks; parents of children who are blind or visually impaired; and adults who are blind or visually impaired. They are focused on finding ways to ensure that students have "the right book at the right time."

For additional information about the AFB Solutions Forum or to volunteer in this effort, contact Mary Ann Siller, Director, AFB National Education Program, 11030 Ables Lane, Dallas, TX 75229. Phone: 469-522-1803 or email at siller@afb.net

**Hold this date for the AFB
Josephine L. Taylor Leadership Institute in
Boston, Massachusetts
March 11-13, 2005
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