



ABTEL's committee on Braille convened July 8 and August 5, 2009. At the meeting on August 5, 2009, Dr. Edward C. Bell, director of the Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness, Louisiana Technology University, and Mr. Michael Kasey, National Federation of the Blind, met with the committee.

The Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure met on September 20-21, 2009, to review the committee's report and make a recommendation to the Board of Education. The Advisory Board received the report of the committee including research on Braille instruction, authority regarding Braille instruction, licensure assessments, the current teacher work force with endorsements in visual impairments, Virginia's consortium to prepare teachers of visual impairments, requirements of other states, and available Braille assessments.

On September 20-21, 2009, the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure approved the following recommendation to the Board of Education:

The Advisory Board unanimously recommends to the Board of Education that a reliable, valid, and legally defensible assessment available statewide (to be determined) demonstrating Braille proficiency prescribed by the Virginia Board of Education be required for individuals seeking an initial license with an endorsement in Special Education-Visual Impairments. [The Department of Education shall follow policies and procedures relative to the procurement of such an assessment.] Additionally, contingent upon available funding, opportunities for licensed teachers with the endorsement in Visual Impairments will be afforded additional professional development in the teaching of Braille through the Virginia Department of Education and the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired. The Advisory Board supports the Virginia Board of Education's efforts to include teachers of visual impairments in the *Standards of Quality* funding formula.

The Board of Education approved the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure's recommendation on Braille certification in response to the 2009 Virginia General Assembly House Bill 2224 on November 17, 2009.

### **Summary of Major Elements**

At the request of the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure, a committee was convened on March 29, 2010, to recommend a Braille assessment to be considered as a requirement for individuals seeking an initial license with an endorsement in visual impairments. Representatives attending the meeting were as follows:

Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure

Tracey Dingus, Chair  
Angela Turley, Member  
Courtney Gaskins, Member

National Federation of the Blind

Michael Kasey

Richmond City Schools

Paula Watson, Teacher

Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired  
Glen Slonneger, Education Services Program Director

Department of Education

H. Douglas Cox, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services  
John Eisenberg, Director of Instructional Support and Related Services  
James Lanham, Director of Teacher Licensure and School Leadership  
Tara McDaniel, Specialist, Special Education Human Resources Development  
Patty S. Pitts, Assistant Superintendent of Teacher Education and Licensure  
Wiley Rowsey, Director of Procurement  
Sarah Susbury, Director of Test Administration, Scoring, and Reporting  
Karen Trump, Special Education Coordinator  
Anne D. Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications

After reviewing available assessments, the committee recommended the Braille Proficiency Test owned by the Texas Education Agency and administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). The Braille-only test was developed by the Educational Testing Service for Texas. The state of Mississippi also has adopted this test. States must seek permission from the Texas Education Agency to use the test.

The four-hour Braille Proficiency Test (0631) is administered as a low volume test by ETS, and is scheduled three times a year (November, March, and June). The projected number of new teachers in Virginia seeking the Special Education-Visual Impairment endorsement who would be required to take the Braille Proficiency Test is anticipated to be less than 30 teachers annually. State procurement testing requirements exempt competitive procurement up to \$50,000 over the life of the contract.

The test addresses the following standards developed by the Texas Education Agency:

*The beginning teacher knows and understands:*

- \* *skills for reading uncontracted and contracted literary; and*
- \* *skills for reading Nemeth Code.*

*The beginning teacher is able to:*

- \* *apply skills for reading uncontracted and contracted literary Braille;*
- \* *apply skills for reading basic Nemeth Code; and*
- \* *use resources for reading advanced Nemeth Code.*

*The beginning teacher knows and understands:*

- \* *skills for producing uncontracted and contracted literary Braille; and*
- \* *skills for producing Nemeth Code.*

*The beginning teacher is able to:*

- \* *produce uncontracted and contracted literary Braille with a braillewriter;*
- \* *produce uncontracted and contracted literary Braille with a slate and stylus;*
- \* *produce basic Nemeth Code with a braillewriter; and*
- \* *refer to Nemeth Code rules to produce advanced Nemeth Code with a braillewriter.*

[Source: *Texas Braille Standards (Standard VII)*, approved April 2, 2004]

The Braille Proficiency Test is composed of two sections. The multiple-choice section assesses the examinees' ability to read Braille using simulated Braille text. The performance-assessment section assesses the examinees' ability to produce Braille text from printed text using both a slate and stylus and a braillewriter. The standard form of the Braille Proficiency Test takes five hours. An Alternate Test Form (ATF) is available for candidates requiring accommodations. The ATF is a combination Reader Script/Braille edition and can only be administered one-to-one.

Candidates must bring the following items to the test site:

- Manual (non-electric) braillewriter that accommodates standard 11 ½ by 11 inch braille paper
- Slate and stylus that accommodates 8 ½ by 11 inch Braille paper
- Braille eraser
- Pencil

On April 19, 2010, the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure voted unanimously to recommend that the Virginia Board of Education approve the Braille Proficiency Test administered by the Educational Testing Service as the required assessment for teachers seeking the Special Education-Visual Impairment endorsement in Virginia. The committee's rationale included the following: (1) the Braille Proficiency Test developed by the Educational Testing Service is a reliable, valid, and legally defensible assessment; (2) the test appears to cover the appropriate knowledge and skills for Braille; (3) the test would be available after a state-specific standard setting study; and (4) the test is accessible across the state.

#### **Superintendent's Recommendation:**

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education receive for first review the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure (ABTEL) recommendation to approve the Braille Proficiency Test administered by the Educational Testing Service as the required assessment for teachers seeking an initial license with the Special Education-Visual Impairment endorsement in Virginia (pending approval from the Texas Education Agency to use the test) and authorize the Department of Education to begin the standard-setting process for the test.

#### **Impact on Resources:**

Costs associated with the administration of the Braille Proficiency Test will be incurred by the Educational Testing Service. Prospective teachers seeking an initial license with the Special Education-Visual Impairments endorsement will be required to pay the test fee.

#### **Timetable for Further Review/Action:**

This agenda item will be presented to the Board of Education for final approval at the July 22, 2010, meeting.