

OSEP Letter on Braille

USEAM
Jones Center
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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in section 614(d)(3)(B)(iii), specifically addresses a public agency's responsibility to make provisions for Braille instruction in educating blind and visually impaired students.

OSEP Letter on Braille

United States Department of Education Office
of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Dear Colleague Letter dated July 19, 2013.

Purpose of letter:

- **reaffirm the importance of Braille instruction** as a literacy tool for blind and visually impaired students.
- **clarify the circumstances** in which Braille instruction should be provided.
- **reiterate the scope of an evaluation** required to guide decisions of IEP Teams.

OSEP Guidance

- ▶ 525.005 Placement
- ▶ 525.003 In General
- ▶ 185.060 Scope of Evaluation Procedures

“Just because a student with a visual impairment currently can read regular or large print text doesn’t necessarily obviate a district’s duty to teach him Braille. ... the obligation may arise from the prospect of future vision loss.” (61 IDELR 172, 113 LRP 25708)

The Requirement

- ▶ “In the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, [the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team **must**] provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille **unless** the IEP Team determines, after an evaluation of the child's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child's future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child.”

Importance

- ▶ Research has shown that knowledge of Braille provides numerous **tangible and intangible benefits**, including increased likelihood of obtaining productive employment and heightened self-esteem.
- ▶ Given these benefits, it is important that States and their public agencies ensure the **appropriate implementation** regarding Braille instruction.
- ▶ Parents and advocates note a decrease in Braille instruction over the past several decades; belief is that Braille instruction is not being provided to some students, although appropriate.

Evaluation

- ▶ The evaluation of vision status and the need (or future need) for Braille instruction should be thorough and rigorous.
- ▶ Include a data-based **media assessment**.
- ▶ Based on a range of **learning modalities**, including:
 - auditory, tactile, and visual
 - a Functional Vision Assessment

Evaluation

- ▶ An assessment of a child's vision status generally would include the **nature and extent of the child's visual impairment**, and its effect, for example, on the child's ability to learn to read, write, do mathematical calculations, and use computers and other assistive technology, as well as the child's ability to be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum offered to nondisabled students.

IEP Teams Considerations

- ▶ The IEP team must consider the evaluation results.
- ▶ The IEP team must ensure children who are blind or visually impaired are provided Braille instruction in order to **receive FAPE** to ensure meaningful access to the general education curriculum offered to nondisabled students.

IEP Team Considerations

- ▶ Systematic and regular instruction from **knowledgeable and appropriately trained personnel** is essential for a child to become proficient in Braille.
- ▶ The IEP team must ensure that the instructional **time allotted** for Braille instruction is **sufficient** to provide the level of instruction determined appropriate for the child.

Factors That May Not Be Used to Deny Braille

- ▶ **Factors, such as:**
 - shortages of trained personnel to provide Braille instruction.
 - availability of alternative reading media (including large print materials, recorded materials, or computers with speech output).
 - amount of time needed to provide a child with sufficient and regular instruction to attain proficiency in Braille.

may not be used to deny Braille instruction to a child.

Accessible Instructional Materials

- ▶ SEAs and LEAs must make accessible instructional materials available to persons who are blind or visually impaired, or have other print disabilities.
- ▶ These include Braille, large print, audio or e-text.
- ▶ Caution: Substituting e-text or other digital formats may not provide appropriate access for a student who requires Braille or tactile graphics.
- ▶ Utah State Instructional Materials Access Center (USIMAC)
www.usimac.org

Questions?

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