



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

August 12, 2016

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Implementation of Unified English Braille for Students Who Are Blind Or Visually Impaired

On November 2, 2012, the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) adopted Unified English Braille (UEB) as an official braille code to replace English Braille American Edition (EBAE) in the U.S. At that time, BANA also maintained the current *Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science Notation*, the *Music Braille Code*, and the *International Phonetic Alphabet* as official braille codes. January 4, 2016, was identified as the general implementation date for UEB in the U.S. Consequently, individual state departments of education and stakeholders collaborated to develop individual state implementation plans with specific timelines and processes for transitioning to UEB in schools across the U.S.

Throughout the development of the Unified English Braille Implementation Plan for Virginia Public Schools, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) carefully considered the need for appropriate information, training, and resources to support the current and future braille instruction and literacy needs of students who are blind or visually impaired. The VDOE facilitated interagency collaboration through meetings held with representatives from the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), the Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Vision Impairment at George Mason University, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, and the Virginia Accessible Instructional Materials Center. Additionally, information and input were gathered from a diverse group of visual impairment/blindness (VI) affiliated stakeholders including teachers of students who are blind or visually impaired (TVI), school division administrators, parents, students, braille transcribers, consumer organizations, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and other U.S. state department of education representatives.

During the 2016-2017 school year, Virginia educators and students who are learning and utilizing braille will begin the process of transitioning to UEB for literary and technical content instructional materials (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, science, and technology) in Virginia public schools. The implementation process will occur gradually over the next several years, with the anticipated completion of the full transition to UEB for braille instruction, materials, and statewide assessments by the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Throughout the transition period, some instructional materials and statewide assessments will continue to be available in EBAE and Nemeth Code to address individual students' needs, as specified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Statewide assessments will be transcribed in UEB for literary and technical content areas (e.g., SOL reading, writing, mathematics, history/social science, science, and end-of-course) according to the general statewide implementation timeline established for the newly revised Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) and the corresponding newly aligned SOL assessments. The VDOE will continue to collaborate with partnering agencies, educational consultants, and higher education to provide professional development and ongoing technical assistance for TVI and VI related service providers throughout the transition process.

Additional information may be found in the attached *Unified English Braille Implementation Plan for Virginia Public Schools*. The transition process will be monitored and reviewed with revisions to the implementation plan, as necessary. Information will continue to be disseminated to designated school division administrators

and posted to the VDOE Web site: [Special Education-Sensory Disabilities-Visual Impairment](#). Should you have questions, you may contact Wanda Council, education specialist, at Wanda.Council@doe.virginia.gov; telephone (804) 371-4059.

SRS/JE/wc

Attachments:

- A. [Unified English Braille Implementation Plan for Virginia Public Schools](#) (PDF)