CDE BRAILLE COMPETENCY TESTING GUIDELINES

Colorado Department of Education

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the history and procedures for the state-mandated braille competency testing for Colorado teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment. The requirement for braille competency was the result of a national and state-level effort to protect the literacy instruction to learners who are braille readers.

Knowledge of braille is inherent in the assessment of a child with blindness/low vision in order to determine the student's need for braille instruction and/or the provision of materials in braille. Federal and Colorado State laws require knowledge of the braille code as follows:

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 provides that the individualized education program (IEP) team shall:

> "in the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, 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."[1]

The Colorado Rules for the Administration of the Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA Rules) require that "the written IEP for each child with a vision disability shall include a Learning Media Plan as developed by the IEP team based on comprehensive assessment of the student's learning and literacy modalities by a licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment. Braille shall be the literacy medium selected unless the IEP team determines, based on the comprehensive literacy learning media assessment that instruction in Braille is not appropriate."[2]

Public school students learning the Unified English Braille Code and/or using braille materials must be assured they have high quality braille instructional materials as part of their free, appropriate, public education.

Background of Braille Competency Testing in Colorado

State-mandated braille competency testing has been a Colorado requirement since 1994.[3]

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[1] Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 USC §1414(d)(3)(B)(iii)

[2] 1CCR 301-8, 2220-R-4.03 (6) (b). Hereafter, the ECEA Rules will be referred to as the "ECEA Rules" or by rule number only (e.g., ECEA Rule ___)

[3] Exceptional Children's Educational Act, Colo. Rev. Stat. §22-20-108(4.5)(d)

Additionally, the ECEA Rules were amended in 1997 and again in 2007 to address the braille-testing requirement and currently require that "Colorado teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of Visual Impairment must have demonstrated competency in reading and writing literary Braille per the guidelines developed by the Colorado Department of Education."[4] With the United States adoption and full implementation of the Unified English Braille Code as of January 2016, the CDE Braille Competency testing materials have been updated from English Braille American Edition to Unified English Braille.

Colorado Initial Licensure in the Endorsement Area of Visual Impairment

CDE Braille Competency Test is administered through the Exceptional Student Services Unit of the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). This test is not tied to state licensure for Special Education Specialists -Visual Impairment (ages 0-21 years) (teachers of students with visual impairments).

CDE Braille Competency Process

The only professionals mandated to demonstrate braille competency per ECEA Rules are teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment who are working virtually and/or in-person in a Colorado administrative unit or state operated program in this role. These individuals must have a valid CDE Certificate of Braille Competency or a CDE Renewal Certificate of Braille Competency on file with their current administrative unit or state operated program place of employment at a minimum by the end of their first instructional year with a Colorado public school year.

This mandate includes those individuals who are on an Authorization: Temporary Educator Eligibility (TEE) and working toward completion of a university program in the field of educating children and youth who are blind/low vision or, in a rare instance, an Emergency Authorization.

The CDE Braille Competency Test may be taken by one other school professional. The test is appropriate for individuals hired by Colorado administrative units or state-operated programs[5] as braillists. The key role of a braillist is to prepare and produce instructional braille materials for students who are learning a braille code(s) and/or who are using braille instructional materials. A CDE Certificate of Braille Competency,

however, does not equate to a teacher endorsement needed to provide assessment and instruction in the Unified English Braille Code, which must be taught within the context of reading instruction.

The CDE offers a Braille Competency Test option for Colorado-based teachers who hold a Colorado teaching license and an endorsement in the area of visual impairment and who are employed by a Colorado administrative unit or state-operated program. This option requires candidates to pass the CDE Braille Competency Test, which consists of 100 multiple-choice questions focused on the Unified English Braille (UEB) Code and an assigned passage that must be transcribed into contracted UEB using a Perkins brailler. The braille transcription passage is approximately 3.5 pages in length (25 lines per page with 28-cell lines).

The original test was developed by an expert panel and was based on English Braille American Edition (EBAE). In March 2016, a panel of experts finalized an updated version of the assessment to align with the Unified English Braille Code for literary content. Both versions of the test demonstrated content validity.

[4] ECEA Rule 4.03 (6) (b)(iv)

[5] Hereafter, for the ease of reading, the term *administrative units* will also include state-operated programs.

The assessment measures the knowledge and skills required of a licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment who provides braille instruction and materials support to students who are learning and/or using the Unified English Braille Code.

The CDE Braille Competency Test can be scheduled during regular weekdays, excluding holidays, by contacting Dr. Tanni Anthony at (303) 503-4647 or anthony_t@cde.state.co.us The test is given by a CDE approved proctor and can be taken with the use of standard reference materials. It is a four-hour test. There is no cost to the test.

First-time test candidates should have completed a university-level braille course or demonstrated sufficient independent study, such as successful completion of an online Unified English Braille (UEB) course, before taking the CDE Braille Competency Test. Adequate training and practice in the use of the UEB Code are particularly important for personnel serving under temporary or emergency authorizations while enrolled in a personnel preparation program leading to licensure and endorsement as a teacher of students with visual impairments.

Requests for testing accommodations, along with supporting medical and/or employment documentation, must be submitted in writing to Dr. Anthony at least one month prior to the scheduled test administration.

The four-hour testing period is designed to provide sufficient time to complete both sections of the assessment. Candidates must complete both the multiple-choice section and the braille transcription section within the allotted time. If either section is left incomplete, neither section will be scored, and the candidate will not pass the assessment. For example, a candidate who completes the multiple-choice section but transcribes only half of the braille passage will not pass the assessment.

Candidates who do not complete both sections within the allotted time must retake the entire assessment at a future test administration, in accordance with the retesting scenarios described beginning on page 6 of this document.

For teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment who do not reside in the State of Colorado but are hired by a Colorado administrative unit or state operated programs to provide virtual services to students with blindness/low vision or deaf-blindness, there is still a requirement to demonstrate braille competency. The options for demonstrating initial braille competency include: (a) successful completion of the CDE Braille Competency Test during an in-state visit, (b) evidence of successful completion of a nationally-recognized braille test (National Certification in Unified English Braille (NCUEB), or the ETS Praxis Braille Proficiency Test #0633); or (c) another state braille test for which there is evidence of sufficient testing requirements for efficient and accurate reading and writing of the Unified English Braille code). Please note that the passage of ETS Praxis Braille Proficiency Test #5282 is not a sufficient measure of braille competency.

Expected Timelines for Earning a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency

All personnel hired as teachers of students with visual impairments must demonstrate braille competency no later than the end of their first instructional year with a Colorado administrative unit. This includes individuals employed on an on a temporary status (Temporary Educator Eligibility-TEE) Authorization and are completing their university program in visual impairment) or an Emergency Authorization, must demonstrate braille competency based on their first year of employment with a Colorado administrative unit.

When a new licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment is hired by a Colorado administrative unit or state operated program, the CDE State Consultant on Blindness/Low Vision will

contact this individual and their Special Education Director to provide them with a copy of this document. Additional information will be given about the recommended preparatory materials.

The new teacher will be asked to set a date to take the CDE Braille Competency Test. These same procedures will be followed for a veteran Colorado teacher licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment who has not yet earned a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency.

The CDE Certificate of Braille Competency must be earned no later than the end of the individual's first instructional year, but no later than May 31st of the first instructional year, with a Colorado administrative unit or state operated program as a teacher of students with visual impairment. If a teacher moves from one Colorado administrative unit or state operated program to another, the expectation of first-year braille competency demonstration does not "reactivate" from year-to-year. The testing clock begins with the first day of Colorado employment as teacher of students with visual impairments in any administrative unit.

If a licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment is hired mid-school year (January 1 or later) of an instructional year, it is recommended that this individual demonstrate braille competency before the end of the same instructional year. It is mandated that the individual demonstrate braille competency no later than August 31st of that same calendar year or before the start date of the next instructional year, whichever comes first.

If the licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment, including those on Temporary or Emergency Authorizations, does not demonstrate braille competency before the first semester of the second school year of employment (consecutive or not) with one or more Colorado administrative units or state operated programs, the CDE will require written documentation of the following assurances from the Special Education Director(s) who employs this individual:

Assurance that the individual is being supervised and supported in their work with students with blindness, low vision, or deaf-blindness.

Assurance that another licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment and who has demonstrated braille competency, will oversee this individual's completion of Learning Media Assessments and development of the state-required Learning Media Assessment Plan, which are designed to determine and document whether a student will be a braille or dual media learner.

Assurance that another licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment and who has demonstrated braille competency will oversee the individual's instruction to a student(s) who is an identified braille or dual media learner.

If the candidate does not demonstrate braille competency by the end of the first semester of the second year of employment as a licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment, a citation of noncompliance will be issued to the administrative unit(s) of hire that will require a Corrective Action Plan.

The CDE Certificate of Braille Competency must be renewed one time following its initial issuance. The process for renewal involves the completion of CDE pre-approved braille production modules. Fifteen clock hours are required for the CDE Renewal Braille Certificate. These clock hours must be earned within the first five years following the date of the initial certificate. Up to four modules can be taken each subsequent year from the initial certificate, but a minimum of two modules must be reserved for the fifth year. A separate document, Braille Competency Renewal Testing Guidelines (http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/sd-vision_guidedocs) provides details on the renewal procedures.

What to Bring to the Proctored Testing Session and Standard References

Candidates should bring appropriately sized braille paper, a Perkins brailler in good-working condition, a braille eraser, and a pen or pencil to the proctored session for the CDE Braille Competency Test.

Candidates taking the CDE Braille Competency Test will be provided with access to a set of standard references during the testing session. The materials are in print and can be accessed through the use of a reader. The intent is to create a testing environment that reflects the real-life scenario that a braille-competent professional may still need to look up a rule or braille code example from time to time. No additional reference materials may be brought into the testing session.

The following resources will be provided to the test candidate for the duration of the testing session:

a) Aroga Unified English Braille Chart

b) Ashcroft's Programmed Instruction: UEB

c) Burns Braille Guide: A Quick Reference to UEB (2nd Edition)

d) Instructional Manual UEB Edition

e) The Braille Enthusiast's Dictionary: Unified English Braille Edition

f) The Rules of Unified English Braille (2024, 3rd edition)

Frequency of Testing

The CDE Braille Competency Test is offered throughout the calendar year with the exceptions of holidays and Sundays. On certain occasions, the test can be scheduled on a Saturday with an available proctor. The following scenarios are offered to address a number of situations that may occur with a candidate. It is expected that the first two scenarios are the most common.

Scenario One: If a candidate passes both the multiple choice and the braille passage sections of the CDE Braille Competency Test during the first proctored session, an initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency will be awarded. This certificate will be valid for five years from the date of issue.

Initial Test Result	Retake Requirement	Outcome
Pass the Multiple-Choice Section and the Braille Passage Section	No retake needed in this scenario	Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency awarded

Scenario Two: If the candidate passes only one section of the CDE Braille Competency Test, the candidate will be offered one additional opportunity to retake the failed section within two calendar months of the date the results are issued. If the candidate passes the retake section, an initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency will be awarded

Initial Test Result	Retake Requirement	Outcome
Pass the Multiple-Choice Section; fail the Braille Passage section	Retake and pass the Braille Passage Section within two calendar months	Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency awarded

Initial Test Result	Retake Requirement	Outcome
Pass the Braille Passage Section; fail the Multiple-Choice section	Retake and pass the Multiple-Choice Section within two calendar months	Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency awarded

Scenario Three: If both sections are not passed during the full administration of the first test or the retake section is failed, the candidate will not earn an initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency. In these situations, the candidate cannot retake the full CDE Braille Competency Test for two calendar months and will be advised to pursue further study and/or a braille mentor.

Initial Test Result	Retake Requirement	Outcome
Fail the Multiple-Choice Section and fail the Braille Passage sections.	No retake eligibility under this scenario	No award of the Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency.
Pass the Multiple-Choice Section; fail the Braille Passage section.	Retake and fail the Braille Passage Section within two calendar months	No award of the Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency.
Pass the Braille Passage Section; fail the Multiple-Choice section.	Retake and fail the Multiple-Choice Section within two calendar months	No award of the Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency.

Scenario Four: In the event that the candidate must retake the full Braille Competency Test a second time, the results will be a passed or failed attempt.

Second Test Result	Retake Requirement	Outcome
Pass the Multiple-Choice Section and pass the Braille Passage Section	No retake needed in this scenario	Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency awarded
Pass the Multiple-Choice Section; fail the Braille Passage section	Retake and pass the Braille Passage Section within two calendar months	Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency awarded
Pass the Braille Passage Section; fail the Multiple-Choice section	Retake and pass the Multiple-Choice Section within two calendar months	Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency awarded

If the second attempt at the CDE Braille Competency is passed, the candidate will earn the initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency. This certificate will be valid for five years from the date of issue.

OR

Second Test Result	Retake Requirement	Outcome
Fail both the Multiple-Choice and the Braille Passage sections	No retake eligibility under this scenario	No award of the Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency
Pass the Multiple-Choice Section; fail the Braille Passage section.	Retake and fail the Braille Passage Section within two calendar months	No award of the Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency.
Pass the Braille Passage Section; fail the Multiple-Choice section.	Retake and fail the Multiple-Choice Section within two calendar months	No award of the Initial CDE Certificate of Braille Competency.

If the second retake of the full CDE Braille Competency Test is not passed, the candidate will be required to pursue a course of study in Unified English (Literary) Braille (e.g., a braille refresher course) and/or a braille mentor before they can retake the braille test on a third occasion. A braille mentor is likely to be a colleague who has demonstrated braille competency and is in the administrative unit or a near-by administrative unit or might be a CDE-approved proctor who also serves in a mentor capacity. It is suggested that the course of study be supported by such a mentor to achieve full benefit. A course of study might be an online UEB course

In the event that a third round of braille testing does not result in a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency, the cycle will continue with a second wait period of three months. The candidate will not be allowed to take the CDE Braille Competency Test again without evidence of a course of study and the use of a mentor.

The Special Education Director of the employed licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment will be apprised of the candidate's status on demonstrating braille competency and options for mentor support. Please refer back to the section on Expected Timelines for Earning a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency for assurance requirements and noncompliance citation practices when a candidate is delayed significantly with the demonstration of braille competency.

Renewal Requirements

Teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment who continue to work in Colorado administrative units in this role must earn a CDE Renewal Certificate of Braille Competency within five years of the date of their initial CDE Braille Certificate of Braille Competency Certificate. This is a one-time requirement. More information can be found at https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/sd-vision_guidedocs

For Further Information

For more information about the requirements for demonstration of braille competency in Colorado and/or the CDE Braille Competency Test, please contact Dr. Anthony at the (303) 303 503 4647 or Anthony_t@cde.state.co.us