
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Benjamin Allen, Chair

2017 - 2018 Regular

Bill No: AB 3223 **Hearing Date:** June 13, 2018
Author: Grayson
Version: May 16, 2018
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** No
Consultant: Jennifer Chase

Subject: Special education: visually impaired pupils: braille: Unified English Braille.

SUMMARY

This bill changes the definition of Braille utilized in the Individual Education Program (IEP) for Visually Impaired Pupils from Standard English, American Edition to Unified English Braille.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Defines "braille" to mean the system of reading and writing through touch commonly known as "Standard English Braille, American Edition." (Education Code (EC) § 56350)
- 2) Requires local educational agencies (LEAs) to provide braille instruction for pupils who have a need for braille as a reading medium. (EC § 56351)
- 3) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to form an advisory task force to develop standards for the mastery of the braille code as a child progresses through kindergarten to grade 12, inclusive. (EC § 56351.7)
- 4) Requires LEAs and Special Education Local Plan Areas to provide pupils with opportunities for instruction to master the braille reading and mathematics standards. (EC § 56351.9)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Changes the definition of Braille used in the IEP from Standard English, American Edition to Unified English Braille, which updates the education code to the current Braille code utilized by California Department of Education and across the United States.
- 2) Specifies that nothing in this act shall be construed to prohibit the use of Nemeth Code for Mathematics and Science Notation, the Braille Music Code or International Phonetic Alphabet Braille Code.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) **Need for the bill.** According to the author, “On November 2, 2012, the United States members of the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) voted to adopt Unified English Braille (UEB) to replace English Braille American Edition (EBAE) in the U.S. and established January 4, 2016, as the date of implementation. As a result, UEB, a revised code and set of rules for teaching and reading braille for students who are blind, became the official literary code in the U.S. While UEB is not regulated by law, all transcribing agencies were authorized to begin providing braille in the new code across the United States in January 2016. While the California Department of Education has begun transitioning to the UEB standard, the state’s Education Code still references the outdated EBAE standard.”
- 2) **Use of Braille:** Braille is a system of raised dots, which is the primary literacy medium for people who are blind or have severe low vision. Braille was invented in 1824 by Louis Braille and is not a language, but an independent writing code which allows many languages to be written and read. Braille symbols are formed by one to six raised dots which appear within cells, which can produce sixty-four combinations. The California Department of Education (CDE) reports that as of December, 2016, there were 3,565 visually impaired students in California aged 0-22 years, representing about 0.5 percent of all students with disabilities in California.
- 3) **Unified English Braille:** According to the International Council on English Braille, Unified English Braille (UEB) was developed to unify braille codes used among English-speaking countries and to unify braille symbols used in literary, mathematics and computing. UEB was ratified in 2004 and is used in several countries including Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In 2012, the United States members of the BANA voted to adopt UEB to replace the prior version of Braille.
- 4) **CDE and UEB:** The Department of Education began a multi-year implementation plan in winter 2015 to transition Braille curriculum to UEB. The plan involved topics such as the training of teachers and transcribers, transcription of materials, and the updating of assessments. New curriculum was provided for students in UEB beginning in January 2016.

SUPPORT

California Council of the Blind
California School Board Association
Disability Rights California

OPPOSITION

None received

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