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Celebrating Families By Linda Kraft, NDVS/SB

North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind has always felt a commitment to supporting families as they raise their children with visual impairments. One very important source of support offered is through the Family Team, made up of parents, school staff, and other agencies who wish to facilitate opportunities for families to meet, learn and most importantly, share with one another. This year's event, "Celebrating Families" was held on February 22-23, 2008, in Jamestown, ND.



The kick-off activity was an informal social and swimming on Friday evening offering parents, children, and presenters an opportunity to get acquainted. Saturday was jam packed with hands on learning opportunities for parents in the expanded core areas of Orientation and Mobility, technology, and daily living skills. Donene Feist, Executive Director of Family Voices of North Dakota, provided timely information to families on



the adjustment process when parenting a child with a visual impairment. Carmen Grove Suminski, Superintendent of ND Vision Services/School for the Blind, greeted attendees on behalf of the school. Parents were also given an opportunity to learn about two member organizations (The National Federation of



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Celebrating Families Continued . . .



the Blind and ND Association of the Blind) that offer support to individuals having a visual impairment. Kara and Cory MacIver shared information about transition, following their daughter Kaylyn's transition from Infant Development services to preschool.

While parents were busy learning and networking with other parents, the children had the opportunity to interact with their peers. They participated in a host of activities from arts and crafts, parachute play, Olympic style games and bowling. Thanks to the assistance of students from Jamestown High School, Jamestown College, Valley City

State University and Park River High School.

Special thanks go out to all that made this weekend a success. Those who provided financial support included ND School for the Blind Foundation, ND Deaf/Blind Project, Montana Dakota Utilities, Northern Plains Electric Cooperative, Lake Metigoshe Lions, Jamestown Lions, and Wal-Mart of Jamestown. Presenters included Ken Dockter, Katrina, Wendel, Mary Verlinde, Donene Feist, Candy Lein, Janice Sowokinos, Barb Delohery, Maria Vasquesz, Zelda Gebhard, Cory and Kara MacIver, and the day's facilitator, Lori Mattick. Family Team Members for the 2007-2008 school year were Dianne Giessinger, Mary Verlinde, Katrina Wendel, Linda Kraft, Sherri Nelson, and parent representatives Laura Roberts and Lori Mattick.

Anyone interested in more information regarding the Family Team please contact Linda Kraft at lkraft@nd.gov.

What is The Children With Medically Fragile Needs Program?

The North Dakota Department of Human Services, Medical Services Division is now accepting applications for the Children with Medically Fragile Needs Program which started in April, 2008. This waiver is designed to assist qualifying medically fragile children between the ages of 3-18 years old. The child needs to be living at home, be Medicaid eligible, be able to meet Level of Care criteria for nursing home, and receive a score of 40 or above on Level of Need. Parents must also be willing to Self Direct their child's care. These waiver services are in addition to those covered in the Medicaid State plan. To apply, parents can contact Katherine Barchenger, Program Manager at: PHONE: 701-328-3701, FAX: 701-328-4875, or EMAIL: kbarchenger@nd.gov

Tax Credit Site is Live

The Better Hearing Institute (BHI), Washington, DC, has been working on a dedicated web site to encourage people to contact their representatives and senators in support of the Hearing Aid Tax Credit (HR 2329/S 1410). Unveiled during Better Hearing and Speech month in May, the site is live and offers a quick and easy way for the hearing health community and families to express its support for the tax credit. Featuring a simple zip code search function, draft letters, and personalization suggestions, the site provides a voice for the 32 million Americans with hearing loss. Visit it at: www.hearingaidtaxcredit.org

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION BY KARA MACIVER, PARENT

After three wonderful years in the Early Intervention program, we were a little nervous about transitioning into the school system. Our family made the move to Minot in August and Kaylyn began preschool at McKinley school later that month. Kaylyn's preschool class consisted of seven students, some full-time and some part-time children. Kaylyn attended preschool every morning from 8:30-11:00 AM. Transportation was provided from the school district to school and to daycare when her school day ended. Kaylyn's preschool IEP team was a wonderful, supportive group of teachers. Kaylyn's classroom teacher, classroom aide, hearing specialist, vision specialist, and speech pathologist were all very active in Kaylyn's educational year. Our team met on several different occasions to learn about making the most of Kaylyn's educational experience. Kaylyn's hearing specialist led the group in a sign language session in which we were all given binders with the signs Kaylyn would be learning at school and to teach all members of the team the basic signs Kaylyn would be using. Kaylyn's vision specialist led a session in which we all participated in a vision stimulation and tried to complete everyday tasks. These two sessions really helped all members of her educational team become more aware of Kaylyn hearing and visual needs.

Kaylyn's speech and language growth over the nine months she attended preschool was absolutely phenomenal. Kaylyn began the school year eager to learn but really limited in her vocabulary. She would become very frustrated when we could not understand what she needed. After the first week of school, Kaylyn came home and pointed in a book, "Mommy, look! It's a purple circle!" It brought tears to my eyes. We had talked about colors and shapes at home, but she was never able to tell me what color or shape something was. At the end of her first year of school, Kaylyn is counting to 30, singing nursery rhymes, recognizing ABC's, and talking like crazy. We still notice difficulty with sounds, lots of missing beginning sounds in words, however, the growth that we have seen is more than we could have ever hoped for. She is so eager to learn and try to say new words. Her understanding of requests and everyday conversation is really coming along too!

One of the learning tools we used was a communication board. Kaylyn carried a binder in her bag to school every day. The binder was labeled in sections: school, daycare, and home. We used picture cards to label the important events in Kaylyn's day. Kaylyn would take the book and communicate with her teachers, daycare provider, and mom about the day. She also "wrote" a sentence about what happened during the day. The first thing she did in the morning at school was take her binder to her teacher and tell her about the day. It was also the first thing she did after walking thru the door at home at the end of the day. She was able to tell us what she ate, played, etc. throughout the day. It was an amazing learning tool. We felt it was a HUGE success! We also had a notebook that went back and forth from home to school with questions, comments, concerns, etc.

Kaylyn's week consisted of two visits from the hearing specialist, two visits from the vision specialist, two large group language sessions with the speech/language teacher, and two small group sessions with the speech/language specialist. Her hearing specialist and vision specialist tried to make one visit each week be a part of the classroom activity and one visit more individualized. The team also met as needed for collaboration on weekly learning activities.

As a mother, I am so proud of my daughter and all she has overcome. She has been truly blessed with wonderful family, educators, and friends. I am so thankful for all the professionals we have been lucky enough to work with. Our transition was successful thanks to all their hard work and Kaylyn's desire to learn!

The ND Early Childhood Outcomes Process

By Nancy Skorheim, DPI Regional Representative

The NDDPI Office of Special Education is responsible for assuring that young children with disabilities receive high-quality services and supports. To work toward achieving this goal, the NDDPI developed the *ND Early Childhood Outcomes (ND ECO) Process*. The *ND ECO Process* was developed through the collaborative efforts of local, state, and national professionals in the area of Early Childhood Special Education. On **July 1, 2008**, the *ND ECO Process* will be implemented statewide in ND. Individuals responsible for the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for preschool children with disabilities will be involved in the implementation of the *ND ECO Process*.

Federal and State Requirements

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEA) includes a heightened emphasis on accountability, focusing on improving educational results for children with disabilities. As required by IDEA 2004, the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) directed states to develop a six year State Performance Plan (SPP) and to submit Annual Performance Reports (APRs) relating to the Indicators specified for the SPP. Within the current SPP there are 20 Indicators. Each Indicator contains information such as: details of baseline data, measurable and rigorous annual targets, and improvement activities. Indicator 7 of the SPP focuses on the process to measure skills of preschool children with IEPs.

Indicator 7: Percent of preschool children with IEPs who demonstrate improved:

- A. Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships);
- B. Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy); and
- C. Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

The NDDPI Office of Special Education and preschool programs that serve preschool children with disabilities are required to report data on Indicator 7 each year as part of the APR. The US Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs uses each state's data to determine how well local school district programs are making a positive difference for young children and their families.

A complete copy of the North Dakota State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Reports can be found on the ND Department of Public Instruction website at <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/>

The ND ECO Process

The *ND ECO Process* provides an entry score for every preschool child with an IEP when they begin receiving Early Childhood Special Education services and then an exit score when the child transitions out of or exits services. The entry and exit scores are gathered in three outcome areas: children have positive social-emotional skills; children acquire and use knowledge and skills; and children use appropriate behavior to meet their needs.

The *ND ECO Process* was developed through a collaborative effort between the NDDPI, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC), a workgroup of North Dakota Early Childhood Special Education professionals and input from professionals providing direct service in Early Childhood Special Education.

The ND ECO Pilot Project began May 15, 2006. Peace Garden Special Education Unit, Bismarck Special Education Unit, Emmons County Special Education Unit and Lake Region Special Education Unit participated in the initial pilot project. From May 2006 through June 2007, members from each of the initial pilot project

The ND Early Childhood Outcomes Process Continued . . .

units gathered valuable information relating to the determination of appropriate Anchor Tools, the design of the ND Child Outcomes Summary Form, and the *ND ECO Process*.

On July 1, 2007, three additional special education units joined the ND ECO Pilot Project as the "Phase I" sites. These units included: Souris Valley Special Education Unit, Dickinson Special Education Unit and Morton Sioux Special Education Unit. These units joined the initial pilot project units in finalizing the initial list of the ND ECO Process Anchor Tools and in the fine-tuning of the ND ECO Process forms and procedures. Piloting the *ND ECO Process* has allowed ND to develop forms and procedures that will assure success when it is implemented statewide on **July 1, 2008**.

Training Opportunities

During the winter and spring 2008, the NDDPI offered several training opportunities for professionals who will be responsible for implementation of the ND ECO Process. These opportunities provided:

1. An overview of the *ND Early Childhood Outcomes Process Guide* which was presented through the ND Interactive Video Network (IVN) and NDDPI website Power Point presentations;
2. Face-to-face trainings or conference call format trainings on the implementation of the ND Child Outcomes Summary Form, and
3. A statewide conference focusing on the key components in the implementation of a successful outcomes system.

The NDDPI looks forward to continuing to provide guidance to facilitate statewide implementation of the *ND ECO Process* by **July 1, 2008**. The successful implementation of this process will assist in assuring that young children with disabilities receive high-quality services and supports.

100 Years of Excellence

By Carmen Grove Suminski, NDVS/SB Superintendent

2008 has truly been an exciting year and truly a milestone for NDVS/SB as we have celebrated "100 Years of Excellence." The Dakota AER/Vision Conference was held May 7-9, 2008, at the Holiday Inn. Eighty persons attended the conference representing North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Manitoba. We were proud to host Jim Gandorf, Executive Director of the International Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), Alexandria, Virginia; Kevin O'Connor, past president of NAPVI (National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments, Inc.), Long Grove, Illinois; and Sandi Baker, American Printing House for the Blind, Inc., Louisville, Kentucky. Additional presenters included Vicki Klemme, South Dakota Services for the Blind, Sioux Falls; Ellen Kaiser, Altru's Diabetes Center, Grand Forks; Diane Mihulka, teacher/vocational specialist, NDVS/SB; Jan Haas, Regional Administrator and Margo Lentz, Vision Rehabilitation Specialist with Rehabilitation Consulting and Services, Grand Forks; and Dr. Joseph Miller, University of North Dakota. A panel discussing "Keys" to Excellence included Ken Dockter, teacher/Orientation and Mobility Specialist, NDVS/SB; Helen Baumgartner, Program Administrator with Rehabilitation Consulting and Services, Bismarck; Candy Lien, teacher, NDVS/SB, Fargo; Virginia, Miller, teacher, Dell Rapids, South Dakota; and Dawn Brush, Rehabilitation Teacher with South Dakota Services for the Blind, Aberdeen.

Several vision related entities exhibited the most current technology and services. A true highlight of the conference was the Centennial Banquet held on Wednesday evening with 114 attendees.

Grant Activity By **Sherri Nelson, Project Coordinator**

The ND Deaf-Blind Project has been funded through the Department of Public Instruction by a federal grant with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education. The grant cycle ends in September, 2008, so a new grant proposal was submitted in April of this year, requesting approval for the Deaf-Blind program for the next five years. Information was gathered for this proposal from Needs Surveys to all families, service providers, school personnel, technical assistants, and from private agencies, and input from the staff and Advisory Board stakeholders.

The goals that were established for the North Dakota Dual Sensory Project (please note the name change) for the next 5 years include: 1) The ND Dual Sensory Project will facilitate collaborative partnerships between family members of children who are Deaf-Blind, early interventionists, special and regular educators, related services personnel, LEAs, state and private agencies to develop and implement supports that improve children's outcomes and educational achievement, 2) The ND Dual Sensory Project will provide information and Technical Assistance, including distance learning activities and ongoing professional development opportunities in combination with on-site coaching, to families of children who are Deaf-Blind, early interventionists, special and regular educators, and related service personnel working with children who are Deaf-Blind, 3) Communicate and collaborate with the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) and other OSEP-funded projects that are sources of expertise on Deaf-Blindness, 4) Work with the families, LEAs, state and private agencies, and other statewide agencies to develop a shared understanding among stakeholder groups of how to support children who are Deaf-Blind within local systems and communities, 5) Employ the system of identification for children who are Deaf-Blind, 6) Communicate state-wide on an ongoing basis through the use of multi-media including the project website, email, TA meetings and events, Advisory Boards, workshops, webinars, as a way to support and evaluate effective collaboration among key stakeholders throughout the state.

There were not significant changes from the last grant, but we added more activities to expand our services throughout the state in order to improve outcomes for children who are Deaf-Blind and their families.

We hope to hear in August of the approval of our proposal. I am optimistic that the North Dakota Dual Sensory Project will be funded for the next five years!

In May, we submitted our annual Census to Washington DC. There were 36 children, age birth to age 21, on the ND Census for children with hearing and vision losses. This number has been relatively stable over the last ten years. I do believe there are more children throughout the state with mild hearing loss and low vision that are not identified. It is my goal to continue promoting the early identification of both hearing and vision impairments through our Dual Sensory Project.

D-B Advisory

Board Members

- Sherri Nelson**
Deaf-Blind Coordinator
- Joni Andre**
Teacher
- Jody Neva**
Parent
- Lisle Kauffman**
Director of Education of the Deaf
- Jodi Appelt**
Education of the Deaf
- Carmen Grove Suminski**
ND Vision Services Supt
- Dennis J. Fogelson**
ND School f/t Deaf Supt
- Karalee MacIver**
Parent
- Carol Lybeck**
NDSD PIP/Outreach Coordinator
- Connie Hovendick**
Lake Region Special Ed
- Vicky Whitcomb**
SE KIDS Program
- Nancy Lundon**
Vocational Rehabilitation
- Michael Marum**
Developmental Disabilities
- Pamilla Schauer**
Anne Carlson Center
- Nancy Skorheim**
ND Public Instruction
- Kari Chiasson**
UND Vision Training Program
- Melissa Elspenger**
NDSD nurse
- Lanna Slaby**
Vision Outreach
- Tami Iszler**
Deaf Outreach
- Ramona Gunderson**
NE KIDS Program
- Dr. Craig Bratvold**
Optometrist
- Linda Ehlers**
Deaf Outreach
- Nicole Witikko**
Deaf Outreach

ND DPI Secondary Transition Steering Council

By Gerry Teevens, ND DPI/Office of Special Education Secondary Transition Coordinator

What is it? The Transition Steering Council serves as an advisory body to the ND DPI/ Special Education Secondary Transition Coordinator. The MISSION of the State Transition Steering Council) is *to work towards building, supporting, and sustaining community partnerships and systems that promote and improve the scope, opportunity, and quality for youth with disabilities to adequately prepare for life and career beyond high school with the individualized supports identified and in place for graduation/exit.*

Who is the council? Membership on the council consists of various stakeholders in the secondary transition process. Included in the membership is representation from the following state and local level agencies and individuals: Higher Education, Vocational Education, Special Education, North Dakota Education Association, Tribal College, Children's Special Health Services, Dept. of Career & Technical Education, Protection & Advocacy, Vocational Rehabilitation, ND Deaf-Blind Services Project, Developmental Disabilities, Youth Correctional Center, Job Services, Parents, Students and Young Adults, Family advocacy agencies, Special education Directors, Teachers, and Independent Living Services.

What drives the mission and activities of the council? The Federally required State Performance Plan drives the mission and the strategic plan of the council. The purpose of the State Performance Plan (SPP) is to plan for the **improvement of outcomes for children and youth with disabilities**. Each year the state must show and report how the state is progressing toward the targets established in the State Performance Plan. The Steering Council provides advisement and steers some of the improvement activities identified in the SPP specific to secondary transition.

What are some of the Strategic Plan activities the council is presently addressing?

1) *Development of a North Dakota Youth leadership Network.* A workgroup was formed to explore youth leadership activities that have been or are occurring throughout our state. The workgroup is having discussions to potentially establish a Community of Practice on Youth Leadership. The role of this Community of Practice will be to promote a "meaningful youth role" through the establishment of a Youth Leadership Council or Network.

The Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living is taking the lead to bring a Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) to North Dakota. The Council Workgroup is collaborating and partnering with Freedom to assist with making this happen. The YLF is a unique career and leadership training program to improve employment and independent living outcomes for youth with disabilities transitioning from high school. A yearlong plan is currently being developed to make this happen during the summer of 2009. It is anticipated that the youth trained during the YLF will be given opportunities to serve as mentors to other youth with disabilities and as youth advisors to agencies throughout the state.

2) *A collaboratively planned DPI & VR 2008 Interagency Secondary Transition conference: "Discover the Magic of Teamwork".* This conference will be held in Minot at the Grand International Inn on October 28, 29, & 30, 2008. A pre-conference "Student Directed Transition Planning" will prelude the conference at 8:30 am on the 28th. The conference will officially begin at 2:45 on the 28th concluding at noon on the 30th.

3) *Support of the "Community of Practice" strategy at the state level and throughout the eight regional Transition Committees.* The "Community of Practice" is a strategy used to address

ND DPI Secondary Transition Steering Council Continued . . .

persistent problems, reach desired goals or outcomes, and build critical relationships. This is done by a group of people that share common interests and agree to interact regularly to improve a practice. ND is one of the eleven states that belong to the National Community of Practice (CoP) on Secondary Transition. Recently four Steering council members (ND state team) attended the annual multi-state meeting of the National CoP on Secondary Transition in Charlotte, NC. After a report by these four individuals, the Council agreed to invite Joann Cashman, Director of the IDEA Partnership to attend the next Steering council Meeting for further discussion on this strategy as a way to improve practice.

For more information on the Secondary Transition Steering council please contact Gerry Teevens, NDDPI 701-328-2277.

NDSB Update By Dennis J. Fogelson, NDSB Superintendent

In the last legislative session, the following bill was passed as follows:

2013 – 14 – To study the provision of services to children and adults who are deaf or hearing-impaired, including: the role of the North Dakota School for the Deaf in the provision of educational and rehabilitative services, the short-term and the long term viability of exiting state facilities, and alternative approaches that might enhance the scope and breadth of service availability; the feasibility of combining the administration and delivery of services of the School for the Deaf with other school districts, educational associations governed by joint powers agreements, special education units, and North Dakota Vision Services – School for the Blind; and examination of alternative uses for the buildings on the School for the Deaf campus beyond the scope of the school's present mission (Higher Education Committee)

On May 21, 2008, the Legislative Council/Higher Education Committee spent the day on the Campus of the North Dakota School for the Deaf. The Committee broke into three groups during the AM session and tour guides were available to guide each group. Legislators visited classrooms, meeting teachers, students and other staff members and a complete tour of campus facilities was given. The groups were given the opportunity to become familiar with all of the programs that NDSB provides to not only students at NDSB but to citizens of North Dakota through NDSB's Outreach Programs.

Following the noon luncheon, NDSB staff members provided the Committee with information regarding NDSB. Local citizens, parents, and patrons were given the opportunity to provide testimony.

The Legislative Council/Higher Education Committee will meet again in August and NDSB officials will be providing additional information requested at that time.

The ultimate goal of this Committee will be to develop a list of recommendations and any bill drafts necessary to implement the recommendations. The Committee is charged to present a final report that will be submitted to the full Legislative Council.

A Celebration of the Life of Helen Keller was held on Friday, June 27, 2008, at the State Capitol in Bismarck. Featured speakers included First Lady Mikey L. Hoeven, Dr. Wayne Sanstead and Robert Rutten from the Department of Public Instruction, and Dr. Marjorie Kaiser, Superintendent of the South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Reading in Braille of the Proclamation of the Governor was performed by Candace Rivinius, Bismarck. Dr. Kaiser gave a wonderful presentation on the Life of Helen Keller.

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt within the heart."

~Helen Keller~

ABOUT TOUCH

PART II

Derived from: Eliot, L. (1999) What's going on in there? How the brain and mind develop in the first five years of life. Bantam Books

"A human being can spend his life blind and deaf and completely lacking the sense of smell and taste, but he cannot survive at all without the functions performed by the skin." Montagu gives the example of Helen Keller, Deaf-Blind from infancy, "whose mind was literally created through the stimulation of her skin." (See Montagu, 1986)

Montagu (1986) as well as Eliot (1999) express concern that the Western world has produced a new "race of untouchables". Montagu says that we rely more on our distance senses (vision and hearing) to communicate, and this appears to have placed a taboo on taste, smell, and touch. Eliot states that perhaps it is time for us to rethink the "general mandate against social touch by teachers and child-care providers". To professionals working with children who NEED to use their sense of touch – and to be touched in order to communicate and be taught – this is significant.

Barbara Miles and many others in the field of Deaf-Blindness point out that we not only need to teach and communicate via touch, but that we should change the way we manipulate children's hands: <http://www.dblink.org/pdf/hands.pdf>

- ☞ Just as we would not poke or try to manipulate a child's eyes, we should not do this with a child's hands either.
- ☞ The reason – Children who are Deaf-Blind not only use their hands (a) as tools (as we do), (b) as sense organs (to fill in information they cannot get through vision and hearing), BUT (c) their hands are also their VOICES – their primary means for expression.
- ☞ How children use their hands and their sense of touch affects the development of their brains. Miles (quoting Lane, 1997), points out that Braille readers and string players "give

evidence of increased cortical representation of the fingers".

- ☞ Miles and many professionals in the field of Deaf-Blindness recommend the use of a technique called "Hand-UNDER-Hand" – especially when helping children explore, initiate topics or express feelings.

Hand-UNDER-Hand

This technique:

- ☞ Initially provides "joint attention – essential for good communication to occur
- ☞ Is not as intrusive as the more commonly used Hand-OVER-Hand
- ☞ Allows the child's brain to "read" only what is under the child's hand: with Hand-OVER-Hand, both surfaces of a child's hand receive and send different messages to the brain
- ☞ Allows the child a greater level of control
- ☞ Is respectful and gentle
- ☞ Gives a child the TIME to think
- ☞ Encourages a child to touch – and not draw back – having a shared experience helps!
- ☞ Helps to better teach a child how something is to be manipulated or managed
- ☞ Encourages a child to want to "see" more

Eliot, L (1999) What's going on in there? How the brain and mind develop in the first five years of life. Bantam Books

Miles, B. (Rev. ed. 2003) Talking the Language of the Hands to the Hands. DB Link fact-sheet.

Montagu, A. (1986, 3rd ed.). Touching: The human significance of the skin. Harper and Rowe



NDVS/SB Brailist Attends National Braille Association Professional Development Conference By Crystal Roy

As always, the NBA Professional Development Conference, held in April in Dallas, was full of useful information for braille transcribers, as well as providing the opportunity for transcribers to network and "pick each others' brains".

The afternoon and morning before the conference started were used to offer training sessions in handling electronic NIMAS files for braille production. Though the Duxbury add-on for this purpose is still in development, existing features were demonstrated and transcribers at the training were invited to download the software and provide input to its further development.

With twenty-three sessions on a wide variety of braille-related subjects available throughout the 2-1/2 day conference, it's often a challenge to decide which sessions to attend. Because the Braille Access Center at NDVS/SB recently began to offer braille transcription of elementary and middle-school music, a session on the music braille code proved especially useful. A handy "cheat sheet" outlining basic requirements for various music formats was worth the price of admission in and of itself.

A session on transcribing Language Arts materials highlighted the intricacies encountered in working with such materials. The session gave transcribers a chance to discuss the rationales behind various approaches to common challenges they face with language arts.

Equally interesting were a session detailing recent changes made by the Braille Authority of North American (BANA) in the braille code ... gotta be sure it's all done right! ... and a session demonstrating "Partner Products" that can be used in conjunction with the Duxbury Braille Translation software.

Between sessions, the vendor displays offered everything from high-end braille embossers that do everything but cook breakfast to braille products offered by national organizations to jewelry that lets you "say it in braille."

The attendance of the Braille Access Center brailist was jointly sponsored by the Deaf-Blind Project and NDVS/SB.



*"Never bend your head. Hold it high. Look the world straight in the eye."
~Helen Keller~*



ND Deaf-Blind Project Technical Assistance Team

ND School for the Deaf

- Carol Lybeck => Devils Lake
- Linda Ehlers => Fargo
- Position Open => Grand Forks
- Tami Iszler => Bismarck
- Nicole Wittiko => Minot



ND Vision Services

School for the Blind

- Dianne Giessinger => Minot
- Linda Kraft => Fargo
- Lanna Slaby => Jamestown
- Position Open => Devils Lake
- Mary Verlinde => Bismarck
- Katrina Wendel => Grand Forks
- Ken Dockter => Grand Forks
- Paul Olson => Grand Forks
- Pat Hill => Grand Forks
- Deb Johnsen => Grand Forks
- Candy Lien => Grand Forks
- Diane Mihulka => Grand Forks
- Tracy Wicken => Grand Forks



Technical assistance request forms are located at www.nd.gov/deafblind/ or call 1-877-630-6214

Update on Availability of Braille Textbooks

by Crystal Roy, Braillist, NDVS/SB

As braille-reading students, their parents, and the professionals who work with them know all too well ... getting textbooks in braille has often been a daunting process. Historically, in spite of the best efforts of Resource Center staffs, braille readers often got their school books well into the semester ... or later ... or not at all.

A few years ago, a national consortium called ATIC (Accessible Textbook Initiative and Collaboration Project) improved the picture considerably. A repository was set up at APH (the American Printing House for the Blind), containing many textbooks in a variety of electronic formats. Braille transcribers submitted textbooks that they had brailled, so they'd be available to more students; and many publishers voluntarily submitted their electronic publisher's files, which facilitated the process of converting a textbook to braille. Although this arrangement was a definite improvement, not all textbooks were available through the repository, and the format of a particular book might or might not work for the requesting school district.

With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, another huge step was taken to make textbooks available to braille readers. This act established NIMAC (the National Instructional Materials Access Center) and mandated that textbook publishers make standardized electronic files available to the Center when requested by purchasing school districts. NIMAC does **not** produce braille textbooks, but serves as a distribution point for the standardized electronic files.

The enthusiasm generated in the vision field as a result of the creation of NIMAC is understandable ... we all look forward to the day when braille-reading students have their books on the first day of school, just like everyone else! Unfortunately the level of enthusiasm has also resulted in a number of common misunderstandings, so to clear up some of them, here are ...

The Facts, Just the Facts

- * Electronic files for textbooks are not submitted automatically to NIMAC; the transfer of files to NIMAC must be requested by a purchasing school district.
- * Only print materials are covered.
- * Plays, music scores or lyrics, and computer programs are excluded.
- * Only instructional materials published after July 1, 2005, are covered.
- * Only elementary and secondary materials are covered, not college-level texts.
- * NIMAS, the standardized format in which textbooks must be submitted to NIMAC, is a work in progress; at present it is weak in handling common textbook elements such as tables, sidebars, glossaries. Currently NIMAS cannot handle math at all, although math formats are in development; it is estimated that it will be 18-24 months before a NIMAS math standard is formally adopted. Work is continuing to further develop NIMAS so it will handle all textbook features.
- * The ability of braille translation software to handle NIMAS files is in its infancy. The Braille 2000 program has beta-tested an update that can handle NIMAS files, and Duxbury is developing an add-on that is currently available only to NIMAS training attendees.
- * Training for braille transcribers on working with NIMAS files was available for the first time in late 2007. Training sessions using both Braille 2000 and the Duxbury add-on were held at the National Braille Association Professional Development Conference in Dallas in April and will continue to be offered at braille-related conferences around the country. Most transcribers familiar with NIMAS at this point in time work with organizations that have been involved in the development of NIMAS.

Update on Availability of Braille Textbooks Continued . . .

- * Although the production of braille textbooks will be speeded up, the conversion from a NIMAS electronic file to a braille or large print textbook will **never** be completely automated; the process will require the involvement of a trained braille transcriber and may take a considerable amount of time, depending on the length and complexity of the textbook.

How Does a School District Obtain Braille Versions of The Textbooks They Use?

- * When the school district orders their print copies of a textbook, they must specify in their contract that they want an electronic file submitted to NIMAC; the submission of files to NIMAC does **not** happen automatically.
- * Once a request is made to the publisher, the publisher must have their files converted to a standardized format call NIMAS (National Instructional Materials Access Standard). Some publishers are able to do this in-house, but many must contract with a third-party for this conversion; consequently it may be several weeks before NIMAC actually has the file.
- * Once NIMAC has the electronic file, it can be downloaded by authorized users. In North Dakota, North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind (NDVS/SB) has this authorization and can request a NIMAS file on behalf of a school district.
- * The school district must identify an accessible media producer to convert the electronic file to braille. A good resource for this is the American Printing House for the Blind (www.aph.org) Accessible Media Producers Database (click the AMP symbol at the bottom of APH's home page). (Because transcribing a textbook requires several weeks or more, the Braille Access Center at NDVS/SB, which has a staff of one, is unable to undertake transcribing textbooks.)

What's Happening at NIMAC

In May NIMAC reported that they have 7,133 NIMAS files (more than twice what they expected to have by that time) and are receiving 35-60 GB of files per week. Nearly all 50 states have contracted with NIMAC and over 60 publishers are registered and contributing files to the repository. Over 600 files have been downloaded for conversion to accessible formats.

The Present Picture

We have the great good fortune to be on the leading edge of significant developments in textbook accessibility! It's a time of great hope and excitement ... and justifiably so. It **is** the leading edge, however, and things are new and just being developed. Getting braille textbooks to our students in a timely way is not as easy today as it will be in another two or three years ... but we're on our way!

FAMILY CONNECT

Family Connect is a website created by the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI) to give parents of visually impaired children a place to support each other, share stories and concerns, and find resources on raising their children from birth to adulthood. There are sections on Community, A Parent's Voice Blog, Infants and Toddlers, Preschoolers, Grade Schoolers, Teenagers, After the Diagnosis, Education, Technology, and Multiple Disabilities. Please visit at <http://www.familyconnect.org/parentsitehome.asp>

ND Vision Services/School for the Blind (NDVS/SB)

Teachers Receive National Recognition

By Carmen Grove Suminski, NDVS/SB Superintendent

Dianne Giessinger, Minot, NDVS/SB Outreach Teacher, and Diane Mihulka, Grand Forks, NDVS/SB Vocational Teacher, are recipients of the awards from the Principals of all Schools for the Blind for their outstanding work with students who have visual impairment.

Letters of nomination were prepared by Carmen Grove Suminski, Superintendent of NDVS/SB, plus letters of support and a resume were submitted to the selection committee, which is comprised of principals of member schools of the Council of Schools for the Blind. Selection criteria are based on the person's experience and training, benefit to children and families, and contributions and service to the school and community.

Dianne has been employed by NDVS/SB since 1996 and has her Masters Degree in Rehabilitation of the Blind Teaching from the University of Arkansas and her Special Education with Vision Certification from the University of North Dakota. She is active in professional organizations currently serving as president of the Dakota Chapter of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Diane has been employed by NDVS/SB since 1978 and has her Masters Degree in Vocational Education and Special Education with Vision Certification from the University of North Dakota. She has been instrumental in the development of the vocational programming at NDVS/SB and has been a member of accreditation teams, a lecturer, and author.

These prestigious awards will be presented to Dianne Giessinger and Diane Mihulka in Louisville, Kentucky, at the Council of School for the Blind Banquet on October 1, 2008. "This will be a memorable event," states Carmen Grove Suminski. "Both are dedicated professionals, and it will be an honor to recognize them."

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ★ **NDVS/SB, All School Reunion**, Open House on Thursday, Sept 11, 2008 & Reunion Activities on Friday, Sept 12, 2008
- ★ **Closing The Gap Conference**, October 16-18, 2008, Minneapolis, MN. The three day conference rate for parents is \$285 with limited scholarships available. www.closingthegap.com
- ★ **Discover The Magic Through Teamwork**, October 28-30, 2008, Grand International Inn, Minot, ND 701-852-3161, A collaborative Training Conference presented by The Dept. of Public Instruction/ Office of Special Education/Secondary Transition & Vocational Rehabilitation
- ★ **Families Connecting Families, (NAPVI)**, July 17-19, 2009, Costa Mesa, CA
- ★ **Music Therapy In Motion**, Emily J. Wangen, MT-BC, Music Therapist-Board Certified is providing music therapy in the Fargo/ Moorhead area. Music Therapy is an allied health profession which uses music to improve, increase, and maintain development, cognition, social skills, and sensory integration. She will also be providing Berard's Auditory Integration Training, AIT. For more information on Music Therapy and AIT, contact Emily at butterfly_eb@yahoo.com, or by phone 218-791-0908.

"One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar." ~Helen Keller~

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☆ **OUR TEAM** ☆

☆ Our team is here to serve families ☆

☆ and professionals of individuals who ☆

☆ are Deaf-Blind, birth through age 21. ☆

☆ Please get in touch with us if you ☆

☆ have questions, or feel we could be ☆

☆ of assistance! ☆

☆ How to access our services: ☆

☆ **ND Deaf-Blind Services Project** ☆

☆ Sherri Nelson, Project Coordinator ☆

☆ 701-665-4401 or 877-630-6214 ☆

☆ **North Dakota School for the Deaf** ☆

☆ Outreach teachers 701-665-4400 or ☆

☆ 800-887-2980 ☆

☆ **ND Vision Services/** ☆

☆ **School for the Blind** ☆

☆ Outreach teachers 701-795-2700 or ☆

☆ 800-421-1181 ☆

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We are on the web!
www.nd.gov/deafblind/

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