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MINNESOTA STATE ACADEMY FOR THE BLIND
Braille Competency/Specialty Training

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind (MSAB) Braille Competency/Specialty Training policy at MSAB is to provide a fair, consistent and systematic process for teaching new employees about the disability of blindness and providing them with a knowledgeable understanding of braille so that they have appropriate knowledge to support the educational program, as well as providing continuing education to veteran staff about best practices and new developments within the field of Blindness.

2. NEED

Staff who are employed at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind are to be knowledgeable in braille and have a legal and professional obligation to be proficient in the use of braille in order to gain permanent status as an employee at MSAB. There are also special areas of training that staff needs in order to understand the disability of blindness, to be respectful of those with the disability and to have the expertise to provide the best education possible to blind/visually-impaired children who attend MSAB.

3. HISTORY

In 1985 the Minnesota Legislature passed statute language to address the need for braille skills for staff who work at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind. MS125A.67 Subd.5 Braille Skills. "A staff member at the Academy for the Blind must be knowledgeable in braille communication as appropriate for the staff member's job." While MSAB has provided informal workshops and in-service training, we now want to formalize the process and address the statute language through this policy. MS 125A.67 Subd. 6. Permanent employees must sign or know braille. "An employee hired after August 1, 1985 cannot get permanent status until the employee is proficient in sign language if employed at the Academy for the Deaf or knowledgeable in braille if employed at the Academy for the Blind."

4. BRAILLE COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

A. All classroom teachers must possess licensure in the area of blind/visually-impaired which presumes proficiency in the use of braille as a written code of communication. Exceptions to this must follow the Minnesota Board of Teaching guidelines until such licensure is obtained.

B. Other direct service staff members who either support braille reading/instruction or prepare materials in braille must demonstrate a basic knowledge of braille. (see appendix A)

Options to demonstrate braille competency include:

- 1) Successful completion of a college course in braille (intended to meet the braille requirement to become certified as a teacher of the blind/visually impaired)
- 2) Successful completion of the beginning braille course offered by the Hadley School for the Blind distance education program.
- 3) Demonstrate a passing score on the National Braille Competency Test offered by the National Library.
- 4) Successful completion of an introductory course in braille provided by the Minnesota State Academies within the first six months of employment.*

*Proficiency in braille under this provision will be measured by demonstrated knowledge: A certificate of achievement will be issued by the instructor.

- C. All related services licensed staff working in the academic environment must demonstrate braille competency by completing an introductory course in braille provided by the Minnesota State Academies within the first six months of employment.*

*Proficiency in braille under this provision will be measured by demonstrated knowledge: A certificate of achievement will be issued by the instructor.

5. SPECIALTY TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

A. New Employee Training

All new employees must be provided with 24 hours of specialty training to understand the disability of blindness and be able to provide the necessary expertise for the best education possible for blind/visually-impaired children who attend MSAB. The training sessions will include but are not limited to such topics as:

- Appropriate knowledge of braille (at least 12 hours of training should be utilized for this topic)
- Technology and assistive technology
- Orientation and Mobility
- Social skills protocol
- Daily living skills

B. Staff Development Refresher Sessions

Quarterly throughout the school year, all staff will be provided with refresher sessions (1-3 hours in length) to review best practices of working with blind/visually-impaired children and/or to learn about new developments within the field of Blindness.

Brad Harper
Minnesota State Academies

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BRAILLE COMPETENCY CHECKLIST

Name:

Job Classification:

Supervisor:

1. Describe the difference between uncontracted and contracted Braille and why contracted Braille is used.
2. Gain familiarity with the history of Braille and why it is such an invaluable contribution.
3. List four different Braille codes and describe literary and Nemeth codes.
4. Describe three Braille writing devices, citing advantages and disadvantages of each.
5. Demonstrate the ability to memorize Braille letters and numerals and read and write them without the aid of a visual prompt
6. Explain the value of reading Braille rather than using only an audio format.
7. Describe an efficient Braille reading technique.

The successful completion of the above areas meets the Braille proficiency requirement, which is a condition of employment at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind.

Date of Completion:

Employee Signature Date

Braille Instructor Date