



ROCKET READ UP

Issue #3, January 2026:

**Totally in Touch:
Celebrating Braille**



Rocket Fuel - a note from Superintendent James Michaels

Our quarterly theme focuses on the power of braille as a tool that transforms both education and employment opportunities. In the classroom, braille fosters independence and confidence, enabling students to master reading, writing, and complex mathematics. Beyond school, its impact extends into the professional world—whether for reading braille notes during a presentation, navigating office spaces by reading door signage, or using elevators with braille indicators. These practical applications illustrate that braille is more than a literacy system; it is a gateway to accessibility and inclusion, opening doors for individuals in the blind community to thrive in so many aspects of life.



2025 Braille Challenge contestants receive their awards from Ms. Burchett and Mr. Michaels at the closing ceremony.

In December ISBVI Elementary students met Rex at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis and enjoyed a day of hands-on learning and seasonal fun.



Countdown

- Jan. 8:** ISBVI hosts Wrestling meet
- Jan. 15:** Tech Time: Tools that Empower (p. 4)
- Jan. 23-25:** Wrestling/Cheer Conference, KY
- Jan. 27:** Winter Stay and Play (p. 4)
- Jan. 29-30 & Mar 19-20:** Leap into L.E.A.D.S. (p. 3)
- Jan. 31:** Indiana Regional Braille Challenge (p. 3)
- Feb. 11-13:** L.E.A.D.S. (p. 3)
- March 6-8:** Bowling Conference



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- P4:** Home team (resources & events for families)



Braille Matters: Building Fluency Every Day

Braille is one of several formats used at ISBVI, depending on students' eye conditions and learning styles. ISBVI inspires braille students on their learning journey by integrating and reinforcing skills throughout the school's curriculum and its physical environment. Here are some of the ways that braille learning is supported at ISBVI, and also a brief summary of the braille learning journey from the teachers' perspective. Thank you to Tara Mueller and Heather Holland for insights they shared as we celebrate Braille Literacy Month!

Integrating Braille Code Across the Curriculum

- **Math:** Students explore Nemeth symbols as they appear in the curriculum and use adaptive tools such as the Math Window, braille ruler, and braille clock.
- **Language Arts:** New contractions are introduced through phonics and spelling. Students write words in both contracted and uncontracted braille during assessments. Proper posture and tracking are emphasized before reading. Repeated readings and timed running records help students track progress—and they love graphing their words per minute!
- **Science & Social Studies:** Students interpret tactile graphics, maps, charts, and diagrams with braille labels to deepen understanding.
- **Beyond Core Subjects:** Braille is everywhere—on calendars, weather charts, classroom labels, and subject folders—giving students daily practice and independence. Arts and FACS faculty incorporate braille materials into their disciplines.

Teaching Braille: A Quick Guide

Teaching braille begins with pre-braille skills, which include tactile discrimination using the *Mangold Basic Braille* program; page orientation, posture, and hand positioning; left-to-right tracking technique without scrubbing; and tactile activities with magnet boards and cork boards. Teachers introduce swing cells to familiarize students with the dots of the braille cell before they begin learning letters.

The Mangold series, which emphasizes correct dot identification and letter recognition, is used to introduce letters in a developmental order. Teachers use *Braille Too* to begin teaching contractions to learners already familiar with print and *Building on Patterns* is used for literacy and UEB integration for non-print learners. Once students have mastered the UEB literary code, the focus of instruction is on fluency, speed, and comprehension.



Outreach Programming

We're thrilled to host students from across Indiana at ISBVI for the Braille Institute of America's **Braille Challenge** on January 31!

This is Indiana's only academic contest specifically for students who are blind or have low vision, featuring tests in reading comprehension, spelling, speed and accuracy, proofreading, and tactile graphics, which are qualifiers for the national competition in Los Angeles in June. Our regional event welcomes students at every stage of their braille journey, in a spirit of camaraderie and skill-building. As a new member of the national Braille Challenge Advisory Committee, I'm excited to bring fresh ideas to this beloved, inspiring tradition.

Throughout second semester, we will continue offering **L.E.A.D.S. (Learners Excelling, Achieving, Dreaming, Succeeding)** ECC-intensive courses, with **Leap into L.E.A.D.S.** (grades K-5) and **L.E.A.D.S.** (grades 6-12) sessions. Details at <https://www.in.gov/isbvi/outreach/short-course-program/>.



Braille Information

Articles:

- [Deciding Between Print and Braille](#) from Paths to Literacy
- [FAQ: Selecting Formats a Learner Needs](#) from The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials
- [Accessible Reading and Writing: A 200-Year Journey with Braille](#)
- [Brains of blind people reading in Braille show activity in same area that lights up when sighted readers read](#)

Professional Development Opportunities

Conferences: [Council for Exceptional Children's DVIDB Pre-Conference](#), Feb. 27 9:00 AM-4:00 PM EST, online
[Illinois AER Vision Conference](#), Feb. 11-13, Naperville, IL

Free, self-paced online training in braille:

- APH's [Braille Brain course](#)
- Hadley's [braille courses](#)
- [Paths to Literacy's list](#) of additional free online courses and resources for learning braille



A student leads contestants in the Braille Challenge pledge at the opening ceremony of last year's competition.



News for Families



Grant Opportunity

The Envision Foundation is offering a wonderful grant opportunity for families of children who are blind. Their goal is to support parents by helping provide adaptive technology and equipment that can make a real difference in a child's learning, daily life, and future independence. If your family could benefit from tools that help your child grow, explore, and succeed, you can learn more and apply here: <https://www.theenvisionfoundation.org/grants>

Upcoming Virtual Session: Assistive Technology Exploration!

Join us on January 15th, 2026, from 5:00–6:00 PM for an engaging virtual session designed to empower access and independence for individuals who are blind or have low vision. This session will introduce families and educators to a wide range of assistive technology tools, from screen readers like JAWS, NVDA, and VoiceOver to accessible math supports such as DESMOS.

Educators: Earn PGP points by completing the post-session survey.

A recording will be available for anyone who cannot attend live.

Register today and grow your AT confidence! <https://form.jotform.com/252314687387164>

Preschool Winter Stay & Play

Do you or someone you know have a preschool-aged child with a vision impairment and want to learn more about our program or simply connect with other families on a similar journey? Join us for our Winter Stay and Play on January 27th!

Families will enjoy a morning filled with hands-on, accessible, winter-themed activities that support sensory exploration, early motor skills, social interaction, and joyful play. It's also a great opportunity to meet other families, connect with staff, and learn more about resources available through our program.

Each child will head home with a take-home activity kit so the fun (and learning!) can continue well beyond the event.

We can't wait to share this cozy, family-friendly morning with you!

<https://www.jotform.com/253375408819163>



Have ideas or topics you'd love to learn more about? Reach out any time: ckessler@isbvik12.org.