

NUBS: A Matter of Educational Opportunity, not Nostalgia

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With a rapidly increasing number of jobs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, equal employment opportunity for blind individuals is synonymous with having the same level of education in all subjects as their sighted peers. One cornerstone of such an education is the availability of materials in which both text and mathematical expressions are presented in a manner that is concise, unambiguous, and intuitive to the braille reader. Another is the ability to efficiently take notes and write out the solutions to math problems.

Unified English Braille (UEB), the braille code that is now being implemented for use in the United States, may be free from braille symbols that have multiple meanings, yet particularly its representation of formulas, equations, and other technical material is neither concise nor intuitive to today's braille readers in the United States. These characteristics of UEB also imply that requiring students to read and write in both UEB and the Nemeth Code, as currently stipulated by the Braille Authority of North America (BANA), increases rather than decreases the complexity of the braille skills that students will need to master. For these reasons, it is the concern of many that the planned changes to braille in the United States will bring about a setback in the ability of blind students to succeed in scientific fields at a time when these subjects are becoming ever more important in the preparation for employment.

The Nemeth Uniform Braille System (NUBS), on the other hand, is firmly rooted in the Nemeth Code and therefore rather intuitive to the reader of American braille. At the same time, it is, like UEB, devoid of the ambiguities that both stump automatic translators and make today's braille code unnecessarily difficult to learn. The Alliance for Braille Literacy's (ABL's) promotion of NUBS during this time of UEB implementation therefore is not motivated by nostalgia for what many see as a lost cause but by the necessity for a braille code that furthers rather than hinders the educational and employment opportunities for those who are blind. Everyone who shares a belief in this necessity is urged to join ABL in its efforts, for it is a lost cause only if we do not act. As President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote near the end of World War II when envisioning a postwar world filled with lasting peace, "The only limit of our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today."