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Demonstration Program/Braille Training
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PR/Award # H235E190004
Budget Period # 4
Report Type: Annual Performance

Table of Contents

Project Narrative - Attachments

Title : Attachments
Attachment:

File :
1 **H235E190004_Exec_Sum_Narrative_Budget_Assurance.pdf**
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

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Attachment:

File :
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U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report Cover Sheet (ED 524B)

[X] Annual Performance Report   [   ] Final Performance Report

Executive Summary
PR/Award #: H235E190004

The Braille Excellence for Students and Teachers (BEST) Grant annual report provides information indicating the extent to which the BEST project met its goals during the first half of Project Year 4. The Project is focusing on three goals that help to promote the BEST grants' focus areas to (1) increase the knowledge of TVIs, intervention specialists, general educators, paraprofessionals, and transcribers in obtaining and creating accessible documents thereby increasing equitable access to braille materials in inclusive settings and (2) heavily market to and expand our reach to increase opportunities for TVIs working in rural communities.

Goal 1: Enhance the competency of pre-service and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and others to provide braille literacy instruction and support across all academic areas including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

Highlights: There are eleven trainings scheduled to accomplish goal 1; seven STEM focused trainings and four focused on the reading and writing of braille. Four STEM focused trainings have been completed with two more planned, and two reading and writing braille focused trainings have been completed with two more planned. One STEM training was cancelled due to low registration.

Goal 2: Enhance the competency of both pre-service and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and others to efficiently and effectively acquire and create braille materials.

Highlights: There are seven trainings/events scheduled to accomplish goal 2; three focusing on producing accessible documents; four technology focused events with two of the technology focused events being specialized presentations to university TVI students highlighting braille production, accessible documents, and assistive technology. Six trainings were completed and one is remaining. Specialized technical assistance was provided to districts/agencies producing braille and educators in the process of becoming a certified braille transcriber. Two new local braille production centers were awarded through an application process, set up, and trained.

Goal 3: Educators and others will be able to apply strategies learned in the BEST project trainings and other activities to more effectively manage the braille needs of their students through the support of follow-up technical assistance or resources.

> **Highlights:** The BEST Grant Professional Learning Community continues to be available to participants of BEST trainings this year. It offers an all-access place for BEST training recordings, materials, announcements, and support as well as a place to network with other educators who are serving the blind and visually impaired. The BEST Tips and Tricks Videos provide support to educators on specific topics 24/7. During year 4 of the grant, the On Demand Tips and Tricks videos have received 221 views and over 8 hours of viewing time.

Many of the grant participants have been from within the state of Ohio, including the Appalachian areas. Due to our continued virtual trainings and events and now hybrid trainings, we continue to increase our area of reach and have had participants from other states within the U.S., as well as international attendees. This year, six participants were from other states and three from other countries. In total for the 3.5 years of the grant, there have been 2,964 participants in grant activities. It was anticipated that there would be 2,500 participants served throughout the entire 5 years of the grant.

BEST collects data on each grant activity keyed to a project objective. WordFarmers, the grant external evaluator, then compiles, analyzes, and interprets the data to determine the effectiveness of the activity and suggests options for improvement and continued growth for the current project year and upcoming activities. Additionally, WordFarmers has been conducting a longitudinal study to continue over the course of the final 1.5 years of the grant for the purpose of (1) to investigate how BEST project participants make use of BEST courses and technical assistance to obtain the skills and expertise needed to fulfill current job responsibilities and to achieve career objectives and (2) to investigate participants' perceptions of the impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness of their BEST experiences and the alignment between their perceptions and BEST project goals.

3. Narrative

Section A. **Substantial progress towards completion of goals, objectives, and outputs with funds awarded in FY 2022.**

1. Describe program activities, outputs, and products (toolkits, curricula, conferences, etc.) completed from October 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

The Asssitive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials Center (AT&AEM Center) at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) has made significant progress towards the completion of the goals and objectives outlined in the scope of work for our Braille Excellence for Students and Teachers (BEST) (H235E190004) grant made possible through continuation funding awarded in 2022. We have completed conference activities, professional development (PD) sessions, and created many opportunities for technical assistance (TA). We have also maintained and expanded the Professional Learning Community (PLC) through Microsoft Teams, which has allowed the participants of our activities continued access to training materials.

In November of 2022, OCALI hosted our annual conference, OCALICON, focused on enriching the lives of people with disabilities. OCALICON was again delivered in a virtual format. This format supported schools and agencies who are still experiencing ongoing staffing challenges as a resulted of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because it was offered virtually, it allowed us to reach more people statewide, nationwide, and worldwide. OCALICON registered 16,304 participants for the conference with 6,241 actually attending.

A total of 419 participants attended eight- 45 minute BEST AT Forum sessions across the three days of OCALICON. This year because of the large conference registration, a new online registration system was used. Unfortuately, the demographics of participants in individual sessions were not captured, therefore, we do not have specific numbers of rural/Appalachian participants who attended our sessions at OCALICON.

The BEST grant provided OCALICON registration for 8 university students studying to be Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs). The number of university students who needed paid registrations was lower this year due to a free registration window offered to all participants for a short period of time.

The sessions offered within the BEST AT Forum at the conference were:

a. Getting Ready for the Annual Federal Quota Census – 34 participants
b. Help, There's a New Braille Student in My District! What Do I Need to Know? - 61 participants

1

c. Mission Inspire: Students with Visual Impairments Soaring to Excellence in Data – 59 participants
d. Being a Dual Reader: Using Both Braille and Large Print in Education and Beyond - 77 participants
e. Literacy Opportunities: Enhancing Braille Skills at the Ohio State School for the Blind Summer Camp – 26 participants
f. APH: Committed to a Lifetime of Learning with Braille – 41 participants
g. Be at Your BEST: Professional Development and Resources – 69 participants
h. Creation of the National Agenda for STEM Education for Students With Visual Impairments – 52 participants

OCALICON was our largest event this year, however, we also demonstrated substantial success with a total of twelve PD sessions offered between October 1st, 2022 and March 31st, 2023, with eleven completed and one that was cancelled due to low registration. We continued to offer PD opportunities via one-day virtual training workshops and multi-day virtual training workshops using Zoom, designed with a range in rigor and time commitments to meet the varied needs of professionals. New this year was the addition of hybrid trainings using a new video conferencing system from [Yealink](https://www.yealink.com/en/solution-detail/zoom-rooms) (https://www.yealink.com/en/solution-detail/zoom-rooms). The system includes 2 cameras, a direct connection to Zoom, and an added document camera. This system allowed us to offer participants a choice of coming in for an in-person training or participating virtually with equally high quality training in the two environments. Two sessions have been offered using this new system with plans to expand to other trainings. One participant indicated their positive experience with the new hybrid system, "I like being virtual with this training, it was as good as being there. Thank you for making it this way". There are currently 3 more trainings planned this project year that will be offered using the hybrid format with the new system. The list below includes the twelve trainings that have been offered to date. Additionally, there are at least 5 more trainings planned for the remainder of the grant year:

a. Braille Formatting: Best Practices for Braille Materials (3.5 hour training)
b. Creating Accessible PDFs (2-session training)
c. Exploring the T3 Tablet (1.5 hour training)
d. Using the Tactipad (1.5 hour training)
e. Scanning for Braille, Large Print, and Electronic Text (4 sessions)
f. Duxbury Braille Translation Software Training (6 sessions)
g. BrailleNote with Google (½ day hybrid session)
h. BrailleNote with Keymath (½ day hybrid session)
i. AT Exploration For Ohio State University TVI Students – Cohort 1
j. Producing Tactile Graphics on the Juliet 120 (1.5 hour training)
k. Using Macros and Templates to Produce Large Print, Braille, and Electronic Text (4 sessions)

2

I. STEM Braille Strategies (cancelled due to low registration)

For each of the PD sessions, Microsoft Teams was used as a virtual PLC to connect with class participants and the instructor after the training for questions or clarifications, and to share and store resources for future use.

This year's grant activities have also included both long- and short-term TA and established two new local braille production centers (LBPCs) so far. As of March 31st, 2023, highly qualified staff in the AT&AEM Center have provided 63.83 hours of BEST grant TA across Ohio. The hours are calculated on three targeted areas of support: a) TA to school districts/agencies producing braille b) TA to Grafton Braille Service Center (GBSC) and, c) TA to braille transcriber candidates. We have continued to provide access to and promote the BEST TA Portal (launched 3-2020), the BEST Professional Learning Community (launched 2-2022), as well as the BEST website (launched 10-2019).

2. Describe the most significant program outcomes from October 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023.

As illustrated in Section A(1) of this report, the BEST grant team within the AT&AEM Center at OCALI were very productive with grant activities and product development during the first two quarters. The following list includes highlights of the most significant accomplishments or outcomes from October 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023:

A. Twelve training activities were planned, and eleven training activities were completed so far in addition to the BEST AT Forum held within the annual OCALICON conference. These activities targeted the two main goals: (1) Enhance the competency of preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and others to provide braille literacy instruction and support across all academic areas including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), and (2) Enhance the competency of preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and others to efficiently and effectively acquire and create braille materials.

Each PD session was evaluated by external evaluators based on observations and attendee feedback, specifically in the areas of quality, relevance, and usefulness. Of the eleven sessions completed 100% of the trainings equaled or exceeded a 6 with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high) on each of the three measures: quality, relevance and usefulness. The highest score for quality was 8 with the lowest being 6.08. In the area of relevance, a high score of 8 was achieved, with the lowest being 6.5. Finally in the area of usefulness of the PD, 8 was the highest score

3

reported, with the lowest score being 6.33. The consistently high scores illustrate the significant success of the PD sessions in providing quality training that was relevant and useful to participants. Because all scores were within our project target of 6, this totals 100% of grant activities within the project year as meeting the performance measure.

B. Two LBPCs were set up in high-need school districts/agencies for the purpose of increasing the ability and capacity to produce incidental braille for students. This year the new LBPCs chosen were Jackson-Milton Local School District and South Point Local School District, both being within Rural/Appalachian counties of Ohio. Staff for each of the two centers were virtually trained on the operation of equipment and software. The application deadline has been extended to offer one more LBPC to an Ohio school district in need.

C. A total of 63.83 hours of TA was provided by highly qualified consultants. The total TA was broken down as follows: a) 14.5 hours of TA to three transcriber candidates. Two are in the process of completing braille transciption certification, one has stopped participation, and b) 49.33 TA hours for educators who are producing braille for students and staff in districts and agencies as well as the districts who were selected to receive the LBPCs previously mentioned. Additionally, participants of BEST activities had access to the BEST TA Portal (https://ataem.org/best-2019-2024/technical-assistance-requests) where requests for technical assistance can be made to the AT&AEM Center's braille consultants. Between October 1, 2022 and March 31, 2023, the webpage to access the TA Portal was visited 58 times. The increase in page visits this year from 34 visits last year reflect a growing awareness of the availability of the TA Portal as an easy to access resource offered through the grant.

D. The BEST PLC, launched in February of 2022 on Microsoft Teams, was developed to encourage ongoing engagement and follow-up for grant event participants. Attendees continue to have ongoing access to training materials and recordings as an option to review content and continue professional growth. Recordings are available only to participants of the respective trainings. A total of 80 recorded training sessions have been made available to 26 current participants, with 34 recordings planned to be uploaded during this project year. Sessions are recorded and posted from each day of a training. As a result of offering multi-day trainings, the number of videos exceed the number of completed activities. By keeping the videos separated by each training day, attendees can return to specific recordings to continue or refresh their learning. Editable transcripts for

4

recordings can also be used to search for training keywords, that are tied to specific timestamps, within the recordings are also available to support participant learning. In addition to providing continued access to resources and training recordings, participants can engage in conversations with other participants within the Teams channel or ask follow-up questions to the trainer.

E. Through our continued partnership with Shawnee State University and The Ohio State University, we will be able to collect information on BEST grant participants who have obtained positions working as TVIs. Currently there is no data on the number of participants who have obtained positions after completing BEST trainings. Both university programs will graduate cohorts in summer 2023. In late summer, we will follow up with the university TVI students who participated in the AT Exploration Day trainings, as well as participants of the Duxbury Braille Translation software training to gather information on whether participants have obtained positions.

F. The BEST longitudinal study by WordFarmers, the external evaluator for BEST, continued with two major aims: (1) to investigate how the BEST project participants make use of BEST courses and technical assistance to obtain the skills and expertise needed to fulfill current job responsibilities and to achieve career objectives and (2) to investigate participants' perceptions of the impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness of their BEST experiences and the alignment between their perceptions and BEST project goals. The information below includes a summary from the study while the full report is included in "Section C: Additional Information".

Summary of BEST Longitudinal Study

Using the BEST Project's Courses, Trainings, and Technical Assistance

Over the course of three years, several interviewees have commented that the trainings and technical assistance services provided by BEST had equipped them to perform proficiently in their current roles and had also opened up opportunities for them to transition to new employers or positions. Comments from several interviewees in Year 2 and Year 3, however, noted that their jobs offer little chance for advancement. Interviewees generally believe that their BEST training will increase their professional capacity and improve their employment prospects.

The findings from the third year once again suggest that interviewees are utilizing BEST grant services by taking repeat courses. They appear to do this to increase

5

skill levels. In some cases, repetition is tied to changing expectations at work. The Year 3 study again focused explicitly on this phenomenon and found that interviewees wanted (1) to *renew and refresh* skills and knowledge and (2) to *master new skills* to better serve students and to remain current with the field. Across the study's three years, circumstantial influences for retaking courses have included the following:

a. instructors adapt courses to students' purposes;

b. BEST services are free-of-cost to students;

c. BEST offerings are predictable (as to content and schedule);

d. courses contain such concentrated content that repetition makes sense;

e. biennial scheduling of advanced courses makes repeating a basic course useful;

f. instructors continue to support students after coursework is complete; and

g. courses enable students to stay up to date with changes in the field.

6

Course features identified in Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 that appear to correlate with BEST participants retaking already-completed courses likely combine into a system that works not only for these students but perhaps for other participants in BEST courses and trainings as well. The Year 1 study identified two features of the profession itself that might also contribute to the pattern of re-taking courses. The first feature—cross-year assignment of teachers to students (e.g., looping up)—entails teachers (and braillists) having regularly to update their skills to keep pace with the increasing academic demands experienced by their students. In Year 2 and Year 3, several interviewees cited this circumstance as contributing to their reason for retaking an already-completed course. The second feature—the demands of new employment assignments on individuals who lack qualifications or (other) training opportunities—is particularly relevant to paraeducators. No Year 2 or Year 3 interviewees' responses mentioned this second feature.

Impact, Quality, Relevance, and Usefulness

Findings from Year 3 indicate that the interviewees perceived BEST project services to be of exceptional quality, relevant to their professional or career goals, and useful in achieving their professional objectives. Impact was far-reaching and effects were seen as significant: Interviewees credited BEST with increasing their capacity to produce high-quality braille and other accessible materials formatted to meet students' individual needs. Effects also included assets (confidence, skills, and knowledge) needed to accomplish current and future professional objectives.

Overall, interviewees viewed BEST courses and TA services as a unique and essential resource for the highly specialized professional development training they need. All ten interviewees indicated that they are extremely likely to continue to make use of BEST project services. Year 3 interviewees' suggestions for improvement included:

a. greater focus on technology, including more hands-on experience with specific tools, AT devices and software;

b. regular updates about new and improved technology;

c. expanding courses and curricula to include more training in the use of Tactile View, BrailleNote Touch, and JAWS, as well as training in orientation and mobility; and

d. more frequent scheduling of advanced-level courses.

7

Year 3 findings showed alignment between interviewees' perceptions and BEST Grant goals. The demographic data and feedback obtained from interviewees demonstrated the widespread influence of BEST trainings and TA services. Interviewees expressed increasing confidence in their ability to produce braille and other accessible materials, operate the necessary equipment and technology, and deliver (or support) instruction in the use of assistive and accessible technologies across all academic disciplines.

Outlook on Future Years

Investigating interviewees' experiences in the coming years will provide additional insights relevant to study goals. Of particular interest will be understanding in greater detail how BEST helps interviewees accomplish career goals (including both present and future employment). Several emerging insights merit careful monitoring.

One emergent insight is that BEST seems to have created a system that delivers rigorous content adapted to the professional circumstances of its specialized target audience. Future data-gathering and analysis efforts may well include more details about how this system works for interviewees. In particular, such features as high-level content, flexible expectations, administrative structures, and encouragement for repeating courses would seem of interest. This system and its features could merit wider inquiry beyond this study.

The role of online instruction in BEST Grant services is another emerging insight. Remote instruction, initiated during the pandemic, provided a training option that was welcomed by interviewees, facilitated participation in BEST Grant classes and trainings, and offered numerous other benefits. The continuation of virtual instruction could entail the development of new BEST initiatives that leverage the online platform. Plans for this study may evolve in the study's remaining years to address changes in BEST Grant services and service delivery.

A third emerging insight is the support the BEST Grant provides to the individuals who engage with its services—during their years of training and throughout their professional lives. The need for community and connection in the post-pandemic world mirrors the need for community and connection among the far-flung practitioners who provide services to persons with blindness and visual impairments. Future research might examine BEST Grant efforts to develop and sustain an intentional community of practice.

The full report of the longitudinal study is provided in the "Section C – Additional Information" section of the APR.

8

3. Describe the most significant program activities, outputs, products and outcomes anticipated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023, particularly in the areas listed above. Indicate the degree to which the goals and objectives in the work plan for the current year are expected to be met by September 30, 2023.

The following reflect the most significant program activities, outputs, products and outcomes anticipated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

A. There are at least five additional trainings scheduled before the end of the grant year on topics related to braille literacy instruction across all academic areas including science, technology, reading, and writing.

B. TA activities will continue by the BEST grant highly qualified consultants and will be available for educators who are producing braille for students and transcriber candidates who are completing their braille transcriber certification. TA will also be provided to the Grafton Braille Service Center at the Grafton Correctional Institution as needed and requested. We are continuing to develop a QR code linked to the TA portal URL that will be included in our lab loans and other items shipped to TVIs to provide additional marketing of the TA portal.

C. Training outreach to two Ohio universities and a Pennsylvania university TVI preparation programs is provided each grant year. Training has already occurred with The Ohio State University TVI program in February 2023. Additionally training for students of the Shawnee State University program joined by Kutztown University is planned for June of 2023. These activities will further our outreach to pre-service teachers and higher education in neighboring states, as well as in Ohio. The trainings focus on AT for students who are blind or visually impaired, as well an introduction to AT&AEM Center resources that support TVIs such as BEST professional development and how to obtain accessible educational materials (AEM). Additionally, a Duxbury training is being arranged with Shawnee State University to provide an overview of how to use the software to produce braille material.

D. Through collaborative work with the Ohio TVI Consortium at Shawnee State, grant activities will continue to support TVIs in rural areas by offering specialized training to expand their braille knowledge, skills, and implementation while in school and post-graduation, thus supporting them in bringing a new level of expertise in areas of the state that are typically underserved. Some examples include funding registrations for the BEST AT Forum at OCALICON, promoting our trainings and resources, as well as other opportunities as they arise.

E. Two of the three LBPCs have been set up this year. The application deadline has been extended and we continue to market aggressively to encourage Ohio school districts in need to apply and receive the final LBPC.

F. Finally, online asynchronous learning opportunities are also being developed to support practitioners in the field who need immediate information or support for troubleshooting. During this project year, an additional Tips and Tricks video

9

series is being completed, Acquiring Accessible Materials. The resources are provided on-demand and focus on specific tools or tasks to allow for quick viewing and easy implementation. Asynchronous learning opportunities will continue to be added to the series to further increase learning opportunities. These resources are posted on our BEST Grant website (ataem.org/special-projects-grants/best-grant) as a collection of On-Demand Tips and Tricks Videos (ataem.org/best-2019-2024/video-trainings). Between October 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023, the On-Demand Tips and Tricks Videos received a total of 221 views, and 8.95 hours of playtime across the 23 videos available.

Our anticipated outcomes are to obtain equal to or greater than 6 on a scale of 2-8 on the participant evaluation rating for quality, relevance, and usefulness for at least 90% of the training sessions. A baseline target number of participants for each training session has been projected based upon the training content and anticipated need. Educators from Appalachian and rural areas have been set as a priority and are anticipated to account for a set percentage of participants based on the training or activity. Some activities/resources have a vetting process established, such as the on-demand webinar series, Tips and Tricks, etc. to ensure high quality products and activities are available to participants. A vetting panel is being established for the new Tips and Tricks videos to review each resource on quality, relevance, and usefulness. Additionally, the BEST grant Advisory Team discusses and reviews all activities and products. WordFarmers will continue to provide external evaluation of the entire project.

4. Describe the non-COVID related challenges, opportunities, and emerging issues encountered to date (October 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023) or anticipated during the remaining portion of this fiscal year April 1, 2023 to September 30, 2023, as well as your plans for overcoming challenges and taking advantage of opportunities. Indicate how RSA might be of assistance.

Generally, the grant activities progressed as anticipated from October 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023. At this writing, we anticipate that no changes will be needed to original grant goals or objectives to meet our current grant obligations.

5. Describe whether COVID-19 has impacted project timelines and training activities and specify what activities have shifted or been postponed.

BEST has continued to offer all trainings in a real time virtual and and some limited hybrid format, as well as offering participants access to session recordings and resources through the PLC. All sessions but the one that was cancelled due to low registration were delivered as planned this grant year.

The activity STEM Braille Strategies was cancelled this project year, as it was last project year. The training title, description, and objectives were altered by the instructor

10

in a way that they felt would better meet the needs of potential participants, but registration for this topic still fell low compared to other offered opportunities.

The need to survey participants also postponed the planned Introduction to Braille Music training with APH from March 2023 to summer of 2023. The survey is scheduled to close on April 6th, after which the responses will be assessed and the activity objectives and description will be set to best meet the needs of the respondents.

6. Discuss whether COVID-19 impacted outreach and recruitment of participants, retaining participants, or impacted the projects ability to meet its targets. If impacted, please describe how the project may be addressing these issues or how the project plans to address these issues.

The model of instruction used for the BEST grant prior to the pandemic was fully face-to-face however throughout the past 3 years of the pandemic, training was switched from face-to-face to virtual training, with the addition this project year of several trainings being offered in a hybrid format. This allowed us to rethink future delivery modules for BEST grant trainings and supports. Many participants have commented on the ease of access that virtual and hybrid trainings provided. Because of the pandemic we were able to develop alternate training modes that can now be leveraged moving forward to possibly better reach participants needs.

With the use of both virtual and now hybrid trainings, we continue to attract participants outside of Ohio to attend and participate in our events. In almost every project year, we have exceeded our targeted participants in each objective we have offered trainings in, and this project year we are on track to exceed our yearly targets in several objective areas once again. This year, six participants have been from other states and three from other countries. In total for the 3.5 years of the grant, from October 1st 2019 to March 31st 2023, there have been 2,964 participants in grant activities. Additionally, we will continue to provide trainings with a TVI university program in Pennsylvania during this project year. It was anticipated that there would be 2,500 participants served throughout the entire 5 years of the grant.

Recently a bill was signed by the President ending the COVID19 national emergency. Additionally, it is anticipated that the public health national emergency declaration related to the COVID19 pandemic will end May 11, 2023. Schools, however, are continuing to experience significant staffing shortages and will likely continue to experience these shortages for the foreseeable future which then impacts staff participation in training activities. This will need to be considered as we plan future grant activities so we can continue to meet district needs as they rebound from the staffing impact of COVID19 and the subsequent ability to release staff for training.

Section B. **Work Plan**

11

1. Provide a work plan for Year 5 that includes anticipated activities, outputs, products and outcomes, and the timeline for completing them. Highlight any major new work plan initiatives or significant changes anticipated in the next project year. If you submitted a work plan in your application, you may update or modify, as needed.

BEST Grant Work Plan
Year 5: 2023-2024 Activities

GOAL 1: Enhance the competency of preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and others to provide braille literacy instruction and support across all academic areas including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

Objective 1.1 Improve statewide equity in the distribution of high-quality training to preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and transcribers to support student proficiency in using braille for scientific and mathematical notation, to access STEM.

Performance Measures
1.1.a. Number of participants in training sessions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 35
1.1.b. Number of participants who complete the training. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 35
1.1.c. Number of participants in training sessions from Appalachian and rural regions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 5
1.1.d Number of braille STEM sessions completed. Measure Type: Program, Target: 3
1.1.e. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target: 90% at project closure.
1.1.f. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target: 90% at project closure.
1.1.g. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target: 90% at project closure.

STEM Activities	Date
BrailleNote Touch with KeyMath	January 2024
MathType and EquatIO Software Training	March 2024
Basic Nemeth	June 2024

12

Objective 1.2 Improve statewide equity in the distribution of high-quality training to preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and transcribers to support student proficiency in braille literacy for reading and writing.

Performance Measures

1.2.a. Number of participants in training sessions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 45

1.2.b. Number of participants who complete the training.
 Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 45

1.2.c. Number of participants in training sessions from Appalachian and rural regions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 10

1.2.d. Number of braille reading and writing sessions completed.
Measure Type: Program, Target: 4

1.2.e. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target: 90% at project closure.

1.2.f. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target: 90% at project closure.

1.2.g. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target: 90% at project closure.

Reading and Writing Activities	Date
A Touch of Braille	October 2023
Paraprofessional Instructional Support Techniques	October 2023
Braille Reading and Writing Smackdown	November 2023
BrailleNote with Google	January 2024
12-Week Braille	March 2024
Basic Braille	June 2024
Advanced Braille	June 2024

GOAL 2: Enhance the competency of preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and others to efficiently and effectively acquire and create braille materials.

Objective 2.1 Provide high-quality training to preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and transcribers to understand the value of, and develop competencies in producing accessible source documents for the purpose of creating braille.

13

Performance Measures

2.1.a. Number of participants in training sessions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 15

2.1.b. Number of participants who complete the training. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 15

2.1.c. Number of participants in training sessions from Appalachian and rural regions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 5

2.1.d. Number of sessions completed. Measure Type: Project, Target: 2

2.1.e. Percent of participants who can meet a mastery level posttest measure. Measure Type: Project, Target: 85% at project closure.

2.1.f. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project Target: 90% at project closure.

2.1.g. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project Target: 90% at project closure.

2.1.h. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target: 90% at project closure.

Producing Accessible Documents Activities	Date
Creating Accessible MS Word Documents	October 2023
Scanning for Braille, Large Print and Audio	January 2024
Using Microsoft Word Templates and Macros to Produce Large Print, Braille and Electronic Text	March 2024

Objective 2.2 Increase ability of educators and others who support braille users to efficiently and effectively locate ready-made braille and/or use non-visual technologies to provide for the braille needs of persons with blindness.

Performance Measures

2.2.a. Number of participants in training sessions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 100

2.2.b. Number of participants who complete the training. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 100

2.2.c. Number of participants in training sessions from Appalachian and rural regions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 20

2.2.d. Number of sessions completed. Measure Type: Program, Target: 3

2.2.e. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target 90% at project closure.

2.2.f. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target 90% at project closure.

14

2.2.g. Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high). Measure Type: Project, Target 90% at project closure.
2.2.h. Number of participants who obtained positions where braille skills are needed. Measure Type: GPRA, Target 2

Technology Activities	Date
Braille AT Forum at OCALICONLINE	November 2023
Duxbury Braille Translation Software Training	January 2024
VI/braille AT for Ohio State University TVI cohorts	February 2024
VI/braille AT for Shawnee State TVI cohort	June 2024

Objective 2.3 Increase the pool of braille transcribers available to provide braille to Ohio school districts, businesses, and other agencies that support students and adults with braille needs.

Performance Measures
2.3.a. Number of participants engaged in TA sessions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: Minimum of 15 per year
2.3.b. Number of participants from rural and Appalachian areas engaged in TA sessions. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: Minimum of 3 per year
2.3.c. Number of participants who complete the NLS course. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 2.
2.3.d. Number of participants who obtain positions where braille skills are needed. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 1
2.3.e. Number of TA hours provided. Measure Type: Project, Target: Minimum of 75 hours per year

Technical Assistance Activities	Date
TA to braille transcriber candidates testing for braille certification	As requested
Provide TA to OSSB, AT&AEM and local school district braille production sites	As requested
TA and training to GBSC as needed	As requested

15

Objective 2.4 Expand braille production capacities within local school districts and/or vocational and technical education centers.

Performance Measure
2.4.a. Number of LBPCs set up. Measure Type: Project, Target: 3 per year

Braille Production Center Activities	Date
Select, setup and train three high need school districts/vocational career and technical centers to receive a local braille production center	October/November 2023

GOAL 3: Educators and others will be able to apply strategies learned in the BEST project trainings and other activities to more effectively manage the braille needs of their students through the support of follow-up technical assistance or resources.

Objective 3.1 Develop and improve access to a range of technical assistance and training materials which can support implementation of braille skills learned from training activities.

Performance Measures
3.1.a. Number of participants utilizing resources. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 15
3.1.b. Number of participants utilizing resources from rural or Appalachian areas. Measure Type: GPRA, Target: 5
3.1.c. Number of resources developed at the close of the grant project. Measure Type: Program, Target: 9
3.1.d. Percent of resources that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high) as measured by a vetting panel. Measure Type: Project, Target: 90%
3.1.e. Percent of resources that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high) as measured by a vetting panel. Measure Type: Project , Target: 90%
3.1.f. Percent of resources that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high) as measured by a vetting panel. Measure Type: Project, Target: 90%

Activities	Date
Develop and promote a video series on Duxbury	September 2024

Manage Project

16

Activities	
Advisory Team Meetings	December 2023, March 2024, June 2024, September 2024
Evaluation Meetings with External Evaluators	Monthly
Contract with Qualified Personnel	October 2023

Activities Projected	Year 4
Trainings	17
Video Resource	1
Other Online Products	0

2. Provide an analysis of the goals and objectives submitted in the grant application. Specifically, indicate whether any goals, objectives, or activities in the work plan represent a change in the scope or objectives of the project. If so, please include the original goal, objective, or activity (reference the page numbers in the application), the specific change, and the justification.

There are no changes in any goals, objectives or activities in the work plan that would represent a change in the scope or objectives of the project. The three goals outlined in the grant focus on braille, with each goal targeting a focused and identified need in the areas of knowledge, practice, and equitable access to braille and related technologies. Although each goal has a specific focus, we have universally targeted Appalachian/rural areas within every goal of the grant to, again, support access to underserved populations.

Goal 1, Enhance the competency of preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and others to provide braille literacy instruction and support across all academic areas including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), has a strong focus on braille literacy and includes all academic areas, with a specific intention to include STEM. The goal is intended to teach professionals about best practices in braille literacy and supporting students in accessing the curriculum across all content areas. Activities to meet this goal are composed entirely of PD opportunities. There are no changes to the original goals or objectives.

Goal 2, Enhance the competency of preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and others to efficiently and effectively acquire and create

17

braille materials, shifts the focus to increase educators' capacity to both obtain and produce braille for their students. The goal intends to broaden knowledge in areas such as braille transcription and related hardware/software, support the establishment and operation of braille production centers, and provide TA for certifications related to the production of braille. To meet this goal, a variety of grant activities are provided through TA and PD. There are no changes to the original goals or objectives.

Goal 3, Educators and others will be able to apply strategies learned in the BEST project trainings and other activities to more effectively manage the braille needs of their students through the support of follow-up technical assistance or resources, is focused on increasing the longevity of the success of the grant and extending attendee knowledge and support. This goal utilizes TA and online resources such as webinars, peer-to-peer support networks, and an online repository for related materials to continue the engagement of attendees and provide continued access to grant materials and information.

In summary, there were no changes to the original goals or objectives; however, due to the pandemic and state restrictions on in-person gatherings, all training activities were delivered virtually. Additionally, some activities were delivered over the course of multiple days to accommodate learners needs in the virtual learning environments.

Section C. Budget

1. **Provide an estimated budget and budget narrative for Year 5, including a personnel loading chart.**

Summary of expenditures obligated from October 1, 2023 to September 31, 2024.

Expenditure	Funds
Personnel	$0.00
Fringe Benefits	$0.00
Travel/Mail	$4,300
Equipment	$0.00
Supplies	$29,598.99
Contractual	$71,170.00
Construction	$0.00
Total Direct Costs	$105,068.99
Indirect Costs	$6,861.01
Total Expenditures	**$**111,930.00

Budget Narrative for Year 5

Personnel and Fringe

18

No personnel and fringe costs were requested for this grant, therefore a personnel loading chart is not provided.

Mail/Travel
Estimated Mail/Travel Budget $4,300

Expenses for mail and travel are budgeted for shipping of BEST computer labs and materials to participants of BEST software trainings, materials for LBPC's, and other instances in which shipping may be required to support grant activities.

Equipment
Estimated equipment budget: $0

Explanation – Due to a change in our fiscal agents' Guidelines for Property Inventory, the original equipment budget was requested to be moved to supplies for the remaining years of the grant. The request was approved by our project officer on April 21, 2022. These funds will still be used as originally specified to purchase braille embossers for local school districts who are approved to receive a local braille production center. The new Property Inventory Guidelines states:

"For the purpose of this policy, "equipment" shall mean a unit of furniture or furnishings, or instrument, a machine, an apparatus, or a set of articles which retains its shape and appearance with use, is nonexpendable, costs greater than $5,000 (effective July 1, 2020). to replace and does not lose it identity when incorporated into a more complex unit except computers or related technology."

Supplies

Estimated Supply Budget: $29,598.99

Funds are budgeted to purchase the following: Software for training participants, supplies and braille embossers for LBPC's, and other materials and resources to support BEST trainings and TA.

Contractual
Estimated Contractual Budget $71,170.00

Funds are budgeted to implement the following activities: TA provided by our BEST TA consultants, video series development costs, instructor costs for PD events, external evaluator costs, and college credit for participants.

Construction
No construction costs were requested in this grant.

19

Indirect Costs

Original Budget 6.53% Rate: $6,861.01

2. Describe any anticipated deviations from your original Year 1 budget that require prior approval from the Department (see EDGAR 34 CFR 74.25 and 80.30), if applicable, including changes in key personnel, level of effort, or line item modifications exceeding the allowable 10 percent administrative flexibility, or any budget modifications resulting from project objectives or scope changes discussed above.

Key Personnel Changes/Level of Effort

There has been a change in key grant personnel with Julie Pashovich's retirement in June 2022. Stepping into her role after 2 years of working with Julie, Augusta Fisher is now handling the grant tasks Julie had managed for many years. Augusta has a B.A. in Writing and Adolescent to Young Adult Education and had prior experience working with the AT&AEM Center as an office intern from 2017 – 2020. There have been no changes in the level of effort among key personnel.

Line Item Modification

At this time, deviations from the original Year 1 budget include:

a. Due to a change in our fiscal agents' Guidelines for Property Inventory, the original equipment budget was requested to be moved to supplies for the remaining years of the grant. The request was approved by our project officer on April 21, 2022. These funds will still be used as originally specified to purchase braille embossers for local school districts who are approved to receive a local braille production center. The new Property Inventory Guidelines states:

> *"For the purpose of this policy, "equipment" shall mean a unit of furniture or furnishings, or instrument, a machine, an apparatus, or a set of articles which retains its shape and appearance with use, is nonexpendable, costs greater than $5,000 (effective July 1, 2020). to replace and does not lose it identity when incorporated into a more complex unit except computers or related technology."*

b. The amount needed in the Contractual budget changed due to moving from in person trainings to virtual and hybrid training formats.

> We anticipate submitting a budget amendment for the current grant year to move the remaining funds in contractual that are not

20

planned for any activities in that budget line. The funds will be used to support BEST trainings and training participants, which may include on demand tips and tricks videos, maintaining current resources, and additions to the OCALI Lending Library that support BEST grant activities. There are no anticipated changes to project objectives or scope.

We are continuing our professional development trainings online/hybrid and will evaluate Year 5 sessions for best delivery methods that fit participant learning needs.

c. Yearly Indirect Cost adjustments, which in turn change the amount in the Supply budget.

Budget Modifications Resulting from Project Objectives or Scope Changes

There were no changes to project objectives or scope.

3. Projected unobligated balance as of September 30, 2023. Indicate the amount of funds from the approved budget that grantee does not expect to obligate by September 30, 2023.

Grantee expects to obligate all funds from its approved budget by September 30, 2023.

21

	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUDGET INFORMATION NON-CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS	OMB Control Number: 1894-0008 Expiration Date: 08/31/2020

Name of Institution/Organization	Applicants requesting funding for only one year should complete the column under "Project Year 1." Applicants requesting funding for multi-year grants should complete all applicable columns. Please read all instructions before completing form.
Education Service Center of Central Ohio	

SECTION A - BUDGET SUMMARY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FUNDS

Budget Categories	Project Year 1 (a)	Project Year 2 (b)	Project Year 3 (c)	Project Year 4 (d)	Project Year 5 (e)	Total (f)
1. Personnel					0	
2. Fringe Benefits					0	
3. Travel					4,300.00	
4. Equipment					0	
5. Supplies					29,598.99	
6. Contractual					71,170.00	
7. Construction					0	
8. Other					0	
9. Total Direct Costs (lines 1-8)					105,068.99	
10. Indirect Costs 6.53% *Enter Rate Applied ____					6,861.01	
11. Training Stipends					0	
12. Total Costs (lines 9-11)					111,930.00	

*Indirect Cost Information (*To Be Completed by Your Business Office*)**:**

If you are requesting reimbursement for indirect costs on line 10, please answer the following questions:

(1) Do you have an Indirect Cost Rate Agreement approved by the Federal government?   _X_Yes   ___No.

(2) If yes, please provide the following information:
Period Covered by the Indirect Cost Rate Agreement: From: _07/_01/_2022_ To: _6/_30/_2023_ (mm/dd/yyyy)
Approving Federal agency: _X__ED   ____Other (please specify): _____ The Indirect Cost Rate is __6.53_%

(3)   If this is your first Federal grant, and you do not have an approved indirect cost rate agreement, are not a State, Local government or Indian Tribe, and are not funded under a training rate program or a restricted rate program, do you want to use the de minimis rate of 10% of MTDC? ____Yes ____No. If yes, you must comply with the requirements of 2 CFR § 200.414(f).

(4)   If you do not have an approved indirect cost rate agreement, do you want to use the temporary rate of 10% of budgeted salaries and wages? ____Yes ____No. If yes, you must submit a proposed indirect cost rate agreement within 90 days after the date your grant is awarded, as required by 34 CFR § 75.560.

(5) For Restricted Rate Programs (check one) -- Are you using a restricted indirect cost rate that:___ Is included in your approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement? Or ___ Complies with 34 CFR 76.564(c)(2)? The Restricted Indirect Cost Rate is _____%

(6)   For Training Rate Programs (check one) -- Are you using a rate that: __Is based on the training rate of 8 percent of MTDC (See EDGAR § 75.562(c)(4))? Or _X__Is included in your approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, because it is lower than the training rate of 8 percent of MTDC (See EDGAR § 75.562(c)(4)).

Name of Institution/Organization	Applicants requesting funding for only one year should complete the column under "Project Year 1." Applicants requesting funding for multi-year grants should complete all applicable columns. Please read all instructions before completing form.

SECTION B - BUDGET SUMMARY
NON-FEDERAL FUNDS

Budget Categories	Project Year 1 (a)	Project Year 2 (b)	Project Year 3 (c)	Project Year 4 (d)	Project Year 5 (e)	Total (f)
1. Personnel						
2. Fringe Benefits						
3. Travel						
4. Equipment						
5. Supplies						
6. Contractual						
7. Construction						
8. Other						
9. Total Direct Costs (Lines 1-8)						
10. Indirect Costs						
11. Training Stipends						
12. Total Costs (Lines 9-11)						

SECTION B – BUDGET NARRATIVE (see instructions)

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
PR/Award #: H235E190004

Budget Narrative: Braille Excellence for Students and Teachers (BEST) Grant

1. **Summary of actual expenditures obligated from October 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023**

	PY 4 Expenditures as of 3/31/23
Personnel	$0.00
Fringe Benefits	$0.00
Travel/Mail	$3,348.57
Equipment	$0.00
Supplies	$18,898.23
Contractual	$20,910.90
Construction	$0.00
Total Direct Costs	**$43,157.70**
Indirect Costs	$1,373.52
Total Expenditures	**$44,531.22**

2. **Projected expenditures to be obligated from April 1, 2023, to September 30, 2023**

	PY4 Projected Expenditures from 4/1/23 - 9/30/23
Personnel	$0.00
Fringe Benefits	$0.00
Travel/Mail	$951.43
Equipment	$0.00

Supplies	$10,700.76
Contractual	$38,135.00
Construction	$0.00
Budget Amendment	$12,124.00
Total Direct Costs	**$61,911.19**
Indirect Costs	$5,487.49
Total Projected Expenditures	**$67,398.68**

Forty percent (40%) of the funds allocated during year four of the grant have been expended. We have completed 11 training events. There are 5 more training events scheduled before the end of the grant year. Two Local Braille Production Centers (LBPC) have been set up and trained by BEST Technical Assistance Consultants, with funds available to establish one more this project year. One video series is planned and scheduled to be completed by September 2023. BEST Technical Assistance Consultants will continue to provide email, phone and virtual technical assistance and support until the end of the grant cycle. The following provides an explanation of the funds allocated per budget category, those funds already expended through March 31, 2023, and the projected remaining expenditures that will occur April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

Personnel and Fringe

No personnel and fringe costs were requested for this grant.

Mail/Travel

Estimated Mail/Travel Budget $4,300
Expended: $3,348.57
Remaining: $951.43

The remaining $951.43 expenses are budgeted for shipping the BEST computer lab and materials to participants for the following trainings: Introduction to Music Braille, and three summer Braille courses. Additionally, when the anticipated third Local Braille Production Center is established in the remaining quarters of the grant, braille paper will be shipped to that center. These funds will be allocated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

Equipment

Original Equipment Budget $0.00
Expended: $0.00
Remaining: $0.00

Supplies

Original Supply Budget: $29,010.54
Funds moved from IDC change: $588.45
Adjusted Budget: $29,598.99
Expended: $18,898.23
Remaining: $10,700.76

The remaining $10,112.31 is budgeted to purchase the following: software, materials, and an embosser for the third anticipated LBPC setup, and materials to support BEST trainings and technical assistance. These funds will be allocated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

Contractual

Original Contractual Budget $71,170.00
Expended $20,910.90
Remaining $50,259.10

Of the remaining $50,259.10, $38,135.00 of the funds are budgeted to implement the following activities and will be allocated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

Activity	Funds
College credits for braille course participants	$7,200.00
Instructor costs for Summer Braille courses (3)	$7,000.00
Consultant costs for providing TA to braille production centers	$17,940.00
Video series development, web content, IST services	$495.00
Remaining external evaluator costs	$5,500.00
Total	**$38,135.00**

The additional $12,124.00 will be submitted in a budget amendment request to the RSA Project Manager for approval to move those funds from Contractual to Supplies for use to support the BEST Braille Music training session, additions of the braille music software and hardware to the OCALI Lending Library for training participants trials of the software/hardware, and replacement of a scanner for the AT&AEM Braille Production Center. The following are estimates of how the remaining $12,124.00 will be allocated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023:

Item	Funds
GOODFEEL music braille software for music braille kit	$1,595.00
Brailliant display for music braille kit	$3,695.00
Laptop for music braille kit (Windows 10, 64 bit)	$899.00
JAWS (perpetual license) for music braille laptop	$1,845.00
Feel the Beat for 15 Introduction to Music Braille training participants	$1,215.00
Scanner for AT&AEM braille production center (replacement)	$2,875.00
Total	**$12,124.00**

Construction

No construction costs were requested in this grant.

Indirect Costs

Original Budget 7.13% Rate: $7,449.46

Budget Amendment 10.21.22: IDC Changed to 6.53%: $6,861.01

Budget Amendment - Moved Funds to Supplies: $588.45

Funds Expended: $1,373.52

Remaining: $5,487.49

We anticipate that all funds in these categories will be expended and/or obligated by September 30, 2023. We intend to continue our scheduled learning opportunities through online learning options by coordinating events such as synchronous online and hybrid courses, virtual technical assistance and training to braille production sites and educators who are serving students who use braille.

educational service center
of Central Ohio

April 18, 2023

The Educational Service Center of Central Ohio (ESCCO) affirms that we are aware of Federal and state data security and student privacy regulations. We have provided links to our Board Policies, Administrative Guidelines as well as our employee handbook which demonstrate such understandings. Additionally the ESCCO requires all employees to undergo Data Security, HIPAA and FERPA trainings on an annual basis.

https://go.boarddocs.com/oh/escco/Board.nsf/Public

https://www.escco.org/Downloads/ESC%20Handbook%20042222.pdf?v=35

David A. Varda Treasurer/CFO
Educational Service Center of Central Ohio

Project Narrative - Signed 524B Coversheet

Title : Signed 524B Coversheet

Attachment:

File :
   1 **H235E190004_Cover_Sheet_Signed_YR4.pdf**

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report
Cover Sheet (ED 524B)

Check only one box per
Program Office instructions.

[X] **Annual**   [ ] **Final**
Performance   **Performance**
Report   **Report**

General Information

1. PR/Award #: H235E190004   2. Grantee NCES ID#: 3904693
(Block 5 of the Grant Award Notification - 11 Characters.)   *(See instructions. Up to 12 Characters.)*

3. Project Title: Braille Excellence for Students and Teachers (BEST)
(Enter the same title as on the approved application.)

4. Grantee Name: FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
(Block 1 of the Grant Award Notification.)

5. Grantee Address:
(See instructions.)

Street: 2080 CITYGATE DR

City: COLUMBUS

State: OH Zip: 43219 Zip+4: 3591

6. Project Director:
(See instructions.)

First Name:Janet   Last Name:Rogers   Title:AT&AEM Center Program Director
Phone #: 6144100736   Fax #: 6142621070   Email Address: jan_rogers@ocali.org

Reporting Period Information *(See instructions.)*

7. Reporting Period: From: 10/01/2022 To: 03/31/2023
(mm/dd/yyyy)

Budget Expenditures *(To be completed by your Business Office. See instructions. Also see Section B.)*

8. Budget Expenditures:

	Federal Grant Funds	**Non-Federal Funds** **(Match/Cost Share)**
a. Previous Budget Period	111,704.65	0
b. Current Budget Period	44,531.22	0
c. Entire Project Period *(For Final Performance Reports only)*		

Indirect Cost Information *(To be completed by your Business Office. See instructions.)*

9. Indirect Costs

a.   Are you claiming indirect costs under this grant?
If yes, please indicate which of the following   ● Yes ○ No
applies to your grant?

b.   The grantee has an Indirect Cost Rate   ● Yes ○ No
Agreement approved by the Federal
Government:

The period covered by the Indirect Cost Rate Agreement is : From: 10/01/2022 To:09/30/2023
(mm/dd/yyyy)

The approving Federal agency   ● ED ○   *(Please*
is :   Other   *specify):*

The Indirect Cost Rate is : 6.53
%

Type of Rate   ○ Provisional   *(Please*
(For Final Performance Reports   ○ Final ○   *specify):*
Only):   Other

c.   The grantee is not a State, local government, or
Indian tribe, and is using the de minimus rate   ○ Yes ○ No
of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC) in
compliance with 2 CFR 200.414(f)

d.   The grantee is funded under a Restricted Rate Program and is you using a restricted indirect cost
rate that either :

● Is included in your approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement ○ Complies with 34 CFR
76.564(c)(2)?

e.   The grantee is funded under a Training Rate Program and:

○ Is recovering indirect cost using 8 percent of MTDC in compliance with 34 CFR 75.562(c)(2)
○ Is recovering indirect costs using its actual negotiated indirect cost rate reflected in 9(b)

Human Subjects (Annual Institutional Review Board (IRB) Certification) *(See instructions.)*

10. Is the annual certification of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval attached? ○ Yes ○ No ● N/A

Data Privacy and Security Measures Certification *(See instructions.)*

11. Is a statement affirming that you are aware of federal and state data security and student privacy regulations included, with supporting documentation attached? ● Yes ○ No ○ N/A

Performance Measures Status and Certification *(See instructions.)*

12. Performance Measures Status

      a. Are complete data on performance measures for the current budget period included in the Project Status Chart? ● Yes ○ No

      b. If no, when will the data be available and submitted to the Department? (mm/dd/yyyy)

13. By signing this report, I certify to the best of my knowledge and belief that the report is true, complete, and accurate and the expenditures, disbursements, and cash receipts are for the purposes and objectives set forth in the terms and conditions of the Federal award. I am aware that any false, fictitious, or fraudulent information, or the omission of any material fact, may subject me to criminal, civil or administrative penalties for fraud, false statements, false claims or otherwise. (U.S. Code Title 18, Section 1001 and Title 31, Sections 3729-3730 and 3801-33812).Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge and belief, all data in this performance report are true, complete, and correct and the report fully discloses all known weaknesses concerning the accuracy, reliability, and completeness of data reported.

Name of Authorized Representative: David Varda	Title: Treasurer, CFO
Signature: *David Varda*	Date: April 24, 2023

Grant Performance Report (ED 524B) Executive Summary Attachment:
Title :   File :

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report
Cover Sheet (ED 524B)

Check only one box per
Program Office instructions.

[X] **Annual**   [ ] **Final**
Performance   **Performance**
Report   **Report**

General Information

1. PR/Award #: H235E190004   2. Grantee NCES ID#: 3904693
(Block 5 of the Grant Award Notification - 11 Characters.)   *(See instructions. Up to 12 Characters.)*

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(Enter the same title as on the approved application.)

4. Grantee Name: FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
(Block 1 of the Grant Award Notification.)

5. Grantee Address:
(See instructions.)

Street: 2080 CITYGATE DR

City: COLUMBUS

State: OH Zip: 43219 Zip+4: 3591

6. Project Director:
(See instructions.)

First Name:Janet   Last Name:Rogers   Title:AT&AEM Center Program Director

Phone #: 6144100736   Fax #: 6142621070   Email Address: jan_rogers@ocali.org

Reporting Period Information *(See instructions.)*

7. Reporting Period: From: 10/01/2022 To: 03/31/2023
(mm/dd/yyyy)

Budget Expenditures *(To be completed by your Business Office. See instructions. Also see Section B.)*

8. Budget Expenditures:

	Federal Grant Funds	**Non-Federal Funds** *(Match/Cost Share)*
a. Previous Budget Period	111,704	0
b. Current Budget Period	44,531	0
c. Entire Project Period *(For Final Performance Reports only)*		

Indirect Cost Information *(To be completed by your Business Office. See instructions.)*

9. Indirect Costs

a. Are you claiming indirect costs under this grant?
If yes, please indicate which of the following applies to your grant?   ● Yes ○ No

b. The grantee has an Indirect Cost Rate Agreement approved by the Federal Government: ● Yes ○ No

The period covered by the Indirect Cost Rate Agreement is : From: 10/01/2022 To:09/30/2023 (mm/dd/yyyy)

The approving Federal agency is :   ● ED ○ Other   *(Please specify):*

The Indirect Cost Rate is : 6.53 %

Type of Rate
(For Final Performance Reports Only):   ○ Provisional ○ Final ○ Other   *(Please specify):*

c. The grantee is not a State, local government, or Indian tribe, and is using the de minimus rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC) in compliance with 2 CFR 200.414(f)   ○ Yes ○ No

d. The grantee is funded under a Restricted Rate Program and is you using a restricted indirect cost rate that either :

● Is included in your approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement ○ Complies with 34 CFR 76.564(c)(2)?

e. The grantee is funded under a Training Rate Program and:

○ Is recovering indirect cost using 8 percent of MTDC in compliance with 34 CFR 75.562(c)(2)

○ Is recovering indirect costs using its actual negotiated indirect cost rate reflected in 9(b)

Human Subjects (Annual Institutional Review Board (IRB) Certification) *(See instructions.)*

10. Is the annual certification of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval attached? ○ Yes ○ No ● N/A

Data Privacy and Security Measures Certification *(See instructions.)*

11. Is a statement affirming that you are aware of federal and state data security and student privacy regulations included, with supporting documentation attached? ● Yes ○ No ○ N/A

Performance Measures Status and Certification *(See instructions.)*

12. Performance Measures Status

      a. Are complete data on performance measures for the current budget period included in the Project Status Chart? ● Yes ○ No

      b. If no, when will the data be available and submitted to the Department? (mm/dd/yyyy)

13. By signing this report, I certify to the best of my knowledge and belief that the report is true, complete, and accurate and the expenditures, disbursements, and cash receipts are for the purposes and objectives set forth in the terms and conditions of the Federal award. I am aware that any false, fictitious, or fraudulent information, or the omission of any material fact, may subject me to criminal, civil or administrative penalties for fraud, false statements, false claims or otherwise. (U.S. Code Title 18, Section 1001 and Title 31, Sections 3729-3730 and 3801-33812).Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge and belief, all data in this performance report are true, complete, and correct and the report fully discloses all known weaknesses concerning the accuracy, reliability, and completeness of data reported.

Name of Authorized Representative: David Varda	Title: Treasurer, CFO
Signature:	Date:

Grant Performance Report (ED 524B) Executive Summary Attachment:
Title :   File :

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Project Status Chart

PR/Award #: H235E190004

SECTION A - Project Objectives Information and Related Performance Measures Data (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

1 . **Project Objective** [ ] Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

1.1 Improve statewide equity in the distribution of high-quality training to preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessional, and transcribers to support student proficiency in using braille for scientific and mathematical notation, to access STEM.

Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
1.a Number of participants in training sessions.	GPRA	35	/		23	/	
1.b Number of participants who complete the training	GPRA	35	/		23	/	
1.c Number of participant in training sessions for Appalachian and rural regions.	GPRA	5	/		2	/	
1.d Number of braille STEM sessions completed.	PROGRAM	3	/		4	/	
1.e Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100
1.f Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100
1.g Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

Seven STEM training sessions were planned for this objective. Four have been completed, BrailleNote with KeyMath, Producing Tactile Graphics on the Juliet 120, Using the Tactipad, and Exploring the T3 Tablet (1.d). Basic Nemeth is scheduled for June 13th – 27th, Advanced Nemeth is scheduled for June 15th – 29th. Registration for those courses is now open. Given that 23 participants have already engaged in trainings it is likely we will exceed our targets for number of participants who complete the trainings with the additional 19 currently registered participants for the future trainings (1.a and 1.b). STEM Braille Strategies was cancelled due to low registration. We continue to market aggressively and engage participants from rural and Appalachian regions of the state (1.c). For project measures of quality, relevance, and usefulness, 100% trainings have equaled or exceeded a measure of 6 on a scale from 2-8 per participant evaluation (1.e, 1.f, 1.g).

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Project Status Chart

PR/Award #: H235E190004

SECTION A - Project Objectives Information and Related Performance Measures Data (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

2 . **Project Objective**   [ ] Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

1.2 Improve statewide equity in the distribution of high-quality training to preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and transcribers to support student proficiency in braille literacy for reading and writing.

Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
2.a Number of participants in training sessions.	GPRA	45	/		27	/	
2.b Number of participants who complete the training.	GPRA	45	/		27	/	
2.c Number of participants in training sessions from Appalachian and rural regions.	GPRA	10	/		0	/	
2.d Number of braille reading and writing sessions completed.	PROGRAM	4	/		2	/	
2.e Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100
2.f Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100
2.g Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

Four training sessions were planned for this objective. Two are completed with 27 participants attending.Two additional sessions are scheduled for the summer. Basic Braille is scheduled to begin June 13, 2023 and Introduction to Braille Music is scheduled for summer of 2023 (2.d). Registration for Basic Braille is already open with 7 participants registered to date and Introduction to Braille Music will open soon (2.a and 2.b). We continue to market aggressively and engage participants from rural and Appalachian regions of the state (2.c). For project measures of quality, relevance, and usefulness, 100% of the trainings have equaled or exceeded a measure of 6 on a scale from 2-8 per participant evaluation (2.e, 2.f, 2.g).

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Project Status Chart

PR/Award #: H235E190004

SECTION A - Project Objectives Information and Related Performance Measures Data (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

3 . **Project Objective**   [ ] Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

2.1 Provide high-quality training to preservice and in-service educators, paraprofessionals, and transcribers to understand the value of, and develop competencies in, producing accessible source documents for the purpose of creating braille.

Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
3.a Number of participants in training sessions.	GPRA	15	/		14	/	
3.b Number of participants who complete the training.	GPRA	15	/		13	/	
3.c Number of participants in training sessions from Appalachian and rural regions.	GPRA	5	/		9	/	
3.d Number of sessions completed.	PROGRAM	2	/		3	/	
3.e Percent of participants who can meet a mastery level post-test measure.	PROJECT		85 / 100	85		100 / 100	100
3.f Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100
3.h Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	GPRA		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

Three trainings were planned for this objective, which included Creating Accessible PDF Documents, Using Macros and Templates to Produce LP, Braille and Electronic Text, and Scanning for Braille, Large Print, and Electronic Text. These three trainings were broken into multiple shorter sessions to accommodate the online training delivery mode. All three trainings have been completed (3.d). While the target of 15 participants was not met this year, with the overall 5-yr total target being 75 participants completing the training sessions in this objective by the end of the grant, we have exceeded that target with 95 participants including those from this year (3.a, 3.b). We continue to market aggressively and engage participants from rural and Appalachian regions of the state (3.c). Participants who met mastery level (85%) on a post test (3.e) was 100%. For project measures of quality, relevance, and usefulness, 100% of the trainings have equaled or exceeded a measure of 6 on a scale from 2-8 per participant evaluation (3.f, 3.g, 3.h).

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Project Status Chart

PR/Award #: H235E190004

SECTION A - Project Objectives Information and Related Performance Measures Data (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

4 . **Project Objective**   [ ] Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

2.2 Increase ability of educators and others who support braille users to efficiently and effectively locate ready-made braille and/or use non-visual technologies to provide for the braille needs of persons with blindness

Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
4.a Number of participants in training sessions.	GPRA	100	/		443	/	
4.b Number of participants who complete the training.	GPRA	100	/		443	/	
4.c Number of participants in training sessions from Appalachian and rural regions.	GPRA	20	/		5	/	
4.d Number of sessions completed.	PROGRAM	3	/		3	/	
4.e Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100
4.f Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100
4.g Percent of trainings that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		100 / 100	100
4.h Number of participants who obtained positions where braille skills are needed.	GPRA	2	/		0	/	

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

For this objective, four activities were planned (exceeding the target of 3 trainings) with three activities completed. The activities completed were Duxbury Braille Translation (DBT) software, the Braille AT forum at OCALICONLINE, and a VI/Braille AT trainings for OSU TVI students. The remaining scheduled activity is a combined VI/Braille AT for Shawnee State University and Kutztown University students in June 2023 (4.d). The number of participants who attended and completed these sessions (443) far exceeded the target of 100. (4.a, 4.b). We continue to market aggressively and engage participants from

rural and Appalachian regions of the state. We are able to track rural and Appalachian participants for all BEST activities with the exception of the OCALICON event (4.c). Currently there is no data on the number of participants who have obtained positions after completing BEST trainings. Both university programs will conclude in summer 2023. We will follow up with the university TVI students who participate in the AT Exploration Day trainings, as well as participants of the Duxbury Braille Translation software training in late summer (4.h). For project measures of quality, relevance, and usefulness, 100% of completed trainings have equaled or exceeded a measure of 6 on a scale from 2-8 per participant evaluation (4.e, 4.f, 4.g).

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Project Status Chart

PR/Award #: H235E190004

SECTION A - Project Objectives Information and Related Performance Measures Data (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

5 . **Project Objective**   [ ] Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

2.3 Increase the pool of braille transcribers available to provide braille to Ohio school districts, businesses, and other agencies that support students and adults with braille needs.

Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
5.a Number of participants engaged in technical assistance (TA) sessions.	GPRA	15	/		64	/	
5.b Number of participants from rural and Appalachian areas engaged in TA sessions.	GPRA	3	/		7	/	
5.c Number of participants who complete the NLS course.	GPRA	2	/		0	/	
5.d Number of participants who obtain positions where braille skills are needed.	GPRA	1	/		0	/	
5.e Number of TA hours provided.	PROJECT	75	/		64	/	

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

BEST collects data in 3 categories of TA, with 64 participants involved in sessions for a total of 63.83 hours (5.e). Many participants were involved in more than a single TA session, therefore unique participants were less than the 64 reported participants. TA is reported in the following categories (5.a): 1) TA to school districts/agencies producing braille were provided for 49.33 TA hours. 2) TA to Grafton Braille Service Center (GBSC) which at this time no TA has been requested. And, 3) TA to braille transcriber candidates: 14.5 TA hours have been provided to 3 participants for their NLS certification. 1 participant received TA but is no longer working on certification, 2 are continuing to work toward the certification and are expected to complete their manuscripts during the next two quarters of the grant (5.c). Of the 64 participants, 7 were from rural/Appalachian counties of Ohio. (5.b) To date, we are unaware of anyone who has obtained a position as a transcriber this grant year as a result receiving general TA or TA for NLS certification. Often participants are already in transcribers positions but have been trained on the job and now desire to pursue formal certification for the braille transcribing work they are already doing. (5.d).

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Project Status Chart

PR/Award #: H235E190004

SECTION A - Project Objectives Information and Related Performance Measures Data (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

6 . **Project Objective**   [ ] Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

2.4 Expand braille production capacities within local school districts and/or vocational and technical education centers.

Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
6a Number of Local Braille Production Centers (LBPCs) set up.	PROJECT	3	/		2	/	

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

An established application process was used to select two high-need school districts/agencies for Local Braille Production Centers (LBPC). The two new LBPC sites, Jackson-Milton Local SD, and South Point Local SD, have been set up and staff have been trained on the new software and equipment. Both centers set up this year were in rural/Appalachian counties of Ohio. The application deadline has been extended to offer one more LBPC to an Ohio school district in need.

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Project Status Chart

PR/Award #: H235E190004

SECTION A - Project Objectives Information and Related Performance Measures Data (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)

7 . **Project Objective**   [ ] Check if this is a status update for the previous budget period.

3.1 Develop and improve access to a range of technical assistance (TA) and training materials which can support implementation of braille skills learned from training activities.

Performance Measure	Measure Type	Quantitative Data					
		Target			Actual Performance Data		
		Raw Number	Ratio	%	Raw Number	Ratio	%
7.a Number of participants utilizing resources.	GPRA	15	/		305	/	
7.b Number of participants utilizing resources from rural or Appalachian areas	GPRA	5	/		2	/	
7.c Number of resources developed at the close of the grant project.	PROGRAM	9	/		27	/	
7.d Percent of resources that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of quality with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high) as measured by a vetting panel.	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		0 / 100	0
7.e Percent of resources that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of relevance with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high) as measured by a vetting panel.	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		0 / 100	0
7.f Percent of resources that equal or exceed a 6 on a measure of usefulness with a range from 2 (low) to 8 (high) as measured by a vetting panel.	PROJECT		90 / 100	90		0 / 100	0

Explanation of Progress (Include Qualitative Data and Data Collection Information)

The BEST Grant Professional Learning Community (https://ataem.org/best-2019-2024/BESTPLC) launched in February of 2022 and continues to be available to participants in BEST trainings this year. This replaced the Peer-to-Peer network. It continues to offer an all-access place for BEST training resources, announcements, and support as well as a place to network with other educators who are serving the blind and visually impaired. To promote and improve access to TA and training materials, we have continued to promote the BEST website with featured Tips and Tricks resource videos to provide training participants with additional resources and follow-up potential. Additionally, synchronous trainings are recorded and made available to registered participants through the virtual platform. Materials and handouts related to the synchronous trainings are also posted with the recordings. The total number of participants calculated as utilizing resources was 305, made up from the 26 Professional Learning Community (PLC) participants (7.a.), the 58 times the TA Portal was accessed, and the 221 views of the Tips and Tricks video resources collected from the BrightCove video hosting platform (7.b.). Of the participants who utilized these resources, 2 from the PLC were identified as Rural/Appalachian participants. Unique video views cannot be gathered through the current system, but we are able to report that in addition to 221 views, watch time for the videos totaled 8.95 hours, or 537.25 minutes, between October 1st, 2022 and March 31st, 2023. To date, over four project years, 27 products have been developed. These products include: 1 BEST website, 1 professional learning community, 1 TA system, 1 resource repository, and Tips and Tricks videos including, Creating Accessible Materials for Compatibility with Screen Readers Series (3); Trouble Shooting for LBPCs Series (8); Duxbury Braille Translation Software Series (3); Math Braille Conversion Series (6); Templates and Macros Series (2); and Perky Duck Series (4) . The 3 Duxbury Braille Translation Software videos appear within the Trouble Shooting for LBPC's series, so these video resources were only counted once in this total (7.c.). The

vetting panel to review the Tips and Tricks Videos developed in this grant year is currently being established. We anticipate obtaining 5 participants per video with each participant vetting no more than two different resources. The vetting survey completed by participants will be finished by the end of this grant year, therefore there is no data to report currently (7.d, 7.e, and 7.f).

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Project Status Chart

PR/Award #: **H235E190004**

SECTION B - Budget Information (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)
Title : H235E190004 Budget_and_Budget_Narrative
File : **H235E190004_Budget_and_Budget_Narrative_H235E190004.pdf**
SECTION C - Additional Information (See Instructions. Use as many pages as necessary.)
Title : H235E190004 Section C Additional Information
File : **H235E190004_Section_C_Additional_Information.pdf**

<div align="center">

Section C. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

AWARD NUMBER: H235E190004

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Grant Partners

The following grant partners continue to provide expertise and support in grant project planning and development by serving on the BEST Advisory Team which meets four times a year. All grant activities and resources are vetted through the Advisory Team. Our partners represent a wide range of agencies including university programs, state disability agencies, the state education agency, the state school for the blind, and other agencies that support people who are blind/VI. The specific list of collaborating agencies is as follows: American Council of the Blind of Ohio (ACBO), Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials Center (AT&AEM Center), Ohio State School for the Blind (OSSB), Shawnee State University (TVI Consortium Project), Ohio State University (OSU), Ohio Center for Deaf Blind Education (OCDBE), Ohio Department of Education - Office for Exceptional Children (ODE, OEC), Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), and Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness at OCALI.

External Evaluation Activities

Our continued goal is to meet district needs with a plan to do so through surveying training and resource needs through the evaluations provided at each BEST training, vetting our new products by experts and users in the field, seeking input from the BEST Advisory team, and annually reviewing results of the longitudinal survey of BEST participants conducted by WordFarmers the BEST external evaluator.

BEST Longitudinal Study

The purpose of the BEST longitudinal study is to investigate how BEST project participants make use of courses and technical assistance to obtain the skills and expertise needed to fulfill current job responsibilities and to achieve career objectives and to investigate project participants' perceptions of the impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness of BEST professional development sessions and technical assistance, including the alignment between participants' perceptions and BEST project goals. Following is the complete Year 3 report of study results.

1

Longitudinal Study of the Use and Outcomes of BEST Training and Technical Assistance Services

BEST Grant Cycle Year 3 Report

Report Submitted by Leslie Clifton
WordFarmers Associates
Submitted April 21, 2023

The BEST project (Braille Excellence for Students and Teachers) provides professional development and technical assistance to build local capacity for those serving braille users throughout the state of Ohio. The project focuses on braille literacy, instruction, materials, and technology, with special emphasis on the needs of braille users in rural, Appalachian, and resource-poor communities. This report is part of WordFarmers Associates' third-party evaluation of the BEST project. It presents results from the third year's work (Year 3) in a five-year study that tracks a sample of BEST project participants to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which they make use of BEST training courses and technical assistance to meet their professional learning needs and to achieve career-related objectives. The baseline report for Year 1 of the study, which looked at school year 2019-2020 and aligned with Year 1 of the BEST funding cycle, was submitted in February 2021.[1] The report for Year 2 of the study, which looked at school year 2020-2021 and aligned with Year 2 of the BEST funding cycle, was submitted in April 2022. The report for Year 3 of the study, which looked at school year 2021-2022 and aligned with Year 3 of the BEST funding cycle, was submitted in April 2023. Appendix A presents information on BEST project goals.

Background

BEST courses and technical assistance services are available to in-service and pre-service educators in Ohio. In response to the coronavirus pandemic that began during Year 1 of the BEST funding cycle (i.e., school year 2019-2020), BEST program courses moved from mostly in-person instruction to primarily remote instruction. During Year 3 (i.e., school year 2021-2022), BEST courses continued to use remote instruction. BEST technical assistance has always been provided both remotely (i.e., by phone, email, and online) and, less frequently, through in-person, on-site services.

BEST course offerings fall into four general categories: (1) training to read and write braille and to teach braille reading and writing; (2) training to read, write, and teach braille math and other STEM subjects; (3) training to create and develop accessible documents and educational materials; and (4) training to support use of, and access to, accessible and assistive technologies. Foundational courses such as A Touch of Braille: An Introduction to Braille Alphabet and Numbers; Basic Nemeth (math); and BrailleNote Touch with Google are available every year. More specialized courses, such as

2

Advanced Braille; Advanced Nemeth; and MathType and Equatio are offered every other year. Some of the trainings for creating accessible documents, such as Scanning for Braille, Large Print, and Audio, and trainings on accessible and assistive technologies (AT)—such as Duxbury Braille Translation Software—are offered yearly; other such trainings are offered in alternate years. Course schedules (subject to change) for the five years of this BEST grant funding cycle can be viewed on the BEST project website.

BEST technical assistance is available to program participants and to the Ohio State School for the Blind (OSSB), Assistive Technology & Accessible Educational Materials Center (AT&AEM), Grafton Braille Service Center, and other local braille production centers (LBPCs) upon request.

Purpose

This study has two aims. The first is to investigate how BEST project participants make use of courses and technical assistance to obtain the skills and expertise needed to fulfill current job responsibilities and to achieve career objectives. This aim implicates four major concerns:

1. Reasons that new and long-term BEST participants make use of BEST's courses and technical assistance services;
2. Benefits that participants obtain from the BEST courses and technical assistance services with which they engage;
3. Ways in which participants make use of what they've learned through BEST courses and technical assistance; and
4. Ways in which BEST trainings and/or technical assistance contribute to participants' professional advancement, work-related goals, and professional objectives.

The study's second aim is to investigate project participants' perceptions of the impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness of BEST professional development sessions and technical assistance, including the alignment between participants' perceptions and BEST project goals. This line of investigation addresses several distinct issues:

a. Who participates in BEST trainings and technical assistance services;
b. Who, besides participants, benefits from the courses and technical assistance provided through the BEST project;
c. Participants' perceptions of the quality, relevance, and usefulness of BEST courses and technical assistance;
d. Changes to BEST project trainings and services that might enhance participants' ability to fulfill their professional learning needs and career objectives; and
e. How participants' perceptions align with BEST project goals.

Methods

The five-year study uses both quantitative and qualitative data collected through annual interviews with a sample of BEST clients, hereafter referred to as the *interviewees*, to create longitudinal case studies of interviewees. This section describes the related instrument development, sample, data collection, and data analysis.

Instrument Development

The team developed a structured interview protocol for the baseline year of the study. The protocol consisted of nine questions pertaining to interviewees' demographic backgrounds and historical involvement with BEST project services, as well as 17 additional questions relating to their involvement with the project from their first engagement with BEST project services up until the end of Grant Cycle Year 1 (i.e., the 2019-2020 school year). For the second year, the team streamlined the protocol to collect updated demographic data and information about their BEST experiences through Grant Cycle Year 2 (i.e., school year 2020-2021). Additionally, the team created an interview protocol that collected new interviewees' demographic backgrounds and information about their historical engagement with BEST project services from their first involvement through Grant Cycle Year 2. For Year 3, the team used a single streamlined interview protocol to collect updated demographic data from all interviewees and information about their BEST experiences through Grant Cycle Year 3 (i.e., school year 2021-2022). Interview questions for Grant Cycle Year 3 are listed in Appendix B.

Study Sample

The study sample for Year 1 (2019-2020) consisted of six interviewees from a total of 42 candidates who had been recruited by email from two sources: (1) a spreadsheet of all Project Year 1 BEST participants and (2) a list of candidates nominated by BEST staff. These six interviewees were re-contacted in Fall 2021 to arrange Year 2 (2020-2021) interviews; however, only four of the six interviewees responded. Due to the attrition of two interviewees from the original study sample (n=6)—which was already small, possibly attributable to circumstances of the pandemic—the evaluation team decided to recruit additional interviewees to join the study for its remaining years. Six new interviewees were recruited from a total of 40 candidates. The addition of these new interviewees in Year 2 brought the total of sample members to ten. All ten of the interviewees returned for Year 3 (2021-2022) of the study.

Data Collection

Each of the ten interviewees (four returning from Years 1 and 2, and six returning from Year 2) participated in a Zoom interview conducted during Fall 2022. These interviews addressed interviewees' demographics, their professional histories, and their experiences through Year 3 of the BEST funding cycle (school year 2021-2022). An evaluator took written notes and recorded the interviews. Verbatim transcripts were created, and the recorded video footage deleted (not needed by the study).

4

Data Analysis

Data analysis for Year 3 of the study followed a similar process as for Year 1 and Year 2. After the interviews had been completed and transcribed, an evaluator began the process of listening to the recordings, reading the interview notes and transcripts, and coding interview data using predetermined (i.e., deductive) codes. At this time, the quantitative and demographic data solicited in the interviews were transferred to a separate document.

During a second review of transcript data, the evaluator categorized passages according to how they were coded. On the third review, the researcher added new (i.e., inductive) codes to manage comments that did not fit well into the deductive categories. After coding the responses, the evaluator grouped codes together based on patterns (also called themes) observed in the data. This process helped make sense of participants' responses.

The analysis grouped together questions that related to each aim. Then it sorted interviewee responses to each question thematically and noted patterns or themes in the data *across questions*, where relevant.

In the Year 3 Report, as in the Year 2 Report, themes are presented in narrative format, listed by frequency of representation in the analysis, from most to least frequent. Illustrative quotes from the transcripts are included in the narrative discussion.

Findings

The findings presented below address the study's two evaluation aims:

To identify how interviewees make use of BEST trainings and technical assistance to meet their respective professional learning needs and to achieve career objectives; and To investigate interviewees' perceptions of the impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness of BEST courses and technical assistance, and how these align with BEST project goals.

This section first reports findings about the interviewees. Then, for each aim, it reports the themes that emerged from the analysis of specific interview questions. To provide additional context for certain responses, comments from interviewees have been incorporated and edited for clarity and brevity.

Comparison of Year 1 with Year 2 and Year 3 findings requires caution: only four of the ten Year 1 interviewees are members across all three years of the study. As a result, differences between Year 1 findings and those for Year 2 and Year 3 should not be attributed to *changes* in BEST project services. To compare Year 2 with Year 3, where the study sample remained constant, any differences can be more accurately attributed to changes in BEST project services.

Interviewees

Of the ten Year 3 interviewees, four have been members of the study since Year 1 and six have been members since Year 2. Five were employed at Ohio public schools, three at ESCs, one at a residential school, and one at a university during the 2021-2022 school year. Job titles were braille assistant/braille parapro (n=2), certified braillist/transcriber (n=2), TVI (n=2), TVI/COMS (n=1), IS (n=1), assistive technology teacher (n=1), and visual learning classroom aide (n=1).

The communities in which the interviewees worked were located in southern Ohio, southwest Ohio, western Ohio, northwest Ohio, northeast Ohio, and central Ohio. Workplace locales ranged from rural to urban, with the majority being suburban.

The self-described job responsibilities of interviewees included providing or assisting with instruction (n=9 interviewees); supporting or collaborating with related service providers, teachers, or other school personnel (n=9); transcribing and producing accessible materials (braille, large print, tactile, and digital) for students with visual impairments/blindness (n=6); providing or assisting in the use of assistive and accessible technology (n=4); teaching braille (n=3); working with families (n=2); participating in instructional planning, such as IEPs and transitions (n=2); and mentoring new teachers/colleagues (n=2). One interviewee, as of the end of Year 3, had not had any professional experience working with individuals with blindness or visual impairments (n=1).

Interviewees' histories of engagement with BEST services through Year 3 of the study included seven interviewees (n=7) who have had high engagement (i.e., more than four BEST trainings or technical assistance services); two interviewees (n=2) who have had moderate engagement (i.e., three or four trainings or technical assistance services) and one (n=1) who has had low engagement (i.e. two or fewer trainings or technical assistance services).

For one of the interviewees, Year 3 was their second year of engagement with BEST project services; all other interviewees had been engaged with BEST services for three or more years. Demographic data tables are provided in Appendix C.

Evaluation aim #1: How do interviewees make use of BEST courses and technical assistance to obtain the skills and expertise they need to fulfill current job responsibilities and to achieve career objectives?

Responses to the interview questions yielded data that contributed to an understanding of how interviewees use BEST experiences to fulfill job responsibilities and achieve career objectives. Four general themes emerged. They resembled those that emerged in Year 1 and Year 2 of the study:

6

1. Motivation: *What motivates interviewees to engage with BEST project courses/trainings and technical assistance;*
2. Benefit: *How interviewees benefited from the BEST courses and technical assistance services in which they engaged;*
3. Application of Learning: *How interviewees make use of what they have learned through BEST courses and technical assistance;* and
4. Alignment: *The connections interviewees perceive between the trainings and/or technical assistance services they have received and their professional advancement, work goals, and professional objectives.*

Motivation. In Year 3 of the study, the most commonly mentioned motivator for interviewees to continue engagement with BEST courses was learning new skills or technology to meet the needs of new or current students (n=15)[2]. Other frequently mentioned motivators were to fulfill a career-related requirement, such as for certification, obtaining a new job, or keeping a current job (n=5) and wanting to refresh knowledge or skills (n=4). Less frequently cited motivators included getting help with software, equipment, and templates (n=3) and the intrinsic value of learning (n=2). This outcome was similar to that of Year 2 of the study. Examples follow:

> You don't get a student who is as academically advanced as my student is [very often] … so there's a hurry-up-and-learn or hurry-up-and-refresh sort of mentality when these students come along...

> I don't know enough about the technology. I don't know enough about Duxbury. I don't know enough about ABBYY FineReader. Even though Itook a four-day class, I don't know enough.

The base year study (Year 1) surfaced an interesting pattern of engagement with BEST courses in which interviewees repeated courses and trainings that they had already completed. As a result of the frequency of this practice reported in Year 1, the study's evaluation team decided to examine the reasons interviewees repeat courses as a separate sub-theme of the larger themes of motivation and quality. The Year 3 study found that seven of the ten interviewees had repeated already-completed BEST courses: five interviewees whose Year 3 courses included repeats of one or more previously-taken classes and two interviewees whose repeated courses had taken place in prior years. Interviewees noted that they had repeated certain courses once, twice, or even three times. For interviewees who had engaged in the practice of repeating courses, the most frequently cited reason was to acquire new skills (n=7), either to increase professional capacity (n=6) or to keep up with changes in technology and practices (n=1). The second most frequently cited reason was to renew or refresh skills and knowledge (n=3). In Year 2, these two reasons had also been the most frequently cited, but in reverse order of frequency. One interviewee explained why they might need to take a course multiple times:

7

> [You don't learn everything in the course] until you're actually using certain parts of it…. When I took it this time, [the instructor] started talking about…how to change your braille into Spanish…and I was like, "Okay." But when my fourth grader gets into high school, I'll be thinking, "I need to take that class again because I know I can do it, but I don't [remember] how."

Additional discussions of the pattern of repeating BEST courses can be found later in this report.

Regarding engagement with BEST technical assistance, of the ten Year 3 interviewees, one interviewee had no experience with BEST technical assistance (TA). Among the nine interviewees who had engaged with BEST technical assistance in Year 3 or in a previous year, the most frequently cited motivator for seeking TA involved the need for software, templates, or online support (n=11). The second most frequently mentioned motivator was the need for help with equipment, including set-up, configuration, and repair (n=6). This pattern of engagement with TA services was the reverse of the pattern found in Year 2, in which the need for help with equipment was the most frequently cited motivator and the need for software, templates, or online support was the second most frequently mentioned motivator.

> I can call the company that makes the braille embosser. First of all, they make you feel like you're stupid. They're like, "Is it plugged in? Is it on?" …And [the BEST TA provider] never makes you feel like that. So, I always start with him and then, if he can't do it, then I'll call the company…

Benefit. Interviewees were asked what new knowledge or skills ensued from engagement with BEST, from their initial involvement through Year 3. As in Years 1 and 2, most interviewee responses referenced increased proficiency in producing braille, large print, and other accessible materials (n=12). They cited increased capacity in the use of tools, hardware, and software (n=4); new and refreshed skills (n=3); improved accuracy and efficiency in formatting braille (n=3); and knowledge of shortcuts and workarounds that increased productivity (n=2). Examples follow:

> …When you take those classes, you're starting in Word. But then it shows you what it looks like in Duxbury and then it kind of just makes sense like, "Ohhhh, now I know what that's supposed to look like," as opposed to, "I don't know if this is right or not."

> That was the first time I had really used [the Juliet embosser]. I mean I took [a BEST] class in Year 2, but [until Year 3] I never got to touch the [embosser].

8

Year 3 interviewees also noted their increased ability to meet student needs (n=7), which they attributed to greater familiarity with AT hardware and applications used by their students (n=2); "tricks" and methods for using and teaching braille (n=2); better understanding of how students with visual impairments interact with hardware, software, and learning materials (n=1); exchanging ideas with colleagues (n=1); and development of more effective teaching strategies (n=1). Examples follow:

> I'm able to produce materials for students that are better for them than just enlarging things on a copier or zooming in to see things on a computer. They're completely formatted to the individualized need of the child. That, I wasn't able to do before.

> BEST brings together TVIs so we can learn from each other and provides resources for us to learn.

Although the new learnings and skills cited by Year 3 interviewees were similar to those cited in Year 2, the overall quantity of citations (n=19) was notably less than in Year 2 (n=27). Factors that might account for the decreased number of citations include: (1) six new interviewees in Year 2 who likely had a lot of new information to report; (2) Year 3 interviewees who were careful not to cite something they might have mentioned in a previous study year; and "survey fatigue"—each year's survey questions are similar and somewhat repetitive.

Interviewees were asked how their BEST experiences through Year 3 affected their ability to *provide students with braille materials and other accessible materials*. Their responses most frequently mentioned acquiring skills to use equipment, tools, and software to produce braille and other accessible materials efficiently and accurately (n=16). These skills included the ability to format increasingly specialized braille materials (e.g., graphs and tables; STEM; Spanish) and the expertise to undertake more complex large print and graphics projects (n=8). Interviewees' responses also cited increased productivity and accuracy (n=4), greater ability to use hardware and software (n=3), and experience with AT devices and programs (n=1). Eleven interviewee responses credited BEST technical assistance with supporting their production of braille and other accessible materials (n=11), including providing advice and instructions regarding hardware and software (n=8), support for challenging projects (n=2), and custom templates (n=1).

> I feel like I'm better able to create materials for my braille students. I'm thinking more about how to format them so they make sense to someone who is visually impaired instead of…what looks right to me.

Application. Interviewees were asked what they have learned through their engagement with BEST courses and technical assistance that they consider to be very useful. Interviewee responses most frequently mentioned the skills to produce braille

9

materials (n=9). Additionally, responses cited skills to produce large print materials and graphics (n=4); reading, writing and teaching braille (n=3); "insider" tips and workarounds (n=3); and types and usage of AT devices, hardware and software (n=2).

> One of the biggest things is that you really need to read braille…visually because you can…create the materials and send [them] to your embosser, but that doesn't mean it's been done correctly. So, a lot of times…I'm checking through [materials] and I see mistakes.

Interviewees were also asked how they had used—and how they anticipated using in the future—specific things they had learned over the entire course of their BEST involvement, from their first course up through Year 3. Eighteen interviewee responses (n=18) referenced providing braille, large print, and other accessible materials to teachers and students. Five responses (n=5) mentioned teaching students—or helping others teach—braille, the use of AT, and academic subject matter. Two responses (n=2) predicted future opportunities to teach or transcribe braille. One response (n=1) mentioned mentoring new teachers and helping colleagues with braille and transcribing.

> All these little tips that I have learned over the last year, it would be nice if I could put them down and share them with other people [who will be providing braille materials to students like mine]….They would need what I had learned and I thought…if I put it all down in one document, that would be really helpful to the people here.

Year 3 interviewee responses pertaining to how interviewees have used, and anticipate continuing to use, knowledge and skills acquired through BEST trainings and technical assistance specifically to provide students with braille materials and other accessible materials were sorted thematically across questions. Eighteen interviewee responses cited activities related to producing, or improving the production of, braille and other accessible materials (n=18). Two responses mentioned formatting materials for AT devices and helping students access and interact with the materials (n=2). One response mentioned obtaining software for formatting (n=1).

> [My students] are going to see [Braille that] …is formatted across the board the way it's always done everywhere, and I need to make sure that they're getting used to seeing it that way.

Alignment. In answering several questions about their use of BEST learnings, some interviewees gave responses that connected what they learned to improved job-related capacity. Eleven responses cited interviewees' increased capacity to provide students with high-quality accessible materials (n=11) and four responses mentioned increased

10

capacity to teach or assist with teaching students (n=4). Two responses mentioned greater ability to help teachers, new colleagues, and others work effectively with blind and VI students (n=2). One response mentioned the ability to help students with devices and technology (n=1) and one response noted increased understanding of students' needs (n=1).

Year 3 interviewees were asked how the BEST trainings and technical assistance services with which they engaged through Year 3 have contributed to meeting their work-related goals and to facilitating their professional advancement. Eight responses cited BEST experiences for qualifying or preparing interviewees to obtain their current jobs, a future job, or a performance-based increase in salary and responsibilities (n=8). Six interviewees' responses noted that BEST experiences have contributed to effective performance in their current jobs (n=6). Three responses (n=3) credited interviewees' engagement with BEST courses and TA services for developing their professional capacity and three responses (n=3) mentioned that, as a result of their BEST learnings, the interviewees were accorded more respect and given higher-level work assignments (i.e., assisting teachers; mentoring and training other teachers and staff; delivering presentations at conferences). Two responses noted that interviewees had developed increased confidence as a result of their engagement with BEST services (n=2), and two responses cited their engagement with BEST trainings for inspiring a desire to continue learning (n=2). One response noted not only a lack of opportunity for professional advancement in the interviewee's current employment situation, but significant job instability, as their continued employment depends on at least one VI student being enrolled. Examples follow:

> I'm just so much faster now. I used to… type it all in and now I can scan it, run it through the OCR... That was my professional goal and I met it, so I'm just thrilled that I did that.

> They're actually having me do presentations now…. They're having me give presentations now on my work. Last Friday was one to colleagues, and then at other times I…[present] at different conferences. This is something that my boss has been pushing me towards.

> If there isn't another student in this district that comes along who is blind and will be a braille reader, I'll have to find a job somewhere else. So, without this training, I don't think I would be as marketable. I *know* I wouldn't be as marketable.

11

Year 3 interviewees were asked if their engagement with BEST services had contributed to any changes since the preceding year affecting their work-related goals or professional advancement. Three responses (n=3) described moves into new positions in Year 3 made possible by skills or certifications acquired as a result of BEST trainings. One response (n=1) noted new job responsibilities with a salary increase. One response cited an unfavorable outcome: the interviewee's inability to complete a certification within their desired timeframe because of a delay due to course revisions, course scheduling, and a waiting period to enroll in the needed BEST class.

Year 3 interviewees were asked in what specific ways their engagement with BEST trainings and TA might impact their professional lives. Five responses (n=5) mentioned that BEST experiences had given interviewees increased confidence in their abilities. Four responses (n=4) noted that the skills and knowledge interviewees acquired through their engagement with BEST services had qualified them for future employment opportunities (e.g., supervisor of a braille transcription department; owner-operator of a private braille production center). Three responses (n=3) cited the BEST project's role in helping interviewees build connections and form professional communities with colleagues in the field. Responses credited BEST services for having given interviewees options to pursue personal interests (n=2) and the ability to share what they had learned with others (n=2). Two responses (n=2) mentioned that interviewees felt assured that, should future problems, questions, or needs arise, interviewees could consult their BEST training materials or contact BEST instructors and TA providers for assistance.

> I could go to a district that has a team of transcribers and use [my BEST learnings], my previous education, and my degrees from my former life so that I could be…in a management position or a supervisory position. And I would not be able to do that had I not had the BEST training and…classes. I think it has helped me position myself as more marketable.

> I'm…determined to use it when I retire…. I would really like to be able to make a difference in this way…. I would like to do some consulting work and maybe do something with the ESC…around here.

> It's…nice to have a community where you don't feel like you're the only person on an island by yourself. Sometimes it feels like that because there aren't very many of us, so it's nice to know that there are other people [and] to really get to know the instructors.

Interviewees were asked how their BEST learnings and experiences up through Year 3 affected their plans for professional growth. Five responses mentioned interviewees' plans to continue taking BEST courses (n=5). Three responses (n=3) cited job-related

12

outcomes (i.e., qualifying for a new job; moving up with a current student; expanding PD into new areas). Three responses (n=3) referenced obtaining certifications, with two interviewees working toward future certifications and one who had completed NLS certification to satisfy a personal goal. Examples follow:

> I will just continue to learn more because…I feel like the learning never stops. You always need to go to these [trainings] because there's always more information and, with technology, things change all the time.

> Some of the topics that they offer help to steer…the expansion of my professional development. Looking at what [BEST] has to offer…might help me decide, "Oh, that's an area I want to grow in my professional knowledge."

Evaluation aim #2: What are interviewees' perceptions of the impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness of BEST courses and technical assistance, including the alignment between interviewees' perceptions and BEST project goals?

Three themes emerged from responses to the survey questions:

1. *Direct and indirect impact:* Who derives direct benefit from participating in BEST trainings and receiving BEST technical assistance services, and who, besides BEST project participants, derives benefits from BEST courses and technical assistance;
2. *Perceptions of quality, relevance, usefulness:* Interviewees' perceptions of the quality, relevance, and usefulness of BEST courses and technical assistance;
3. *Additional indicators of quality, relevance, and usefulness:* Other insights from participants about quality, relevance, and usefulness with possible implication for changes that might enhance participants' ability to fulfill their professional learning needs and career objectives.

A fourth theme was created to address the alignment between interviewees' perceptions and BEST project goals, and was separately analyzed across multiple questions:

4. *Alignment:* How interviewees' perceptions about impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness align with BEST project goals.

The discussion that follows includes relevant detail interpreted from the quantitative (demographic) data.

Direct and indirect impact. *Direct impact* refers to persons affected directly by BEST trainings and technical assistance services, in other words, the interviewees. All Year 2

13

interviewees returned for Year 3 of the study, however, some experienced changes over the course of the year. The group continued to be characterized by a moderate degree of diversity of background, employment, and BEST project experiences (see the subsection on Study Sample Interviewees). Among the sample, all ten of the interviewees worked with or for teachers; eight also worked with related service providers (e.g., COMS; OT; TVI; IS). Eight of the interviewees worked with students, and two interviewees also worked with families. Demographic data provided by interviewees are shown in Appendix C.

Up to and including Year 3 of the study, interviewees' engagement with BEST grant services ranged from having taken only one course in Year 2 to having taken twelve or more courses or trainings over a span of many years, some of them repeats of courses taken previously. Seven interviewees took part in both in-person and remote instruction. Two had experienced only remote instruction, and one had experienced only in-person instruction. Nine of the ten interviewees had engaged with BEST technical assistance.

Indirect impact refers to persons affected through interaction or association with one (or more) of the interviewees. Such indirect impact is logically very probable since the point of interviewees' participation in BEST grant services is often to receive support toward improving such impact. Findings reported above affirm this probability. Year 3 interviewees' indirect impact included:

a. students with whom they work;
b. teachers, related service providers, and support staff in interviewees' schools who work with or otherwise interact with the interviewee's students;
c. teachers, related service providers, and support staff in interviewees' schools or districts who do not work with the interviewees' students;
d. other students in the classrooms of interviewees' students;
e. students within and outside the district who are learning about blindness and visual impairment;
f. braillists, TVIs, intervention specialists, and teachers from other districts;
g. students' family members;
h. colleagues, student teachers and interns; and
i. the community, including churches, public organizations, persons needing braille or other accessible materials.

[I had a student] share her braille knowledge with the [sighted] kids in the…class, and that was good for her…. We talked about, what are you going to explain and the alphabets. And so, she…talked with her peers about braille and the technology that she has, and…the BrailleNote Touch, and [how] it's just like an iPad, and these are what the braille letters look like when you're typing them on the typewriter and different things.

I have…friends who have children with low vision and we've talked about it.

14

Quality, relevance, and usefulness. This subsection presents findings about courses and trainings—considered first—and then about technical assistance.

Coded responses about *courses and trainings* were sorted thematically across several questions to construct an overview of relevant perceptions of quality, relevance, and usefulness. The Year 3 interviewees considered the courses to be rigorous and of very high quality, and almost all interviewees noted the relevance and usefulness of the courses.

Seven interviewees explicitly praised the quality of BEST instructors, noting instructors' breadth of knowledge and ability to communicate and provide feedback. Instructors were cited for their responsiveness to questions, flexibility, and generosity in sharing tips and materials. Interviewees' responses often noted that courses they had taken were: (1) filled with information; (2) fast paced; (3) individualized to accommodate participants' needs; (4) supported by high quality materials; and (5) motivational (i.e., inspiring interviewees to apply new learning and pursue further study). The extensive knowledge, experience, flexibility, and responsiveness of instructors were cited as factors that made the courses especially relevant and useful to interviewees.

> [What stands out is] how user-friendly everything is. [It's] like customer service…[Everyone] is there to help us, and when we have questions or we have a need, [it's] very easy to get ahold of people, very easy to get answers.

> There's this big book…it's really thick. And then [there's] sort of a distilled version…. This thing is "the bible." [The instructor] does a handout of the handout—it's kind of neat.

> [The instructor] always is positive and supportive. If there's ever anything you need, call.

In Year 3, courses continued to be delivered through remote instruction, and several interviewees noted ways in which the BEST project's use of the online format was particularly effective: (1) comprehensive curricular materials provided in advance; (2) well-organized logistics, including timely shipments and pick-ups of equipment and easy-to-follow instructions; (3) asynchronous learning opportunities; (4) recorded sessions that could be re-watched as needed; (5) opportunities to interact with other participants; and (6) in-session technical assistance providers who could immediately address technical issues and provide needed software and templates. The clear implication is that interviewees regarded BEST courses and trainings as exhibiting very high quality.

> It was helpful to work in small groups to compare techniques.

15

> When you take the courses remotely, they send you everything...You don't use [your own computer] because… you use their computer.

Additional discussion of the BEST Grant's use of remote instruction can be found later in this report.

Interviewee responses across multiple questions suggested that interviewees found BEST trainings to be relevant to their work or to the work they would be doing in the future, providing: (1) answers to questions specifically related to interviewees' circumstances; (2) programs and templates that could be put into immediate use; (3) instruction and "insider" tips for formatting materials to meet students' and teachers' needs; and (4) up-to-date information on hardware, software, and AT devices. Additionally, interviewee responses across several questions referenced the usefulness of BEST courses, including: (1) practical shortcuts; (2) instructors' willingness to address individual needs; (3) templates, macros, and tools; (4) materials and practice assignments that interviewees could keep and reuse as needed; and (5) communication and collaboration with other course participants.

> I had questions…that…I sent to them, and they brought them up and showed me exactly how to do something and how to format it.

> Every time I get to take a class or every time I sit to do something that involves braille or involves the technology of it, I'm thinking about the things that I learned in those classes and I realize how imperative they are.

The pattern observed in study Years 1 and 2 of interviewees repeating BEST courses was also evident in Year 3. Seven of the ten Year 3 interviewees mentioned having repeated courses they had already completed, including five interviewees who repeated one or more prior-year courses during Year 3. Three interviewees reported never having repeated a BEST course. Responses of the interviewees who had repeated courses indicated that they had done so to refresh previously learned skills and information (n=3) and to get more out of previously taken courses (n=3), for reasons that included: (1) keeping up with students' increasing needs; (2) building on their own increasing capacity; and (3) staying up to date with changes in the field. The repetition of already-completed courses provides further confirmation that interviewees consider BEST courses to be of high quality, relevant, and useful.

> We didn't use Nemeth last year in math. We had to be using UEB with math because the math book did not come in Nemeth. So both of us had to relearn our math and how to do it, so that was our challenge

> …Every time I [repeat] a class I'm learning more because you can take all the notes you can but, until you can actually use it in your practice, it's hard to grasp it. And so, each year it's amazing how much more I learn...

16

Interviewees' perceptions about the quality, relevance, and usefulness of BEST *technical assistance* (TA) services were reflected in data from the interviews. Interviewees were asked about their TA experiences up through and including Year 3 of the grant funding cycle. During data collection, no distinction was made between TA services provided remotely and those that were provided in person, following the determination in Year 1 that the format of the TA was circumstantial (i.e., determined by the type of service needed and the location) and unrelated to interviewees' perceptions of the quality and usefulness of the services.

Responses to the interview questions were sorted thematically across multiple questions to provide an overview of interviewees' perceptions of the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the BEST TA services they had received. Of the ten Year 3 interviewees, only one had never engaged with BEST TA. The responses of the nine interviewees who had engaged with BEST TA indicated that they considered those services, overall, to be of very high quality, relevance, and usefulness. Interviewees' responses mentioned new knowledge acquired through BEST TA services, including: (1) use of software, templates, and macros; (2) techniques for complex and specialized formatting projects; (3) configuration, operation, and troubleshooting of equipment; and (4) the use and formatting needs of AT devices. Interviewees' responses cited the expertise of the BEST TA providers, their patience and willingness to help, responsiveness, and dedication to finding solutions. Interviewees' comments depicted BEST TA services as a unique, indispensable, and ongoing resource for the highly specialized technical support they need to do their jobs. Examples follow:

> I know that when I call [BEST TA service provider] or [different BEST TA service provider], if they don't know they will figure it out. It's refreshing, it's comforting to know that I will get a resolution. I know that doesn't seem like a big deal, but it is because braille transcribers are so busy trying to figure out how to [format complex specialized projects] ....

> If I have electronic problems or Duxbury problems, I can always email [a TA service provider] and they are very helpful. So, I feel like that is important because if I didn't have that network, I would have no idea how to fix things or how to correct them.

In Year 2 of the study, interviewees' responses frequently mentioned the need for significant TA relating to their ability and confidence to install, operate, and troubleshoot the hardware and software for producing braille and accessible materials. Year 2 comments also cited the growth interviewees experienced in this area of expertise. In Year 3, interviewees' comments mentioned with less frequency the need for TA relating to the operation and troubleshooting of hardware and software and mentioned with greater frequency the need for techniques and "insider" tips for producing braille and other accessible materials.

17

Interviewees' comments in Year 2 and Year 3 do not reveal reasons that account for this differing pattern of responses.

Additional indicators of quality, relevance, and usefulness. Several interview questions yielded quantitative and qualitative data that provided additional insights into interviewees' BEST project experiences and their perceptions of the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the courses, trainings, and TA services. One question asked about experiences with, and perceptions of, the two formats of BEST courses: in-person and remote. Seven of the Year 3 interviewees noted that they had experienced both in-person and remote courses, two reported having experienced only remote courses, and one reported having experienced only in-person courses.[3]

Responses from all Year 3 interviewees demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with the BEST courses they had taken, regardless of the format. However, comments from interviewees who had experienced both formats noted contrasts. Positive perceptions of BEST in-person courses were reflected in comments noting that:
   a. In-person sessions made it easier for participants to meet and learn from others in attendance;
   b. Some classes are more conducive to in-person instruction;
   c. In-person sessions made it easier to feel involved;
   d. With in-person instruction, participants could focus on learning instead of on technical issues;
   e. During in-person sessions participants could use their own computers and could immediately download software and templates; and
   f. Traveling and staying at a hotel away from home was enjoyable.

Interviewees' few concerns with in-person courses centered mostly on the challenges of traveling, being away from home and workplace, and arranging permission and coverage for work absences.

Interviewees' reactions to online instruction included the following approvals:
   a. Online sessions were more convenient;
   b. BEST handled the remote format well;
   c. Online sessions were well organized, well supported, and technology issues were addressed;
   d. Logistics were comprehensive and efficient, with pre-loaded computers, extra monitors, books and manuals, assignments, and set-up and shipping instructions shipped free-of-charge;
   e. A tech support person was in attendance at all sessions;
   f. More participants could be accommodated;
   g. Some courses were better online;
   h. Multi-tasking was possible;
   i. Not having to travel was nice; and
   j. Arrangements were easier to make.

18

Critique of remote instruction involved (1) difficulty in interacting with other people (i.e., colleagues; instructors); (2) technology challenges; (3) a belief that some subjects are easier to learn in person; and (4) distractions that made it difficult to focus. Despite such critiques, interviewees who had experienced both formats noted that both the in-person and online BEST courses were very good. Of the seven interviewees who had attended both in-person and remote courses, three preferred the online format, two preferred the in-person format, and two were equally satisfied with both formats. Of the two interviewees who had attended only online courses, one would attend future courses in either format and the other would prefer in-person courses. The one interviewee who had experienced only in-person instruction had no preference and would attend courses in either format. Examples follow:

> I like being in person better. It's travel to get up to Columbus from here, but I just felt more involved in the class. It's more personal, and you're more focused on [the class instead of] …what's around you and trying to get online.

> I'd rather be in person, although the instructor who did [remote instruction of] braille did a great job of breaking us up into little groups or pairs so that we could still glean from each other, and I thought that was really important.

> When you take the courses remotely, they send you everything...You use their computer [on which the TA provider] has [installed] braille macros and large print macros, which…on my own computer I don't have….So, I need to email [the TA provider] and say, "Hey, send me those macros." Whereas, if I had been there… he [would] just…take care of it right then and there.

A new area of investigation in the Year 3 study looked at interviewees' awareness of changes in BEST Grant services and their experiences in relation to any changes. At the end of Year 3, the evaluator noticed revisions to the BEST Grant's website suggesting possible new services or new modes of service delivery, (e.g., a registered-access group referred to as the *BEST Grant Professional Learning Community*; several repositories of videos that included recordings of braille-related trainings and "insider" tips and tricks). A question was added to the interview protocol to determine whether interviewees were aware of any changes to BEST Grant services and, if so, whether these changes had impacted interviewees' experiences. The findings relating to this area of investigation were considered as a separate sub-theme of the larger themes of interviewees' perceptions of the quality, relevance, and usefulness of BEST services.

Year 3 interviewees' responses indicated little to no awareness of any changes to BEST Grant services. Two interviewees indicated that they might have read an email about a

19

professional learning community but that neither had followed up on it. One interviewee mentioned having been asked to evaluate two videos and having found them to be helpful. Three responses referenced videos that interviewees had received as part of course materials, and two responses mentioned that the interviewees had been told during trainings about the availability of videos.

> I think I was [asked to be a video] rater…. I didn't even know they were there, and I felt like they were very helpful. It was very timely too because I had to pack up my braille embosser to bring it home…. I didn't know I had to secure the thing in the back, so that was very helpful.

When asked how likely they would be to continue work with BEST, all ten interviewees stated their intention to do so. Five interviewees indicated they were *100% likely*—three of them noting that they had already registered for upcoming classes. Three interviewees stated they were *very likely* to continue to engage with BEST services and two interviewees said they were *planning to* continue. Thematic sorting across questions revealed a similar pattern: interviewees were likely to repeat courses already taken. In short, data obtained through varied lines of inquiry constitute additional evidence that BEST services are of high quality, usefulness, and relevance. Examples follow:

> I think the courses are well prepared. The people who do the presenting are excellent. Yes, I definitely will take them again.

> I'm constantly checking the calendar and asking [an AT&AEM staff member] to keep me informed of when [a certain] class is coming so I can get signed up for it…. I want to make sure…I don't get put on a waiting list.

> Yes, I am going to. I've already taken one on braille formatting and I plan on taking Advanced Nemeth. And if they have any kind of graphic technology or something I will probably take that. I'm not sure I would take the KeyMath anymore because I've done that twice.

One question invited comments about what interviewees disliked about BEST services and another asked for ideas to improve or enhance BEST services. Interviewees offered some critiques and several relevant suggestions. Four of the interviewees stated that there was nothing they disliked about BEST services.

Interviewees' critical comments dealt mostly with scheduling and participation: (1) alignment between the schedule of courses and the needs of participants; (2) the difficulty of taking classes during school hours; and (3) employers' limits on allocated PD hours. Several interviewee responses noted communication issues, including

20

difficulty finding and navigating the BEST website and emails about course offerings that were blocked by district servers. One comment across all the transcript data—regarding only one course—referenced difficulty in understanding the subject matter that was unable to be moderated by instructor scaffolding. Another comment described a convergence of circumstances (i.e., delays; course scheduling; enrollee backlog) that prevented the interviewee from completing certification requirements within their preferred timeframe. Examples follow:

> [Classes] are during school hours, so [because of my position] it's been harder to get a sub for [coverage]. I had to take off four afternoons for the one class and I had to take off six afternoons [for the other].

> It was a struggle. The people who use [the program] every day really love it…[but] people who are…in the school sometimes have to do braille on the fly…. I really tried to wrap my head around it and I am tech savvy, so it's not that…. The [instructor's] support was there, the knowledge was there to teach me…it just didn't fit for what I do.

> [Trying to complete my certification requirements] ….is just a frustrating situation now because I signed up for the course two years ago. And now that they finally…have gotten all the materials ready, they're letting people in one at a time. And so I'm still kind of on a waiting list.

Year 3 interviewees' suggestions for improvement centered on technology and course offerings. Several interviewees requested greater focus on technology, including: (1) more hands-on experience with specific tools, AT devices, and software (e.g., BrailleNote Touch; JAWS; Chameleon; Chromebook); (2) regular updates about the latest technology; and (3) simplified instruction and increased opportunities for practice for those who struggle with technology.

Interviewees' suggestions for additional courses or expansion of curricula included orientation and mobility training; training in the use of Tactile View, BrailleNote Touch, and JAWS; a class on Advanced Nemeth that includes chemistry, trigonometry, and calculus; and changes to the schedule so that certain courses are offered more frequently. One interviewee offered no suggestions for improvements, stating "Everything is perfect."

> I wish…that they would have some [in-person] trainings on actual tools. I have a smart brailler called a Chameleon, and I struggle every day with it…I need a hands-on, in-person session where somebody says, "This is what you do. Press this button. Touch this."

21

> [They could offer] some sort of ongoing blog or something that introduces different types of technologies….Something that I can regularly review, a library type of thing, of materials or technology that are out there….Not necessarily that they're purchasing the equipment, but…information and an index of stuff that's out there and what it could be used for.

> So, you have basic Nemeth, advanced Nemeth. I would really love super-advanced. [Including] chemistry, trig, calculus…. And they probably won't because I don't think a lot of people get there with their students…. But I know when I need support for those things, I can call and they will get me support.

Alignment. When sorted thematically across questions, interviewee comments about impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness showed alignment with BEST project goals. For instance, demographic data and interviewees' comments suggest that the direct and indirect impacts of BEST trainings and TA services are far-reaching across the state. Interviewees represent six regions of Ohio and serve rural, suburban, and urban populations. They work in several professional capacities and voluntarily share their expertise with colleagues and organizations in their home communities. Indirectly, interviewees' BEST learnings and competencies reach general education teachers; primary, secondary and post-secondary students; families; intervention specialists; TVIs; related service providers; braillists; preservice educators and interns; district technology providers; and community members.

Survey responses frequently referenced interviewees' growing capacity to provide or support braille instruction across all academic areas and interviewees' increased competency in providing teachers, students, and families with high quality braille and other accessible materials. Additionally, many interviewees mentioned the development of their skills in managing the technology for producing accessible materials and their growing confidence, independence, and resourcefulness in doing so.

Discussion

This ongoing study has two aims. These are to discover interviewees' (1) use of BEST courses and TA in their jobs and careers and (2) perceptions of impact, quality, relevance, and usefulness, especially as these perceptions align with the BEST Grant project's goals. This section discusses the tentative answers emerging in Year 3 of this five-year study, and it concludes with an outlook on the two years of work yet to come.

22

Using the BEST Project's Courses, Trainings, and Technical Assistance

Over the course of three years, several interviewees have commented that the trainings and technical assistance services provided by BEST had equipped them to perform proficiently in their current roles and had also opened up opportunities for them to transition to new employers or positions. Comments from several interviewees in Year 2 and Year 3, however, noted that their jobs offer little chance for advancement. Interviewees generally believe that their BEST training will increase their professional capacity and improve their employment prospects.

The findings from the third year once again suggest that interviewees are utilizing BEST grant services by taking repeat courses. They appear to do this to increase skill levels. In some cases, repetition is tied to changing expectations at work. The Year 3 study again focused explicitly on this phenomenon and found that interviewees wanted (1) to *renew and refresh* skills and knowledge and (2) to *master new skills* to better serve students and to remain current with the field.

Across the study's three years, circumstantial influences for retaking courses have included the following:
   a. instructors adapt courses to students' purposes;
   b. BEST services are free-of-cost to students;
   c. BEST offerings are predictable (as to content and schedule);
   d. courses contain such concentrated content that repetition makes sense;
   e. biennial scheduling of advanced courses makes repeating a basic course useful;
   f. instructors continue to support students after coursework is complete; and
   g. courses enable students to stay up to date with changes in the field.

Course features identified in Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 that appear to correlate with BEST participants retaking already-completed courses likely combine into a system that works not only for these students but perhaps for other participants in BEST courses and trainings as well. The Year 1 study identified two features of the profession itself that might also contribute to the pattern of re-taking courses. The first feature—cross-year assignment of teachers to students (e.g., looping up)—entails teachers (and braillists) having regularly to update their skills to keep pace with the increasing academic demands experienced by their students. In Year 2 and Year 3, several interviewees cited this circumstance as contributing to their reason for retaking an already-completed course. The second feature—the demands of new employment assignments on individuals who lack qualifications or (other) training opportunities—is particularly relevant to paraeducators. No Year 2 or Year 3 interviewees' responses mentioned this second feature.

23

Impact, Quality, Relevance, and Usefulness

Findings from Year 3 indicate that the interviewees perceived BEST project services to be of exceptional quality, relevant to their professional or career goals, and useful in achieving their professional objectives. Impact was far-reaching and effects were seen as significant: Interviewees credited BEST with increasing their capacity to produce high-quality braille and other accessible materials formatted to meet students' individual needs. Effects also included assets (confidence, skills, and knowledge) needed to accomplish current and future professional objectives.

Overall, interviewees viewed BEST courses and TA services as a unique and essential resource for the highly specialized professional development training they need. All ten interviewees indicated that they are extremely likely to continue to make use of BEST project services. Year 3 interviewees' suggestions for improvement included:

a. greater focus on technology, including more hands-on experience with specific tools, AT devices and software;
b. regular updates about new and improved technology;
c. expanding courses and curricula to include more training in the use of Tactile View, BrailleNote Touch, and JAWS, as well as training in orientation and mobility; and
d. more frequent scheduling of advanced-level courses.

Year 3 findings showed alignment between interviewees' perceptions and BEST Grant goals. The demographic data and feedback obtained from interviewees demonstrated the widespread influence of BEST trainings and TA services. Interviewees expressed increasing confidence in their ability to produce braille and other accessible materials, operate the necessary equipment and technology, and deliver (or support) instruction in the use of assistive and accessible technologies across all academic disciplines.

Outlook on Future Years

Investigating interviewees' experiences in the coming years will provide additional insights relevant to study goals. Of particular interest will be understanding in greater detail how BEST helps interviewees accomplish career goals (including both present and future employment). Several emerging insights merit careful monitoring.

One emergent insight is that BEST seems to have created a system that delivers rigorous content adapted to the professional circumstances of its specialized target audience. Future data-gathering and analysis efforts may well include more details about how this system works for interviewees. In particular, such features as high-level content, flexible expectations, administrative structures, and encouragement for repeating courses would seem of interest. This system and its features could merit wider inquiry beyond this study.

The role of online instruction in BEST Grant services is another emerging insight. Remote instruction, initiated during the pandemic, provided a training option that was welcomed by interviewees, facilitated participation in BEST Grant classes and trainings, and offered numerous other benefits. The continuation of virtual instruction could entail the development of new BEST initiatives that leverage the online platform. Plans for this study may evolve in the study's remaining years to address changes in BEST Grant services and service delivery.

A third emerging insight is the support the BEST Grant provides to the individuals who engage with its services—during their years of training and throughout their professional lives. The need for community and connection in the post-pandemic world mirrors the need for community and connection among the far-flung practitioners who provide services to persons with blindness and visual impairments. Future research might examine BEST Grant efforts to develop and sustain an intentional community of practice.

..................Column Break..................

Appendix A

The BEST Project's Goals

The first goal of the BEST project is to increase the competency of Ohio's pre-service and in-service educators (i.e., teachers, paraprofessionals, specialized service providers, and support staff) and others to provide braille literacy instruction and support across all academic areas, including Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

The project's second goal is to enhance the competency of pre-service and in-service educators and others to acquire and create braille materials efficiently and effectively.

The third goal of the BEST project is to enable educators and others to apply strategies learned in BEST project trainings and other activities to effectively manage the braille needs of their students through the use of technical assistance and technology resources.

25

Appendix B

Interview Questions for All Year 3 Interviewees

1. Where did you work during Y3 (2021-2022)? Job title, certifications, and professional responsibilities?   How is this different from the previous year?
2. Would you characterize your current work location as urban, suburban, or rural?
3. With whom do you work directly? Teacher(s), student(s), etc.
4. What were your BEST courses and technical assistance services in Y3 (2021-2022)?
5. Why did you undertake your Y3 BEST courses and/or technical assistance?
6. Have you taken any BEST course or training more than one time? Why? Were any of your Y3 courses repeats?
7. What new knowledge and skills did you develop as a result of your BEST courses and technical assistance in Y3?
8. What knowledge, skills, or other takeaways did you get from your Y3 BEST experiences relevant to producing/providing braille materials and other accessible materials?
9. Were there things you have learned through all your BEST trainings and technical assistance sessions over the years that you used (in your work, etc.) in Y3 (2020-2021) that you hadn't used before? (Or that you didn't mention the last time we spoke?)
10. Are there ways you envision using in your future work what you learned through your Y3 BEST courses and/or technical assistance services?
11. How have your BEST learnings and experiences through Y3 contributed to meeting your work-related goals and to your professional advancement? Has there been a change in this regard since Year 2?
12. In what specific ways have your BEST learnings and experiences through Y3 impacted your professional life? Has there been a change in this regard since Year 2?
13. How do your BEST learnings and experiences through Y3 affect your plans for professional growth? Does this represent a change since Year 2?
14. Is there something you learned/experienced <u>in your Y3 BEST courses and/or technical</u> assistance that specifically contributed to your ability to meet your work-related goals or specifically impacted your professional life and plans for professional growth?
15. In addition to the students and teachers you directly supported as part of your regular job responsibilities, how during school year 2021-2022 have you used what you have learned through BEST trainings and/or technical support to help others (family, community, etc.)?
16. If you engaged with BEST courses or technical assistance in Y3, what stands out for you the most about those BEST experiences?
17. Of all the things you've gotten from your BEST experiences through Year 3, what is the most useful to the work you do or the work you anticipate doing in the future?
18. How likely are you to participate in BEST trainings and/or BEST technical assistance in the future, and what would motivate you to undertake future courses or technical assistance?

26

19. Is there anything about BEST trainings and/or technical assistance that has *not* worked for you, and why?
20. What trainings or services do you wish BEST would offer, and how would these help you?
21. In Year 3, did you experience in-person and remote courses, and what are your thoughts about these two formats of BEST services? Would you participate in both in-person and remote trainings? Which do you prefer, and why?
22. Did you notice any changes in the BEST program in Year 3, and if so, how did you find out about these and have they had any impact on your experience with the program

27

Appendix C

Employment Circumstances of Interviewees

BEST Longitudinal Study Demographic Data (Year 3: School Year 2021-2022)

Data for all Interviewees – Employment

Timeframe	# Interviewees	Job Titles	Employment Setting	Main Population Served	Interviewee Job Tasks* *Some interviewees perform multiple tasks.
Y3 (2021-2022)	10 returning	Braille Asst/Braille Parapro 2 Certified Braillist/Transcriber 2 Intervention Specialist 1 TVI 2 TVI/COMS 1 Assistive Technol. Teacher 1 Visual Learning Classrm Aide 1	ESC 3 High Sch 1 Mid Sch/Jr.High 1 Elem Sch 1 Tech High Sch 1 Public Sch District 1 Residential Sch 1 University 1	Rural 2 Suburban 4 Urban 3 Suburban and rural 1	Transcribe/produce braille/lg print/other materials 6 Teach braille 3 Assistive/access. tech. 4 Instruction 9 Work with families 2 Mentor student teachers, colleagues 2
Y2 (2020-2021)	10 (4 returning, 6 new)	Braille Asst/Braille Parapro 2 Certified Braillist/Transcriber 2 Intervention Specialist 2 TVI 1	ESC 2 Mid Sch/Jr.High 2 Elem Sch 1	Rural 2 Suburban 4 Urban 3 Suburban and rural 1	Transcribe/produce braille/lg print/other materials 7 Teach braille 2 Assistive/access. tech. 2

30

Timeframe	# Interviewees	Job Titles* * all known prior employment for each interviewee	Employment History* *some interviewees had more than 1 job	Main Population Served	# Interviewees with Pre-Y1 BEST experience
		TVI/COMS 1 Gen Ed HS English Teacher 1 Classroom Aide 1	Tech High Sch 1 Public Sch District 1 County DD Board 1 Residential Sch 1 University 1		Instruction 9 Work with families 2 Mentor student teachers, colleagues 1
Y1 (2019-2020)	6	BrailleAsst/Para 2 Parapro/Braillist 1 Cert.braille trans 1 TVI/COMS 1 IS 1	Mid/Jr.High Sch 2 Elem Sch 1 ESC 1 DDBrd HS 1 Residential Sch 1	Rural 1 Suburban 3 Urban 1 All 3 1	Mobility/Orient 3 Braille/Lg Print 5 Online Mats 2 Braille to print 1 AT 1 Instruction 3 IEPs/ETRs 1
Pre-Y1	6	BrailleAsst/Para 2 Education Aide 2 Parapro 1 Cert. braille trans.1 TVI/COMS 1 IS 1 Administration 1	Mid/Jr. High Sch 1 Elementary Sch 2 ESC 1 DD Brd HS 1 Residential Sch 1 Online School 1 Sight Center 1 OH County 1 Hospital 1	Rural 1 Suburban 3 Urban 1 All 3 1	4

Data for all Interviewees – # of Interviewees Engaged in BEST Courses and Technical Assistance

31

Timeframe	# Interviewees	In-person Courses	Remote Courses	Technical Assistance Services		Likely to do more BEST courses/TA
Y3 (2021-2022)	10	0	8	7*		10
Y2 (2020-2021)	10	0	7	3*		10
Y1 (2019-2020)	6	3	3	In-Person 2	Remote 2	6
	# Interviewees	In-person Courses	Remote Courses	In-person TA	Remote TA	# Interviewees w/ Pre-Y1 BEST experience
Pre-Y1	6	4	2	4	2	4

*Beginning Y2, Technical Assistance services were no longer differentiated between in-person and remote. Delivery format was found to be circumstantial and unrelated to quality.

32

National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials (NCRTM)

The braille training project known as the Braille Excellence for Students and Teachers (BEST) focuses on statewide professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) activities for Ohio educators and others who support Ohio students and their braille needs. This summary will address select aspects of the grant activities which other agencies might find useful for replication. To view all activities provided through the project please visit the BEST grant website.

Statewide Braille Preservice and Inservice Training Program Model

Between 15-20 trainings are offered each year through the BEST grant. PD is planned to meet the needs of a wide range of participants (e.g., teachers, related service staff, students, paraprofessionals, and families). Additionally, we provide training for specifically requested topics from our two Ohio TVI university programs and an additional university program in a neighboring state. Topics of PD include braille literacy, Nemeth, STEM, creating accessible documents for braille production, and technologies to support the use of braille and braille production. Some PD activities take place within larger events such as our international conference, OCALICON, allowing us to share our expertise with a broader and more diverse audience about how to serve students who use braille. Finally, BEST works with braille equipment vendors by hosting additional device-specific PD. In these trainings, we offer the latest developments in new equipment or new equipment features so that educators can continue developing their technical skills. Our trainings help educators grow, improve, and more effectively support their students.

All participants in BEST grant PD participate in session evaluations, and the project external evaluators also observe and document selected training session activities to triangulate the data and assure validity of the participant evaluation feedback. We then use the data to modify, improve, and change the PD activities to better meet our participants' needs in subsequent years of the grant.

Pre-COVID, all BEST trainings were planned as face-to-face events with a few blended sessions. During the COVID pandemic, all trainings were transitioned to a virtual synchronous format using Zoom. One of the unintended outcomes of this change was being able to attract participants from other states and other countries. We have continued with virtual trainings, but have invested in a system that provides onsite room cameras and a document camera connected to Zoom so that we can now offer the option of hybrid synchronous trainings. Our ability to simultaneously offer both an in-person training and a virtual training allows us to provide a high-quality experience to even more participants regardless of location. Many of our school districts and agencies continue to experience staffing challenges that emerged during the pandemic; as a result, staff release time for trainings has been more limited. Hybrid training offers participants a choice: Attend in person at a central location or remain at their workplace, potentially saving time away from students. Additionally, trainings include half-day, full-day, two-day, four-day, and multi-week events.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

A private PLC hosted on Microsoft Teams provides training participants with a repository of resources to support their learning asynchronously. All trainings are recorded. After the synchronous trainings, participants have access to the recordings as well as other training resources such as slide decks, handouts, and related materials. In the chat feature in Teams, participants bring questions to both peers and the course instructor for ongoing discussions and support.

On-Demand Tips and Tricks Videos

We developed almost two dozen On-Demand Tips and Tricks Videos to supplement some of the more difficult concepts in the trainings and to support frequently asked questions directed at the consultants. These short asynchronous videos support educators and transcribers when technical assistance is needed immediately and real-time TA assistance is not instantly available. Tips and Tricks On-Demand videos provide short "how to's" that address the most common challenges faced by braille trainers or producers. The videos offer a quick and immediate response to help educators and transcribers troubleshoot on their own. Examples of topics offered include creating accessible documents, macros and templates for braille and large print, successful use and troubleshooting of braille-related technologies, as well as math braille conversion. A panel of experts determines areas of need and provides consistent branding, ensuring the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the videos.

Local Braille Production Centers (LBPC)

Another way the BEST grant supports the capacity of local and regional education agencies to produce the braille materials that students need is by the establishment of three braille production centers annually. The braille production centers supported by the grant provide local or regional agencies with high-tech braille production technologies that boost the quality, quantity and timely delivery of incidental braille materials to the students they serve.

After education agencies complete an application for an LBPC, a review committee chooses applicants of greatest need based on several factors. These include the number of students who use braille to access the curriculum, the geographic distribution/accessibility of other LBPCs close to the requesting region, and the ability of the agencies to provide basic technologies (a networked Windows computer), technical support for the braille production center, and braille-proficient staff who can train on braille software and hardware. Additionally, applicants must commit to permitting neighboring agencies to use the braille production equipment.

We announce the availability of the three braille production centers by: notifying all former BEST participants; posting to the AT&AEM center and BEST grant websites; and spreading the word over AT&AEM Center social media in October of each year. In November and December, we announce the recipients, and we typically complete local setups by January. During COVID and currently, equipment is typically configured off site and shipped to awardees. Then, we complete the remainder of the setup and training on how to use the system via a Zoom meeting. Items offered in the setup are a braille embosser, braille production software (Duxbury and MathType), optical character recognition software (ABBYY FineReader), and a starter supply of braille paper.

Donated embossers and repair of older embossers is also used to supplement the development of more sites than anticipated through the grant. A list of all braille production centers and a map of those sites is available on the BEST website so agencies without production centers can coordinate local/regional braille production support when needed.

Braille Technical Assistance

The BEST grant project provides TA for a number of activities. TA focuses primarily on followup to PD to make sure that teachers were able to implement strategies with fidelity. Our TA also supports local braille production equipment—whether provided by the grant project or purchased by the education agency—and mentors transcribers and others who are learning braille, pursuing the broader objective of increasing the pool of available braille production specialists. The project includes a team of highly trained braille and

braille technology consultants who provide support across the state. Their professional learning is also supported through grant PD activities so they can maintain and enhance their skills to provide the most up-to-date support to educators. Because each has very specific knowledge, cross-training of staff has also been targeted to ensure that at least two people possess the same specialized knowledge to ensure the sustainability of project support.

While technical assistance has included support through email or phone over the past grant years, we dramatically ramped up our capacity to provide support virtually during the pandemic. Two virtual platforms, Zoom and Microsoft Teams, have been used to provide TA to grant participants. TA can be requested through the BEST Online TA Portal, via which a consultant will reach out to the requester. Grant participants typically receive a response within 24 to 48 business hours. The portal, which we promote across all virtual trainings, can be easily accessed by anyone at any time.

[Grafton Braille Service Center](#)

Finally, the BEST grant provides technical assistance and training support to the Grafton Braille Service Center, a prison braille production program, as requested. The program trains prisoners in braille transcription skills; in turn, they produce braille for a variety of agencies such as local and regional education agencies, as well as the American Printing House for the Blind. This service provides another high-quality source for Ohio education agencies to purchase braille textbooks. Requested supports are currently provided primarily via email and phone.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BUDGET INFORMATION NON-CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS

OMB Control Number: 1894-0008
Expiration Date: 08/31/2020

Name of Institution/Organization

Education Service Center of Central Ohio

Applicants requesting funding for only one year should complete the column under "Project Year 1." Applicants requesting funding for multi-year grants should complete all applicable columns. Please read all instructions before completing form.

SECTION A - BUDGET SUMMARY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FUNDS

Budget Categories	Project Year 1 (a)	Project Year 2 (b)	Project Year 3 (c)	Project Year 4 (d)	Project Year 5 (e)	Total (f)
1. Personnel					0	
2. Fringe Benefits					0	
3. Travel					4,300.00	
4. Equipment					0	
5. Supplies					29,598.99	
6. Contractual					71,170.00	
7. Construction					0	
8. Other					0	
9. Total Direct Costs (lines 1-8)					105,068.99	
10. Indirect Costs 6.53% *Enter Rate Applied ———					6,861.01	
11. Training Stipends					0	
12. Total Costs (lines 9-11)					111,930.00	

*Indirect Cost Information (*To Be Completed by Your Business Office*):

If you are requesting reimbursement for indirect costs on line 10, please answer the following questions:

(1) Do you have an Indirect Cost Rate Agreement approved by the Federal government?   _X_Yes   ___No.

(2) If yes, please provide the following information:
Period Covered by the Indirect Cost Rate Agreement: From: _07/_01/_2022_ To: _6/_30/_2023_ (mm/dd/yyyy)
Approving Federal agency: _X__ED   ____Other (please specify): _____ The Indirect Cost Rate is __6.53_%

(3)   If this is your first Federal grant, and you do not have an approved indirect cost rate agreement, are not a State, Local government or Indian Tribe, and are not funded under a training rate program or a restricted rate program, do you want to use the de minimis rate of 10% of MTDC? ____Yes ____No. If yes, you must comply with the requirements of 2 CFR § 200.414(f).

(4)   If you do not have an approved indirect cost rate agreement, do you want to use the temporary rate of 10% of budgeted salaries and wages? ____Yes ____No. If yes, you must submit a proposed indirect cost rate agreement within 90 days after the date your grant is awarded, as required by 34 CFR § 75.560.

(5) For Restricted Rate Programs (check one) -- Are you using a restricted indirect cost rate that:___ Is included in your approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement?
Or ___ Complies with 34 CFR 76.564(c)(2)? The Restricted Indirect Cost Rate is _____%

(6)   For Training Rate Programs (check one) -- Are you using a rate that: __Is based on the training rate of 8 percent of MTDC (See EDGAR § 75.562(c)(4))? Or _X__Is included in your approved Indirect Cost Rate Agreement, because it is lower than the training rate of 8 percent of MTDC (See EDGAR § 75.562(c)(4)).

Name of Institution/Organization	Applicants requesting funding for only one year should complete the column under "Project Year 1." Applicants requesting funding for multi-year grants should complete all applicable columns. Please read all instructions before completing form.

SECTION B - BUDGET SUMMARY
NON-FEDERAL FUNDS

Budget Categories	Project Year 1 (a)	Project Year 2 (b)	Project Year 3 (c)	Project Year 4 (d)	Project Year 5 (e)	Total (f)
1. Personnel						
2. Fringe Benefits						
3. Travel						
4. Equipment						
5. Supplies						
6. Contractual						
7. Construction						
8. Other						
9. Total Direct Costs (Lines 1-8)						
10. Indirect Costs						
11. Training Stipends						
12. Total Costs (Lines 9-11)						

ED 524

SECTION B – BUDGET NARRATIVE (see instructions)

U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
PR/Award #: H235E190004

Budget Narrative: Braille Excellence for Students and Teachers (BEST) Grant

1. **Summary of actual expenditures obligated from October 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023**

	PY 4 Expenditures as of 3/31/23
Personnel	$0.00
Fringe Benefits	$0.00
Travel/Mail	$3,348.57
Equipment	$0.00
Supplies	$18,898.23
Contractual	$20,910.90
Construction	$0.00
Total Direct Costs	**$43,157.70**
Indirect Costs	$1,373.52
Total Expenditures	**$44,531.22**

2. **Projected expenditures to be obligated from April 1, 2023, to September 30, 2023**

	PY4 Projected Expenditures from 4/1/23 - 9/30/23
Personnel	$0.00
Fringe Benefits	$0.00
Travel/Mail	$951.43
Equipment	$0.00

Supplies	$10,700.76
Contractual	$38,135.00
Construction	$0.00
Budget Amendment	$12,124.00
Total Direct Costs	**$61,911.19**
Indirect Costs	$5,487.49
Total Projected Expenditures	**$67,398.68**

Forty percent (40%) of the funds allocated during year four of the grant have been expended. We have completed 11 training events. There are 5 more training events scheduled before the end of the grant year. Two Local Braille Production Centers (LBPC) have been set up and trained by BEST Technical Assistance Consultants, with funds available to establish one more this project year. One video series is planned and scheduled to be completed by September 2023. BEST Technical Assistance Consultants will continue to provide email, phone and virtual technical assistance and support until the end of the grant cycle. The following provides an explanation of the funds allocated per budget category, those funds already expended through March 31, 2023, and the projected remaining expenditures that will occur April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

Personnel and Fringe
No personnel and fringe costs were requested for this grant.

Mail/Travel

Estimated Mail/Travel Budget $4,300

Expended: $3,348.57

Remaining: $951.43

The remaining $951.43 expenses are budgeted for shipping the BEST computer lab and materials to participants for the following trainings: Introduction to Music Braille, and three summer Braille courses. Additionally, when the anticipated third Local Braille Production Center is established in the remaining quarters of the grant, braille paper will be shipped to that center. These funds will be allocated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

Equipment

Original Equipment Budget $0.00

Expended: $0.00

Remaining: $0.00

Supplies

Original Supply Budget: $29,010.54

Funds moved from IDC change: $588.45

Adjusted Budget: $29,598.99

Expended: $18,898.23

Remaining: $10,700.76

The remaining $10,112.31 is budgeted to purchase the following: software, materials, and an embosser for the third anticipated LBPC setup, and materials to support BEST trainings and technical assistance. These funds will be allocated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

Contractual

Original Contractual Budget $71,170.00

Expended $20,910.90

Remaining $50,259.10

Of the remaining $50,259.10, $38,135.00 of the funds are budgeted to implement the following activities and will be allocated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023.

Activity	Funds
College credits for braille course participants	$7,200.00
Instructor costs for Summer Braille courses (3)	$7,000.00
Consultant costs for providing TA to braille production centers	$17,940.00
Video series development, web content, IST services	$495.00
Remaining external evaluator costs	$5,500.00
Total	**$38,135.00**

The additional $12,124.00 will be submitted in a budget amendment request to the RSA Project Manager for approval to move those funds from Contractual to Supplies for use to support the BEST Braille Music training session, additions of the braille music software and hardware to the OCALI Lending Library for training participants trials of the software/hardware, and replacement of a scanner for the AT&AEM Braille Production Center. The following are estimates of how the remaining $12,124.00 will be allocated between April 1, 2023 and September 30, 2023:

Item	Funds
GOODFEEL music braille software for music braille kit	$1,595.00
Brailliant display for music braille kit	$3,695.00
Laptop for music braille kit (Windows 10, 64 bit)	$899.00
JAWS (perpetual license) for music braille laptop	$1,845.00
Feel the Beat for 15 Introduction to Music Braille training participants	$1,215.00
Scanner for AT&AEM braille production center (replacement)	$2,875.00
Total	**$12,124.00**

Construction

No construction costs were requested in this grant.

Indirect Costs

Original Budget 7.13% Rate: $7,449.46
Budget Amendment 10.21.22: IDC Changed to 6.53%: $6,861.01
Budget Amendment - Moved Funds to Supplies: $588.45
Funds Expended: $1,373.52
Remaining: $5,487.49

We anticipate that all funds in these categories will be expended and/or obligated by September 30, 2023. We intend to continue our scheduled learning opportunities through online learning options by coordinating events such as synchronous online and hybrid courses, virtual technical assistance and training to braille production sites and educators who are serving students who use braille.