

**BEST: Final Report
October 2014 through September 2015**

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Introduction

The BEST project, which is an effort of four collaborative partners: American Council of the Blind of Ohio (ACBO), Center for Instructional Supports and Accessible Materials (CISAM), Ohio Center for Deafblind Education (OCDBE), and the Ohio State School for the Blind (OSSB), received funding for a five-year scope of work starting on October 1, 2014.

This report summarizes the work of year one of the BEST project, making summative claims about the project to answer the following four evaluation questions:

1. Did the BEST project accomplish the work it set out to accomplish?
2. Did the BEST project achieve target levels of quality, relevance, and usefulness?
3. Did the BEST project have a significant impact on the learning of educators in braille and technologies used to make braille accessible to students with visual impairments?
4. Was the BEST project responsive to the needs of key clients and stakeholders?

Goals and Objectives

The project goals are included here so that readers of this final report can refer to them readily in reference to the specific evaluation findings assembled thus far and discussed below.

Goal 1: Increase the braille competency of Ohio's educators through the provision of high-quality professional development and technical assistance that focus on results-driven outcomes.

- Objective 1.1: Provide professional development to educators.
- Objective 1.2: Provide technical assistance and support to educators.
- Objective 1.3: Provide avenues to communicate information and support to educators.

Goal 2: Increase the knowledge and use/implementation of braille and state-of-the-art technologies of Ohio educators through high-quality professional development/learning opportunities and technical assistance that focus on result-driven outcomes.

- Objective 2.1: Provide high-quality professional development training to educators in Ohio serving students who are blind and visually impaired or deafblind to increase their knowledge and use/implementation of braille and state-of-the-art technologies.
- Objective 2.2: Provide technical assistance and support relating to state-of-the-art technologies to educators in school districts by adults who are blind and technology experts.

Goal 3: Increase the competency of personnel providing quality braille materials for Ohio students who require braille through the provision of high quality professional development training and technical assistance support.

- Objective 3.1: Provide high quality professional development to educators related to the production of braille.
- Objective 3.2: Provide technical assistance to school districts that produce braille for Ohio schools.
- Objective 3.3: Expand braille production capacities at the local school district level.

Manage Project

- Management Task 1: Establish Advisory Board and participate on Board.
- Management Task 2: Lead and participate in BEST Leadership Meetings.
- Management Task 3: Hire Dr. Aimee Howley – External Evaluator for the Grant.
- Management Task 4: Develop and disseminate BEST Brochure.
- Management Task 5: Contract with Qualified Personnel.

Methods

The evaluation team used various methods for gathering information about the project: participant ratings of professional development (PD) sessions, pre- and post-assessments of PD sessions designed to teach Duxbury, review of project documents (e.g., brochures, postings to the project Listserv), and discussions with BEST project staff.

Forms that allow participants to rate the professional development sessions in which they participate include four parts: (1) a set of questions that provide details about the quality of the session; (2) a set of questions that permit participants to judge the extent to which the session added value by increasing their knowledge and skills; (3) a set of questions that address the requirements of Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) by allowing participants to rate the overall quality, relevance, and usefulness of the session; and (4) a set of open-ended questions enabling participants to describe what they learned and how they plan to use it as well as to provide suggestions to presenters and BEST project staff.

Findings

The report of summative findings addresses the four evaluation questions in the Methods section. Interpretations of the findings are provided in a section of the report, “Discussion and Recommendations,” which follows the “Findings” section.

Did the BEST Project Accomplish the Work it Set Out to Accomplish?

During the first year of the five-year project, the BEST staff performed activities that addressed all of the project’s objectives for Year 1. Appendix A presents tables that show accomplishments by objective.

Did the BEST Project Achieve Target Levels of Quality, Relevance, and Usefulness?

On all counts, BEST project activities exceeded target levels of quality, relevance, and usefulness. Notably, a target of 3 on a 4-point scale would represent above-average quality, relevance, or usefulness. But, as the information in Tables 1, 2, and 3 shows, participants’ mean ratings of the quality, relevance, and usefulness of all project activities were above 3.0 and typically above 3.5.

Table 1: Mean Quality Ratings

Time Frame	PD Activity	Average Quality Rating (4-point scale)
October, 2014	BrailleNote	3.8
January, 2015	Duxbury I	3.56
January, 2015	Duxbury II	3.2
February, 2015	Assistive Technologies and Techniques	3.3
February, 2015	Transition Introduction to UEB	4.0
March, 2015	Duxbury I: Grafton	3.1
March, 2015	Duxbury II: Grafton	3.58
April, 2015	Duxbury I: Follow-up	4.0
April, 2015	Duxbury II: Follow-up	3.6
May, 2015	AT Conference	3.7
June, 2015	Basic Braille	3.82
June, 2015	Advanced Braille	4.0
June, 2015	UEB: Toledo	4.0
June, 2015	UEB: Columbus	3.75
June, 2015	UEB: Cleveland	3.92
June, 2015	Basic Nemeth	3.83
July, 2015	Advanced Nemeth	4.0
September,	Scanning	3.6

Time Frame	PD Activity	Average Quality Rating (4-point scale)
2015		
September, 2015	BrailleNote (9/15/15)	3.75
September, 2015	BrailleNote (9/16/15)	3.8

Table 2: Mean Relevance Ratings

Time Frame	PD Activity	Average Relevance Rating (4-point scale)
October, 2014	BrailleNote	n/a
January, 2015	Duxbury I	3.56
January, 2015	Duxbury II	3.6
February, 2015	Assistive Technologies and Techniques	3.4
February, 2015	Transition Introduction to UEB	3.9
March, 2015	Duxbury I: Grafton	3.4
March, 2015	Duxbury II: Grafton	3.58
April, 2015	Duxbury I: Follow-up	4.0
April, 2015	Duxbury II: Follow-up	4.0
May, 2015	AT Conference	3.8
June, 2015	Basic Braille	3.82
June, 2015	Advanced Braille	4.0
June, 2015	UEB: Toledo	4.0
June, 2015	UEB: Columbus	3.92
June, 2015	UEB: Cleveland	3.85
June, 2015	Basic Nemeth	3.67
July, 2015	Advanced Nemeth	4.0
September, 2015	Scanning	3.6
September, 2015	BrailleNote (9/15/15)	3.92
September, 2015	BrailleNote (9/16/15)	3.8

Table 3: Mean Usefulness Ratings

Time Frame	PD Activity	Average Usefulness Rating (4-point scale)
October, 2014	BrailleNote	3.88
October, 2014	ABBYY Scanning	4.0
January, 2015	Duxbury I	3.67
January, 2015	Duxbury II	3.4
February, 2015	Assistive Technologies and Techniques	3.4
February, 2015	Transition Introduction to UEB	4.0

Time Frame	PD Activity	Average Usefulness Rating (4-point scale)
March, 2015	Duxbury I: Grafton	3.4
March, 2015	Duxbury II: Grafton	3.73
April, 2015	Duxbury I: Follow-up	4.0
April, 2015	Duxbury II: Follow-up	3.8
May, 2015	AT Conference	3.7
June, 2015	Basic Braille	3.88
June, 2015	Advanced Braille	4.0
June, 2015	UEB: Toledo	4.0
June, 2015	UEB: Columbus	3.92
June, 2015	UEB: Cleveland	4.0
June, 2015	Basic Nemeth	3.67
July, 2015	Advanced Nemeth	4.0
September, 2015	Scanning	3.6
September, 2015	BrailleNote (9/15/15)	3.92
September, 2015	BrailleNote (9/16/15)	3.8

Did the BEST Project Have a Significant Impact on Learning?

The impact of project activities was measured in three ways. First, in the training sessions participants provided self-ratings of their levels of knowledge and skill before and after the session. Second, pre- and post-test scores were obtained for participants in four training sessions: Basic Braille, Advanced Braille, Basic Nemeth, and Advanced Nemeth. Third, instructors of Duxbury I and Duxbury II trainings, each of which entailed an initial session and a follow-up session, used rubrics to evaluate the portfolios of participants during the follow-up session for each training.

All three approaches to measuring impact revealed very high levels of impact. Table 4 presents effect sizes for the impact of trainings, as assessed through participants' self-ratings. It's important to note that an effect size of .8 represents a high level of impact, and that no effect size presented in the table is lower than 1.0. Many are above 2.0.

Table 4: Effect Sizes Based on Participants' Self-ratings

Time Frame	PD Activity	Effect Size (based on participants' self-ratings)
October, 2014	BrailleNote	n/a
January, 2015	Duxbury I	2.1
January, 2015	Duxbury II	1.01
February, 2015	Assistive Technologies and Techniques	2.95
February, 2015	Transition Introduction to UEB	1.99
March, 2015	Duxbury I: Grafton	2.1

Time Frame	PD Activity	Effect Size (based on participants' self-ratings)
March, 2015	Duxbury II: Grafton	1.39
April, 2015	Duxbury I: Follow-up	1.32
April, 2015	Duxbury II: Follow-up	n/a
May, 2015	AT Conference	n/a
June, 2015	Basic Braille	3.25
June, 2015	Advanced Braille	2.21
June, 2015	UEB: Toledo	2.65
June, 2015	UEB: Columbus	2.34
June, 2015	UEB: Cleveland	1.65
June, 2015	Basic Nemeth	2.1
July, 2015	Advanced Nemeth	3.58
September, 2015	Scanning	1.47
September, 2015	BrailleNote (9/15/15)	1.6
September, 2015	BrailleNote (9/16/15)	1.59

Impact based on the comparison of pre- and post-test scores in four courses also showed high levels of impact. Table 5 presents these effect sizes. Note that only one of these effect sizes (i.e., for the Advanced Braille course) was in the moderate-impact range. All others were in the high-impact range.

Table 5: Effect Sizes Based on Pre- to Post-test Comparisons

Time Frame	PD Activity	Effect Size (based on pre- to post-test comparisons)
June, 2015	Basic Braille	1.28
June, 2015	Advanced Braille	.75
June, 2015	Basic Nemeth	2.36
July, 2015	Advanced Nemeth	3.01

Was the BEST Project Responsive to the Needs of Key Clients and Stakeholders?

Participant ratings of Advisory Board meetings provide one way to gauge project responsiveness. For both meetings, ratings for the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the meeting were high. Table 6 presents these findings.

Table 6: Mean Advisory Board Participant Ratings on a 1 (low) to 4 (high) Scale

Meeting	Average Quality	Average Relevance	Average Usefulness
December 11, 2014	3.6	3.6	3.4
April 30, 2015	3.5	3.7	3.7

Another indicator of responsiveness are the numbers of times that BEST provided technical assistance to client groups. These data are presented in the tables in the Appendix.

Discussion and Recommendations

Overall, the evidence collected through the external evaluation indicates that the BEST project accomplished what it set out to accomplish in Project Year One. Furthermore, wherever client and participant measures are available (i.e., for all professional development activities and advisory activities), they indicate high levels of participant satisfaction as well as high levels of impact on the learning of educators, transcribers, and other adult participants.

Accomplishments by Objective

Objective 1.1 Provide professional development to educators.

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. Statewide UEB Training	February 27, 2015	Completed
B. Follow-up Regional UEB Trainings	Cleveland – June 8, 2015 Toledo – June 9, 2015 Columbus – June 10, 2015	Completed Completed Completed
C. Braille Immersion Camp with support from OSU Interns and OSSB TVIs	June 16-20, 2014	Completed
D. Weeklong Summer Basic Braille Course for educators	June 15-18, 2015	Completed
E. Weeklong Summer Basic Nemeth Course for educators	June 22-25, 2015	Completed
F. Weeklong Summer Advanced Braille Course for educators	July 6-9, 2015	Completed
G. Weeklong Summer Advanced Nemeth Course for educators	July 13-16, 2015	Completed
H. 14-week Blended Basic Braille Course (1 st 7wks in Yr 1 - 2 nd 7wks in Yr 2)	August 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 and September 8, 14, 2015	Completed

Objective 1.2 Provide technical assistance and support to educators.

Activity	Year	Level of Completion
A. Technical assistance (TA) through email and phone for educators/TVIs of students who attended the Braille Immersion Camp.	OSSB/OSU	Completed
B. Follow-up email and phone technical assistance for 14-week Blended Basic Braille Course (1 st 7 weeks)	Robin Finley and Dan Kelley TA – 58 hours	Completed
C. Technical assistance services regarding assistive technology hardware and software in the areas of braille literacy, production and technology for educators	Jerry Whittaker and Katie Robinson TA – 310 hours	Completed

Objective 1.3 Provide avenues to communicate information and support to educators.

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. Listserv posts with braille initiatives such as Braille Challenge, Seedlings, NFB Bell Program, AFB Dots for Literacy	3 CISAM Listservs BEST Community of Practice	Completed
B. BEST/CISAM Facebook and Twitter accounts to post announcements, updates, and grant information	Facebook and Twitter	Completed
C. Links on BEST website to post resources to assistive technology	BEST website UEB links on CISAM website UEB Transition Plan on website	Completed

Objective 2.1 Provide high-quality professional development training to educators in Ohio serving students who are blind and visually impaired or deafblind to increase their knowledge and use/implementation of braille and state-of-the-art technologies.

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. Assistive Technology (AT) Conference including families, in collaboration with ACBO, CISAM, OCDBE & OSSB including AT Vendor exhibits	May 2, 2015	Completed
B. Follow-up professional development training with AT Vendors from the AT Conference	BrailleNote October 28-29, 2014 September 15-16, 2015	Completed

Objective 2.2 Provide technical assistance and support relating to state of the art technologies to educators in school districts by adults who are blind and technology experts.

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. Email, phone and on-site support from collaborative partners regarding technology displayed at AT Conference	Vendors/Partners	Completed
B. Technical assistance relating to assistive technologies and	Jerry Whittaker and Katie Robinson	Completed

computer hardware and software by CISAM technical assistance consultants	TA – 310 hours	
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Objective 3.1 Provide high quality professional development to educators related to the production of braille.

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. Duxbury II	January 12-13, 2015	Completed
Duxbury I	January 14-15, 2015	Completed
Statewide Scanning	September 8-9, 2015	Completed
B. Follow-up training to the initial training	April 13-14, 2015	Completed
Duxbury II	April 16-17, 2015	Completed
Duxbury I		
C. Participant portfolios at the end of the series	Jan Carroll and Jerry Whittaker	Completed

Objective 3.2 Provide technical assistance to school districts that produce braille for Ohio schools.

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. Technical assistance for educators after the initial training	Jerry Whittaker – TA - 135.25 hours	Completed
B. On-site technical assistance to Local Braille Production Centers (LBPC)	Jerry Whittaker TA – 24.5 hours	Completed

Objective 3.3 Expand braille production capacities at the local school district level.

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. Establishment of LBPCs in Ohio school districts	ESC of North Central Ohio (Seneca County) ESC of Stark County	Completed
B. Technical assistance, support and training	Jerry Whittaker TA – 72.25 hours	Completed

Objective 3.4 Provide training and support to Grafton Braille Service Center (GBSC) Prison Braille Program.

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. Duxbury Follow-up Training UEB Training	March 17-18, 2015 March 31, 2015	Completed Completed
B. Technical assistance and support to GBSC through email, phone and on-site	TA hours – 74.25	Completed

Manage Project

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
A. BEST Advisory Board	December 11, 2014 April 30, 2015	Completed Completed
B. BEST Leadership Meetings	November 13, 2014 February 26, 2015 June 4, 2015 August 6, 2015	Completed Completed Completed Completed
C. External Evaluator – Aimee Howley Evaluation Meetings	October 27, 2014 November 25, 2014 December 10, 2014 January 23, 2105 February 25, 2015 April 8, 2015	Completed
D. Develop and Dissemination BEST Brochure	-Draft of the brochure developed -Survey for vetting brochure -Brochure disseminated	Completed
E. Contract with qualified personnel	Jan Carroll – Duxbury Training and Technical Assistance Robin Finley – Braille Immersion Camp and Follow-up Technical Assistance and Follow-up Blended Basic Braille Online Course Aimee Howley – External Evaluation Lauri Kaplan – AT Conference Dan Kelley – Follow-up Blended Basic Braille Online Course Shelley Mack – Summer	Completed

Activity	Year 1	Level of Completion
	Braille Courses, UEB Statewide and Regional Trainings Ceil Peirano – Braille Immersion Camp and Follow-up Technical Assistance Jerry Whittaker – Technical Assistance, Consultation, Professional Development, Duxbury and Scanning	