

BRaille COMPETENCY TESTING GUIDELINES

Colorado Department of Education

**Revised January 2011; Added a New Reference December 2012;
Updated for Unified English Braille on April 2016**

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the history and procedures for the state-mandated braille competency testing for Colorado licensed teachers endorsed in the area of visual impairment. The requirement for braille competency was the result of a national and state-level effort to protect the literacy instruction to learners who are braille readers.

Knowledge of braille is inherent in the assessment of a child who is blind or visually impaired in order to determine the student's need for braille instruction and/or the provision of materials in braille. Federal and Colorado State laws require knowledge of the braille code as follows:

- The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 provides that the individualized education program (IEP) team shall “the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP Team determines, after an evaluation of the child's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child's future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child.”¹
- The Colorado Rules for the Administration of the Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA Rules) require that “the written IEP for each child with a vision disability shall include a Learning Media Plan as developed by the IEP team based on comprehensive assessment of the student's learning and literacy modalities by a licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment. Braille shall be the literacy medium selected unless the IEP team determines, based on the comprehensive literacy leaning media assessment that instruction in Braille is not appropriate.”²

¹ Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 USC §1414(d)(3)(B)(iii)

² ICCR 301-8, 2220-R-4.03 (6) (b). Hereafter, the ECEA Rules will be referred to as the “ECEA Rules” or by rule number only (e.g., ECEA Rule ___)

Background of Braille Competency Testing in Colorado

State-mandated braille competency testing has been a Colorado requirement since 1994.³ Additionally, the ECEA Rules were amended in 1997 and again in 2007 to address the braille-testing requirement and currently require that “Colorado teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of Visual Impairment must have demonstrated competency in reading and writing literary Braille per the guidelines developed by the Colorado Department of Education.”⁴ With the United States adoption and full implementation of the Unified English Braille Code as of January 2016 the Colorado braille competency testing materials have been updated from English Braille American Edition to Unified English Braille.

Colorado Initial Licensure in the Endorsement Area of Visual Impairment

All candidates for initial educator licenses in Colorado have historically been required to take and pass one or more of the PLACE Content Assessments. Candidates for the special education endorsement in Special Education Specialist: Visual Impairment were mandated previously to pass the *PLACE Educator Content Assessment for Special Education Specialist: Severe Needs – Visually Impaired*. This test had a short section to assess braille competency in English Braille American Edition. This particular content assessment is suspended currently as a licensure requirement. Whether this specific test will be revised to include a section specific to Unified English Braille or is fully replaced with another test as a licensure requirement is yet to be determined.

At this time, it is important to note there is not a Professional Services and Educator Licensing Unit content test that requires a candidate for the Special Education Specialist: Visual Impairment to demonstrate braille competency as a requirement of licensure. It is further important to note that if such a content test is reinstated, it does not replace the Colorado Braille Competency Test administered through the Exceptional Student Services Unit. This latter test is not tied to licensure.

Colorado Braille Competency Process

The only professionals mandated to demonstrate braille competency per ECEA Rules are Colorado teachers licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment. This mandate includes those individuals who are on an Authorization: Temporary Educator Eligibility (TEE) and working toward completion of a university program in the field of educating children and youth who are blind/visually impaired. Students learning the Unified English Braille Code and/or utilizing braille materials must be assured they have high quality braille materials in their instruction.

³ Exceptional Children’s Educational Act, Colo. Rev. Stat. §22-20-108(4.5)(d)

⁴ ECEA Rule 4.03 (6) (b)(iv)

The Colorado Braille Competency Test may be taken by one other school professional. The test is appropriate for individuals hired by Colorado administrative units or state-operated programs⁵ as braillists. The key role of a braillist is to prepare and produce instructional braille materials for students who are learning a braille code(s) and/or who are using braille instructional materials. A CDE Certificate of Braille Competency, however, does not equate to a teacher endorsement needed to provide assessment and instruction in the Unified English Braille Code, which must be taught within the context of reading instruction.

The CDE has one option for those individuals who are required to earn a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency of Reading and Writing Unified English Braille. This option includes passing the Colorado Braille Competency Test, which consists of 100 multiple-choice questions specific to the Unified English Braille Code and an assigned passage that must be brailled in contracted Unified English Braille with a braille writer. The braille passage consists of approximately 3.5 pages (25 lines per page, 28 cell lines).

An expert panel constructed the first test in English Braille American Edition. The panel finalized the update of the Colorado Braille Competency Test in March 2016 to reflect the Unified English Braille Code specific to literary content. Both versions of the test demonstrated content-oriented validity. The test measures the content and skills needed by a licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment who is working to provide instruction and materials support to students who are learning and/or using the Unified English Braille Code.

The Colorado Braille Competency Test can be scheduled at any time of the year by contacting Dr. Tanni Anthony at (303) 866-6681 or anthony_t@cde.state.co.us. The test is given by a pre-approved proctor and can be taken with the use of standard reference materials. It is a four-hour test. There is no cost to the test. Written requests for accommodations must be sent to Dr. Anthony at least one month before the scheduled test session.

The four-hour testing period provides adequate time to complete both sections of the test. If both sections of the test are not entirely completed within the allotted time, neither section of the test will be graded and the candidate will fail the full test. For example, if the multiple-choice section is completed and only one-half of the passage is completed in braille, the candidate will fail the full test. The test candidate will have to retake both sections of the test at a future date as described in the scenarios below.

Expected Timelines for Earning a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency

All licensed teachers endorsed in the area of visual impairment, including those individuals employed on temporary status (Temporary Educator Eligibility-TEE) who are

⁵ Hereafter, for the ease of reading, the term *administrative units* will also include state-operated programs.

completing their university program in visual impairment), must have a valid CDE Certificate of Braille Competency or a CDE Renewal Certificate of Braille Competency on file with their current administrative unit of employment. The CDE Certificate of Braille Competency must be earned no later than the end of the individual's first instructional year, but no later than May 31st of the first instructional year, with a Colorado administrative unit as a teacher of students who are blind/visually impaired. If a teacher moves from one Colorado administrative unit to another, the expectation of first-year braille competency demonstration does not "reactivate" from year-to-year. The testing clock begins with the first day of Colorado employment as teacher of students with visual impairments in any administrative unit.

If a licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment is hired mid-school year (January 1 or later) of an instructional year, it is recommended that this individual demonstrate braille competency before the end of the same instructional year. It is mandated that the individual demonstrate braille competency no later than August 31st of that same calendar year or before the start date of the next instructional year, whichever comes first.

The CDE Certificate of Braille Competency must be renewed one time following its initial issuance. The process for renewal involves the completion of CDE pre-approved braille production modules. Fifteen clock hours are required for the CDE Renewal Braille Certificate. These clock hours must be earned within the first five years following the date of the initial certificate. Up to four modules can be taken each subsequent year from the initial certificate, but a minimum of two modules must be reserved for the fifth year. A separate document, *Braille Competency Renewal Testing Guidelines* provides details on the renewal procedures at:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/sd-vision_guidedocs

When a new licensed teacher endorsed in the area of visual impairment is hired by a Colorado administrative unit, the CDE State Consultant on Blindness/Visual Impairment will contact this individual and his or her Special Education Director to provide him or her with a copy of this document. Additional information will be given about the recommended preparatory materials.

The new teacher will be asked to work with his or her administrative unit supervisor to set a date to take the Colorado Braille Competency Test. The CDE will provide appropriate technical assistance to assist the candidate to prepare for the test. These same procedures will be followed for a veteran Colorado teacher licensed and endorsed in the area of visual impairment who has not yet earned a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency or, as appropriate, a CDE Renewal Certificate of Braille Competency.

What to Bring to the Proctored Testing Session and Standard References

Candidates should bring the appropriate sized braille paper, a braillewriter in good-working condition, a braille eraser, and a pen or pencil to the proctored session for the Colorado Braille Competency Test.

Candidates taking the Colorado Braille Competency Test will be provided access to a set of standard references during the testing session. The intent is to create a testing environment that reflects the real-life scenario that a braille-competent professional may still need to look up a rule or braille code example from time to time. No additional reference materials may be brought into the testing session.

Clean copies of the following resources will be provided to the test candidate for the duration of the testing session:

- Aroga Unified English Braille Chart
- Ashcroft's Programmed Instruction: UEB (2014, Printing 3 or later)
- Burns Braille Guide: A Quick Reference to UEB
- Instructional Manual UEB Edition 2015
- The Braille Enthusiast's Dictionary: Unified English Braille Edition
- The Rules of Unified English Braille (2nd Edition 2013)
- A standard English dictionary

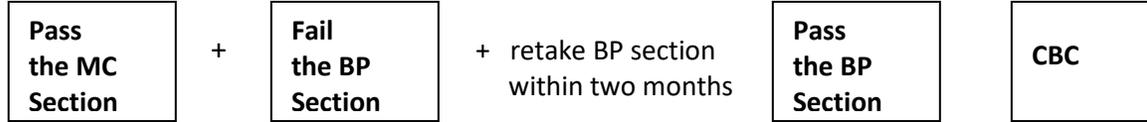
Frequency of Testing

The Colorado Braille Competency Test is offered throughout the calendar year. The following scenarios are offered to address a number of situations that may occur with a candidate. ***It is expected that the first two scenarios are the most common.***

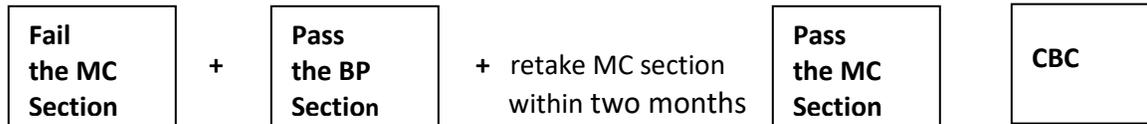
Scenario One: If a candidate passes both the multiple choice (MC) section and the braille passage (BP) of the test during one proctored session, a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency (CBC) will be awarded. This certificate will be valid for five years from its date of issue.



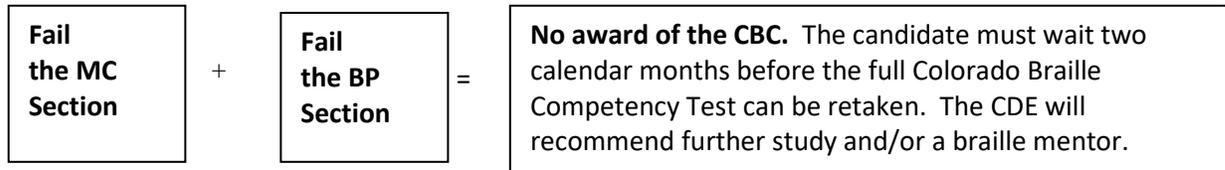
Scenario Two: If the candidate passes only one section of the Colorado Braille Test, a second opportunity will be offered to retake the failed section within a two-calendar-month-period from the date of the issued results. If the candidate passes the retake section, a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency will be awarded.



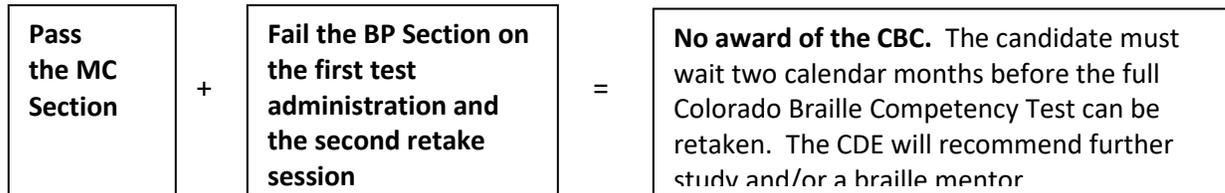
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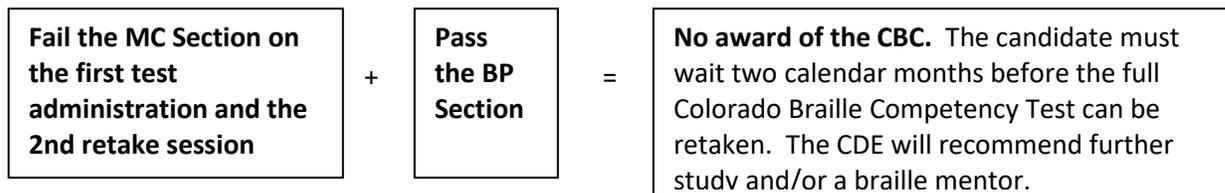
Scenario Three: If both sections are failed during the full administration of the test or the retake section is failed, the candidate will not earn a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency. In these situations, the candidate cannot retake the full Colorado Braille Competency Test for two calendar months and will be advised to pursue further study and/or a braille mentor. CDE will work with the candidate to provide a braille mentor.



or



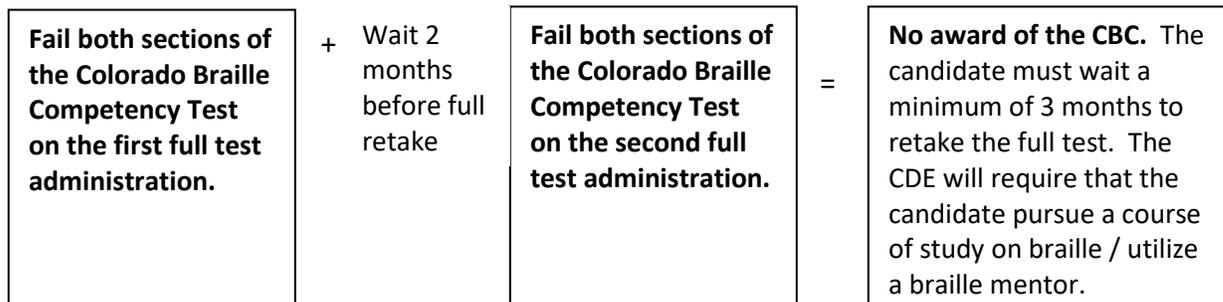
or



Scenario Four: In the event that the candidate must retake the full Braille Competency Test a second time, one of the above described scenarios will necessarily occur during the second full round of testing.

If the second retake of the full Colorado Braille Competency Test is not passed, the candidate will be required to pursue a course of study in Literary Braille (e.g., a braille refresher course) and/or a braille mentor before he or she can retake the braille test on a third occasion. A braille mentor is likely to be colleague who has demonstrated braille competency and is in the administrative unit or near-by administrative unit. It is suggested that the course of study be supported by such a mentor to achieve full benefit. A mentor can work with the candidate to call specific attention to areas of need in the Literary Braille Code.

A third full retake of the Colorado Braille Competency Test will be allowed after a three calendar month period of study / mentoring.



In the event that a third round of braille testing does not result in a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency, the cycle will continue with a second wait period of three months. The candidate will not be allowed to retake the Colorado Braille Competency Test without evidence of a course of study and the use of a mentor.

The Special Education Director of the employed candidate will be kept apprised of the candidate's status on demonstrating braille competency and options for ongoing technical assistance support. If braille competency is not demonstrated by the end of the first instructional year, the CDE will issue a noncompliance citation to the administrative unit of hire of the test candidate. CDE technical assistance will be offered to assist with the required corrective action.

For Further Information

For more information about the requirements for teacher demonstration of braille competency in Colorado and/or the Colorado Braille Competency Test, please contact Dr. Anthony at the (303) 866-6681 or Anthony_t@cde.state.co.us