



CA DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION  
STATE  
SPECIAL SCHOOLS

# Braille Bites

## California School for the Blind

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### Superintendent's message

By: Stuart Wittenstein

As I write these introductory words to the newest edition of the Braille Bites, I am enjoying the lingering good feelings from attending the Northern California Regional Braille Challenge a few days ago here at the California School for the Blind. What a wonderful opportunity



to celebrate the Braille Code, literacy for blind students, and the families, teachers, and transcribers who support the children! In addition to the Challenge participants' hard work at the competition, family members were treated to workshops designed to inform them about the various service options for their children available in Northern California and the technological advances which will enable their children more access to information than ever before. It was a truly remarkable and successful day – made more successful by the collaboration of agencies in Northern California.

As you will read in this issue, CSB students have many opportunities to learn and grow, both on and off of our campus. In particular, I hope you will read the letter from one family about the impact that CSB has had on the educational and social achievement of their son. We were thrilled to receive it – and even more thrilled to be able to make a difference in a child's life.

# LOOK WHO'S NEW!



**Tina Michaud**  
Teaching Assistant



**Ray Abesamis**  
Teaching Assistant



**Caitlin O'Malior**  
Reader



**Emily Matthews**  
Reader



**Michelle Jacobs**  
Teaching Assistant



**Xander Saravia**  
Reader

## Ice-skating

By: Mary Alice Ross

The students in the transition program began ice-skating in January and finish the program at the end of February. After eight weeks of ice-skating, the student's skill level improves dramatically.

Here are some photos of the students using different techniques while ice-skating. Jess is holding onto the wall for support, Manuel is using a "skate aid" and then advances to using his cane on the ice.

Tommy uses the back of Amanda's wheelchair for support and then helps to move her around on the ice.



on the ice.

Within a group setting, each student uses the individual technique that best suits him/her.

This is one of the most challenging units that we teach in Adapted Physical Education.

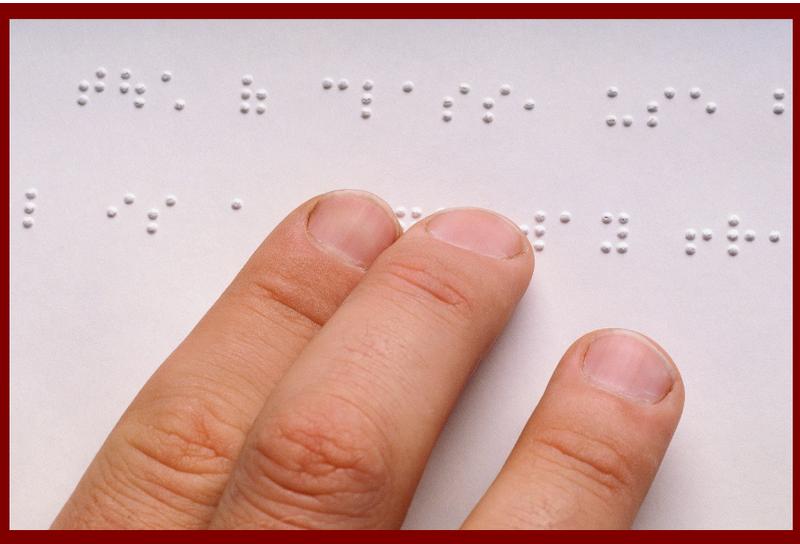


## Adoption of the Universal Braille Code

By: Alysa Chadow

On November 2, 2012, I had the privilege of observing the members of BANA (Braille Authority of North America) vote to adopt the Universal English Braille Code (UEB) for use in the United States. The vote took place at the Braille Institute of America.

The road to Los Angeles was over 21 years in the making and had a series of bumps (no pun intended) to it. Ever since its invention by Louis Braille in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Braille has evolved to include reading and writing systems for math, science (including computer science), and music.



Having so many systems meant using a Braille symbol in multiple ways, and became complex and off-putting for many users. Then in 1991, Dr. Abraham Nemeth and Dr. Tim Cranmer presented a paper at a BANA meeting stressing the need to unify the Braille code. Over the next 2 decades, other English-speaking countries-Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, and the United Kingdom-adopted the UEB. Only the United States remained steadfast and true to the old literary code.

South Africa, and the United Kingdom-adopted the UEB. Only the United States remained steadfast and true to the old literary code.

BANA spent the last several years researching the feasibility of using the UEB in the United States, and by 2012 was ready to vote on its adoption. With the needed two-thirds majority vote in place, the first step in the adoption process is now complete. As part of the package, the Nemeth code will be retained and used along with the UEB.

So, what happens next? Implementation of the UEB will take several years, to say the least, and TVIs must be trained in it before teaching it to their students. BANA's plans for this year include the formation of a strategic planning committee to look into the nuts and bolts of the operation. In the meantime, those of us who use the now "older" system will be seeing those dot patterns with which we grew up for a while.

And now, a teaser-I will discuss the changes in my next article. Stay tuned!

## Goalball spotlight with Abel

Goalball is a team sport developed for blind and visually impaired athletes. The National Goalball Championship took place in Jacksonville, Florida in November, 2012. Abel Del Toro, a junior at Kennedy High School, participated in the tournament with the team representing California; The California Cyclones. The team took a Bronze medal. Abel was honored for the 2012 All-American Team. He was also selected to play on the USA Youth Team in the upcoming World Championship Goalball Tournament in Colorado Springs, Colorado during the summer of 2013. Abel was invited to attend the Men's USA Goalball Team training camp in December, 2012 in Lake Placid, New York. He is being considered as a future USA player – one of two youth players in the country to be so honored – and may have a chance to participate in the Paralympics in Brazil in 2016.



## Get Ready to be Challenged!!!

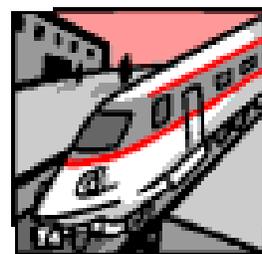
On Saturday, March 2, 2013 **CSB** hosted the Northern California Braille Challenge. Vista Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired, the San Francisco Lighthouse for the Blind, Junior Blind of America, National Federation of the Blind of California, and the California Council of the Blind were co-sponsors of this great event. Twenty enthusiastic students throughout the Bay Area tested their knowledge and skills when they completed a series of Braille tests on Challenge Day. Tests included proof reading, spelling, graphs and charts, and speed and accuracy. While students were taking their exams, family members were treated to two panel discussions and workshops. This year's keynote speaker was Jerry Kuns, beloved Assistive Technology Specialist and entrepreneur. All students received certificates of participation and metals. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners for each category received great prizes. Let's applaud the courage and skills of these students.



## Waiting for Mr. Lee

By: Wayne Siligo

“There they are!” The aging man’s voice sounded as gentle as the patter of warm summer rain. Every weekday late afternoon as I waited for my ride, I would here the same friendly words, spoken softly through the din of the Fruitvale BART station. Then as always, the next few moments would be filled with his warm voice speaking to my Labrador guide dog Oliver. ”Have you been working hard? I bet you’re ready to go home bout now. Give old Lee those soft ears.” Owners of Dog Guides are instructed to tell others not to pet the dog while the dog is working. But, from the first time Mr. Lee appeared, I couldn’t make the words come out of my mouth. So each day as he bent down to stroke and scratch my old boy’s head and ears, I always listened to his conversation as if it were the first time I’d heard his words. Our topics were varied, but there was always the weather, and how his companion was working too hard now that he was retired.



As he watched for my ride, Mr. Lee would continue talking to me while noisy trains past by.

This pattern continued for at least two years, and no matter how aggravating or dismal the daily news seemed to be, Mr. Lee never changed his gentle, philosophical approach to the fast paced life around him. Every day our conversation began as if no time had passed between our last words. On those rare afternoons when I didn’t feel a hundred percent, and his voice wasn’t as welcome as usual, in seconds we were back on comfortable and soothing ground.

I haven’t met Mr. Lee for some years now, so I don’t know what has become of him or his family. I try to be optimistic and believe it’s possible he comes at a different time than before, I certainly don’t want to dwell on any other reason for his absence. I do know that even now, I find myself listening, half expecting to hear that same gentle age-wizedened voice.

His memory has brought some heavy thoughts to mind. Sadly, we need to be reminded that there is a wonderful treasure in the dignity and warmth of the elderly, perhaps a sense of caring and openness of days past. Whenever I think about Mr. Lee, a worn but very real saying crosses my mind.

“We don’t really know how much we appreciate someone who carves a niche into our lives until they are no longer with us.”

## A parent thank you to CSB

"Our decision to send Jack to **CSB** has been so validating. Jack has grown academically, socially and emotionally. He is a very different person since his arrival at your school - all for the better. Thanks to everyone for your belief and efforts in making him the best he can be. It shows!

Our journey through Special Education has not been easy. By the time we arrived at **CSB**, our entire family was tired, frustrated and beaten down. It has been so refreshing to work with a staff of professionals who work so beautifully together, include the parents, and always keep the best interest of Jack in mind. It has been a gift. Thank you.

We are not surprised that Delena and Ron are receiving praises all around. They deserve it in spades. The growth in both boys has been amazing. It's especially fun to read Jack's writing. We were told many, many times that he would never be able to read and write. Now I see a boy who can text, email and write. He has style and things to say. It's a great gift that Delena and Ron have given Jack. Thank you, thank you.

It's very exciting to see Jack excelling at Walter's. Who would have thought we'd have an honor roll student??? We are looking forward to the upcoming semester and seeing how Jack does in a mainstream English class. This is a welcome challenge. Thanks to you all, he is ready to take it on.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Cheryl and Vic for all their "behind the scenes" work. Cheryl has given Jack the tools to envision life beyond our living room. His world is growing everyday. We can see it in the confidence he now displays at stores and outside venues. Jack has a much better grasp of his disability and uses the tools that Cheryl has given him to navigate the world successfully.

Vic's work with Jack's pragmatic skills is paying off in dividends. No where do you see the growth in this area more than at Boy Scouts. He has improved so much in joining in conversations and staying relevant in the chaotic banter of teenage boys. What was once agony to watch, is now (almost!) taken for granted. Jack has been a patrol leader for the last three months. While it has had challenges, it is so good to see him stretch into a leadership position and use his communication skills to guide the group.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the staff at the dorm - especially Charles, Tim and the wrestling coaches. They have given Jack independence and a sense of community. People are always amazed that we are okay with Jack staying in the dorm. All we can say is, "Are you kidding?" He loves it and he gets SO VERY MUCH out of it. Friendship, community and independence to name a few. Thank you for being part of Jack's Village.

Now that this written, I can see that it is long overdue. For that we apologize. All of you have been a "game changer" in Jack's life. Words can't express our gratitude. Thanks for making a difference.

Keith and Tracey Gillette

## **A visit to the Mythbusters experiment** By: Mary Durski's class

My favorite exhibit at the San Jose Tech Museum, was the table cloth pull. I was not certain whether or not I would be able to pull it off, but I performed the task very well on several occasions. I also really enjoyed the dangerous card throw. Surprisingly, I was able to stick the playing card in the target, achieving a speed of 28 miles per hour. All in all, I enjoyed my time spent at the Mythbusters Exhibition.—Robert L.

On December 19, 2012, my class and I attended the Tech Museum in San Jose. We observed several Mythbusters experiments. My favorite was the tablecloth experiment which consisted of us yanking a tablecloth off of a table with plates and a vase on it. I took great pleasure in witnessing Xander being shot at with a paintball gun. We topped off the outing with a delicious lunch at the Sonoma Chicken Coop.—Julissa C.

Everyone is asking what your favorite part of the San Jose Tech Museum was. That is easy, it was the Mythbuster part. From seeing the props to throwing cards at a dart board. I ran through the rain to test one of the other Mythbusters experiments. I was also shot at by a paintball gun and drove blind. I enjoyed snatching the table cloth from under the dishes. What was not to love about my trip to San Jose?—Xander S.

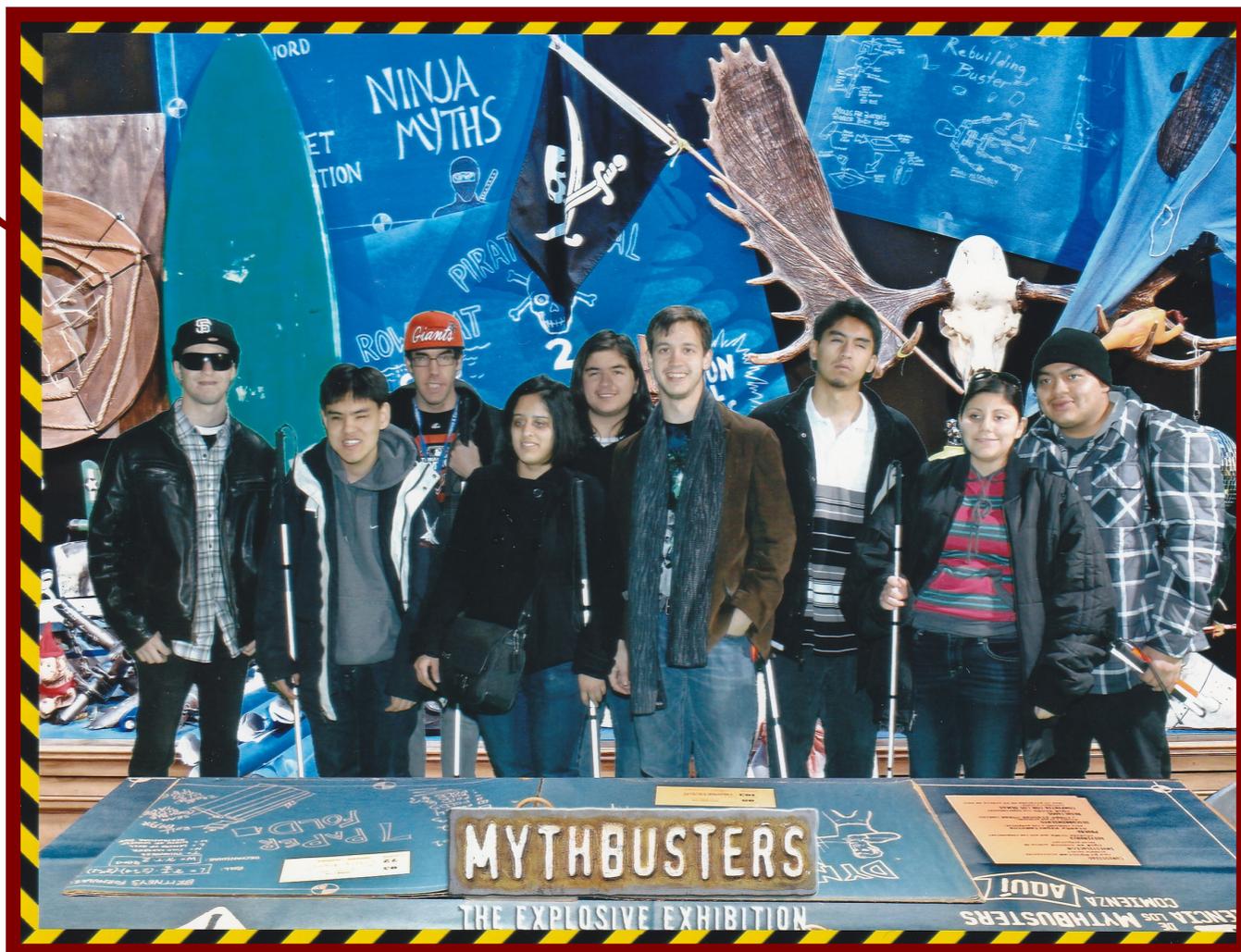
My class took a trip to the Tech Museum for a Mythbusters exhibit. There were many different experiments to do. There was a card throwing display where you threw a card and tried to get it stuck in a target. My favorite was the table cloth experiments. You had to pull a table cloth with a place setting on it and try and get not knock off the place settings. There were many different types of table cloths. There was a silk, cotton and leather. I learned that the silk works the best. In all, I really enjoyed the whole trip and would love to do it again some time. - Jason B.

My class went on a trip to the Tech Museum in San Jose. It was very interesting to see the different experiments that were being displayed in the museum. My favorite display was walking through the rain. I also enjoyed seeing my classmate Xander dodge a paint ball gun shot. Although I never seen the show Mythbusters. I really enjoyed their experiments. This was a trip that I would like to repeat in the future.—Alex H.

My favorite things about the Mythbusters exhibit was the blind driving and pull the tablecloth off the table. I loved seeing all of the stuff from the show. The shark, phonebook swing, and the blue prints from the show. It was my favorite trip my whole **CSB** school year; I would not change it for the world! - Randy H.

My favorite exhibit at the San Jose Tech Museum was pull the tablecloth. I didn't think I would be able to pull a table cloth off of a set table, and have all the dishes stay on the table. I am not thinking of doing this experiment at home. All in all, it was a nice day, and I really enjoyed myself.—Jot P.

My class went to the Mythbusters in San Jose. My favorite experiments were house building and pull the tablecloth. I also enjoyed the phone book swing. I am amazed on how much science is out there. I really enjoyed my time at the San Jose Tech Museum and appreciated the opportunity to go with my class. I enjoyed my time so much that I would like to go on this trip again sometime in the future.—Chris N.





## Valentine's Day Dance



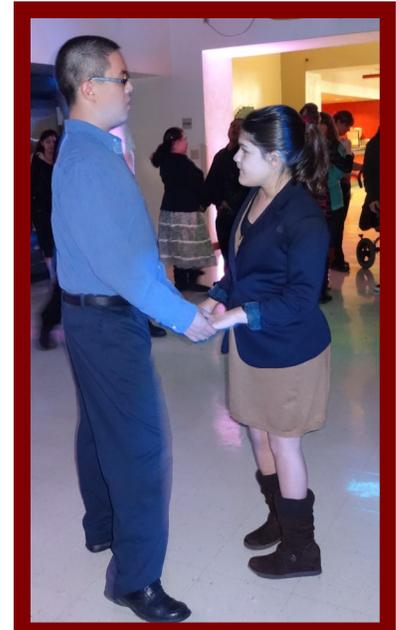
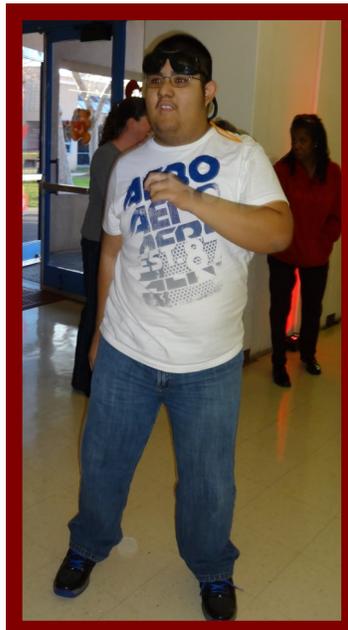
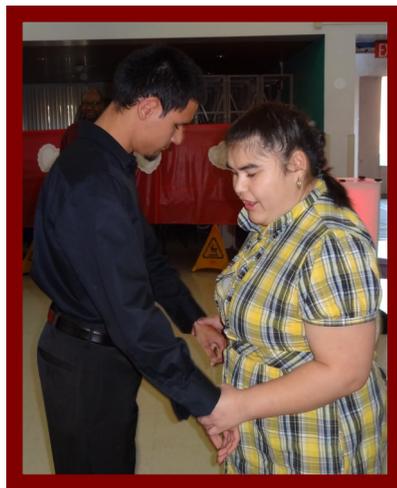
A rose by any other name or “We’re having the sweetheart dance where?”

With hearts and cupids on the windows, red table cloths, matching napkins, utensils and center pieces, the **CSB** dining hall was transformed into a place for students to dance and have a great time.

The music was loud and the dance floor was colorful thanks to the lights provided for by the DJ.

The students danced alone, as couples and in groups.

When polled, the majority of the students loved the dance, the food and soon forgot it was a cafeteria.



If you would like to contribute a future article for Braille Bites, please send it to: [jrudder@csb-cde.ca.gov](mailto:jrudder@csb-cde.ca.gov)