

# **BRAILLE COMPETENCY TESTING GUIDELINES**

## **Colorado Department of Education Revised May 2010**

### **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 child'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.”<sup>1</sup>
- 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.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Background of Braille Competency Testing in Colorado**

State-mandated braille competency testing has been a Colorado requirement since 1994.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the ECEA Rules were amended in 1997 and again in 2007 to address the

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

<sup>2</sup> 1CCR 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 \_\_\_\_)

<sup>3</sup> Exceptional Children's Educational Act, Colo. Rev. Stat. §22-20-108(4.5)(d)

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.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Colorado Initial Licensure in the Endorsement Area of Visual Impairment**

All candidates for initial educator licenses in Colorado are required to take and pass one or more of the PLACE Content Assessments. Candidates for the special education endorsement in Special Education Specialist: Blind/Visually Impaired must take and pass the *PLACE Educator Content Assessment for Special Education Specialist: Severe Needs – Visually Impaired* (hereafter referred to as “*PLACE: VI*”).

The exception to the requirement for the *PLACE: VI* test may include out-of-state applicants for an initial license who have the requisite training and teaching experience in the field of educating students who are blind/visually impaired. Applicants falling in this category should consult the application for an Initial License provided by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), which can be found at:

[http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/Licensure\\_main.asp](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprof/Licensure_main.asp)

The *PLACE: VI* includes a brief braille competency section. In order to pass the *PLACE: VI*, both the teaching content and the braille competency sections must be passed. It is important to note that passing the *PLACE: VI* does not result in the CDE Certificate of Braille Competency. It only qualifies the individual to be licensed and endorsed as a teacher of children with visual impairments in the State of Colorado.

### **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 Literary Braille Code and/or utilizing braille materials must be assured high quality braille materials in their instruction.

The Colorado Braille Mastery Test may be taken by one other school professional. The test is appropriate for individuals hired by Colorado administrative units or state-operated programs<sup>5</sup> 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 Literary Braille Code, which is taught within the context of reading instruction.

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<sup>4</sup> ECEA Rule 4.03 (6) (b)(iv)

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

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

The test was constructed by an expert panel and has demonstrated content-oriented validity. It 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 Literary Braille Code.

The Colorado Braille Mastery 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, the multiple-choice section is completed and only one-half of the passage is completed in braille. Even though the multiple-choice section is at the passing level, no credit will be given for either section. The test taker 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 on a Temporary Teacher Eligibility (TTE) or a Special Educator Eligibility (SEE), 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 30 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 31 of that same calendar year or before the start date of the administrative unit of employment.

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, *Renewal Certificate for CDE Braille Competency Information on Braille Modules*, located on the CDE webpage on Blindness/Low Vision (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/BLV.asp>), provides details on the renewal procedures.

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 Mastery 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 Mastery 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 taker for the duration of the testing session:

- English Braille American Edition 1994 (Revised 2002)
- BANA Braille Codes Update 2007
- Instruction Manual for Braille Transcribing
- New Programmed Instruction in Braille
- Braille Enthusiast's Dictionary
- Condensed Reference Sheet of Literary Braille Code Contractions and Punctuation
- A standard English dictionary

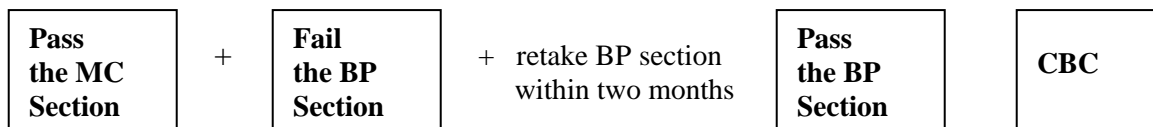
## **Frequency of Testing**

The Colorado Braille Mastery 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.***

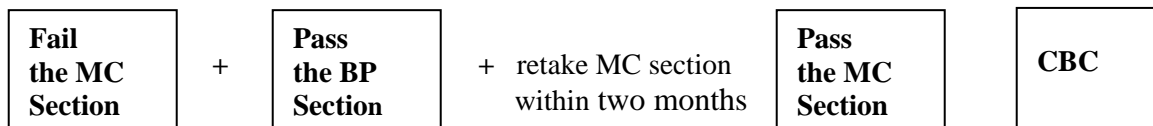
**Scenario One:** If a candidate passes both the multiple choice (MC) section and the braille passage (BP) of the test during one proctored session, a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency (CBC) will be awarded. This certificate will be valid for five years from its date of issue.



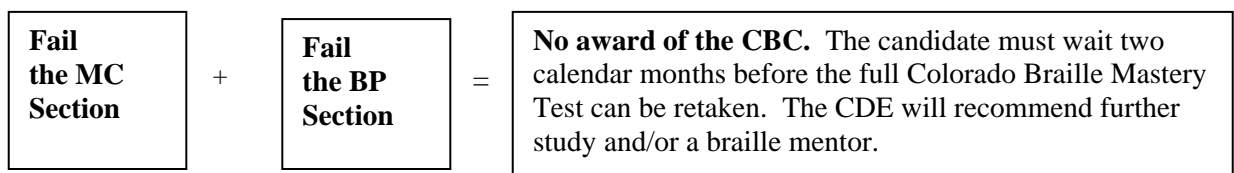
**Scenario Two:** If the candidate passes only one section of the Colorado Braille Test, a second opportunity will be offered to retake the failed section within a two-calendar-month-period from the date of the issued results. If the candidate passes the retake section, a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency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



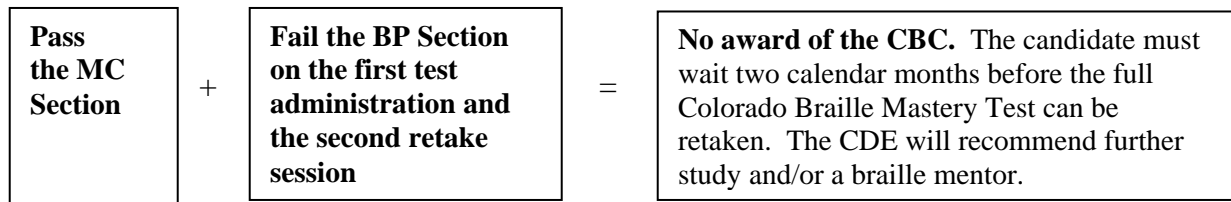
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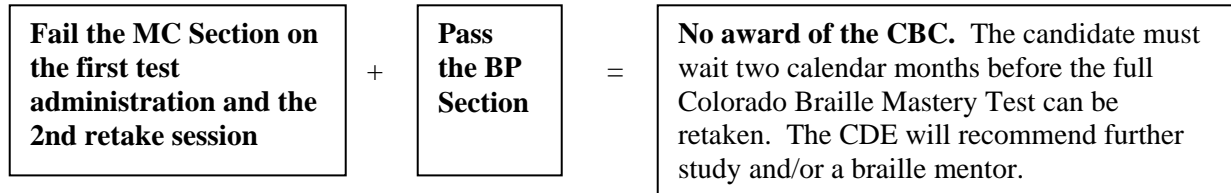
**Scenario Three:** If both sections are failed during the full administration of the test or the retake section is failed, the candidate will not earn a CDE Certificate of Braille Competency. In these situations, the candidate cannot retake the full Colorado Braille Mastery Test for two calendar months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



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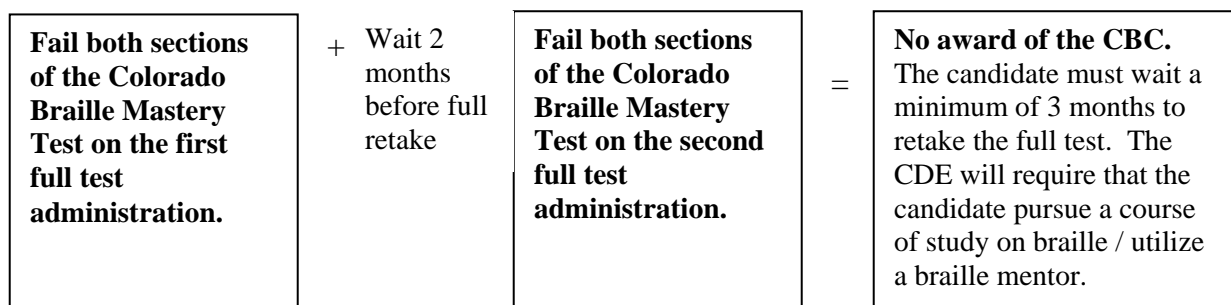
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**Scenario Four:** In the event that the candidate must retake the full Braille Mastery Test a second time, one of the above described scenarios will necessarily occur during the second full round of testing.

If the second retake of the full Colorado Braille Mastery 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 Mastery 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 Mastery 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. 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 Mastery Test, please contact Dr. Anthony at the (303) 866-6681 or <Anthony\_t@cde.state.co.us>.