

# Frequently Asked Questions about the Florida Braille Challenge Regional Events



## 1. Why are older students taking the same test as younger students?

Braille Institute of America created The Braille Challenge along with the rules, testing procedures, category levels, etc. Students should register for the category based on their *reading* level, not their *age*. After the first year of the Florida Braille Challenge, we realized it was very awkward having 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders testing with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, even though they were all on the same reading level. In Florida, we decided to create additional categories so that the older students were not testing with younger ones. One category is “Un’s the One” for students only reading uncontracted Braille. This is for students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and up. Another category division that was made in Tampa in 2011 was that the Freshman group was split into two groups (younger/older students). It is very difficult to accommodate the very diverse group of Braille readers who compete because there is such a varying range of ages and reading levels. It is also difficult to secure enough testing rooms, volunteers, proctors, etc. and of course with more categories come more prizes (more fundraising)! When you register your students, be sure to indicate which level would be most appropriate and explain to your student that not everyone will be in the same grade in their testing group, but everyone will be *reading* at the same level. TVIs and/or parents should make this decision. You can go to The Braille Challenge website for more specific information about contest levels: [www.braillechallenge.org](http://www.braillechallenge.org).

## 2. Isn't there a larger venue in Tampa where we can hold the event?

The Tampa event has changed venues several times and the best geographical location and logistical layout has been at the Lions Eye Institute Foundation. They are one of our biggest supporters and make many accommodations to meet our growing needs. A fourth event is going to be held in Orlando in 2012, which should reduce the amount of students competing in Tampa. Additionally, it is VERY important to register your students by the deadline. By the December deadline of last year, we had plenty of space to accommodate the number of registered students. Many teachers/parents requested that their students be allowed to register late for a number of reasons. It's very difficult to turn away a child who wants to compete in The Braille Challenge, but this year's deadline will be very strict due to the large number of events and incredible amount of planning to be done. T-shirts, prizes, food, etc. all need to be planned for and purchased months in advance of the events.

## 3. Why aren't there materials available at the Pre-Braille level?

Braille Institute of America created this competition for students in first through twelfth grades. There is not a formal “Pre-Braille” competition. This is something we created in Florida after many TVIs asked if their younger students could attend. The Pre-Braille category is not a formal testing event. If TVIs have students who want to attend and participate in this category, they are responsible for making and bringing materials at their students' level. Since all of these little ones have very different skills, it is not

possible to create a standardized Pre-Braille “test” that will be appropriate for everyone. Sometimes a little one comes who is not accompanied by a TVI. The other teachers in the Pre-Braille room have always been happy to include those students. The Pre-Braille room is always the liveliest and is always in need of volunteers and TVIs to assist. The goal is to get the pre-braille students excited about braille and introduce them to the event so that when they are in first grade, they will be more prepared for the competition.

#### **4. Why can't the event be held on a weekend?**

Since so many volunteers, teachers, administrators, etc. are needed to set-up/clean-up and run the events, we feel that we would have the most support during a workday. It's difficult for students to miss school, but they are working on reading comprehension, tactile graph reading, and other literacy related skills. So many of the folks who are needed to make these events successful have many other obligations on the weekends.

#### **5. Why is the event so long?**

Braille Institute designed The Braille Challenge event to include 5 ability levels with the younger groups taking 3 contests and the older groups taking 4 contests. They provided an official handbook to follow so that the integrity of The Braille Challenge is maintained throughout North America where all of the regional events are held. Specific guidelines are outlined for the length of time of each contest, break time for the students in between, lunch, and of course scoring time. Some regional events do not score student contests the day of their Challenge, which means students are not awarded first, second, or third place prizes (but they likely finish sooner). Fortunately we have a great turnout at our regional events, but this also means we have a greater turnout of contests to score. At the Central Tampa event, scorekeepers had to score close to 200 student Braille contests! They have a scoring handbook with very specific scoring instructions required by Braille Institute and our Score Room Administrators implement many checks and balances so that at least two scorekeepers look at every contest to ensure accuracy. These regional events are intended to provide educational opportunities to parents, families, and educators as well as recognize these young Braille readers for their accomplishments. Providing workshops and guest speakers and scoring the contests on site and holding an Award Ceremony accomplishes Braille Institute's mission. Some teachers and parents take their little ones in the Pre-Braille group home after lunch. It may be helpful to hold a mini award ceremony for the Pre-Braille group at the end of lunch to recognize them and end their very long day sooner.

#### **6. Why can't students use an electronic notetaker?**

This is Braille Institute's competition with their rules, contests and support. In order to make the contests standardized, all students compete with the same equipment. There are no spell check options on a Perkins Brailier! Not all students have access to an electronic notetaker, so some would be at an advantage over their peers. Since Perkins brailiers are available on quota from APH, all students can have access to them. There may be a transition in the next few years to move towards notetakers (at least for the older levels), but for now, everyone uses the Perkins. Good news, in 2012 students will be able to use the Next Generation brailier. No more giant paper for little fingers!

## **7. How can I help my students prepare for The Challenge?**

Braille Institute's website, [www.braillechallenge.org](http://www.braillechallenge.org), has sample contests posted for students to practice. Teachers and students can access sample spelling lists, reading comprehension passages/questions, speed and accuracy audio files, proofreading passages, and tactile chart and graph files to emboss at all 5 category levels. Teachers should also review these sample contests to help determine what level their students should register for.

## **8. Where can I find more information about the various testing levels and skills required in each level?**

Go to [www.braillechallenge.org](http://www.braillechallenge.org) and look for the "Contest Categories and Sample Questions".

## **9. What do other counties do about transportation issues?**

Every county addresses transportation differently. Some parents attend with their children, which would be ideal so the parents can participate in the educational sessions. Some counties obtain permission for teachers to transport and reimburse for travel. Some counties provide a van for all students and teachers to travel together. Divisions of Blind Services or Lighthouse agencies have assisted with transportation for some students. Teachers, students, and families from some counties have done their own fundraising campaign to raise money for rental vans and hotel rooms so that all teachers, students, and families can travel together.

## **10. Who goes to The National Braille Challenge in California?**

Only students who take the contest in **contracted** Braille are eligible for the Finals. Students who take the Apprentice test in uncontracted (including the "Un's the One" group) are not eligible to compete in The National Braille Challenge. Of all the students competing around the US and Canada, the top 12 scorers from each level advance to the Finals. So, the top 12 students of all of North America in the Apprentice-contracted only category move on, the top 12 of the Freshman, the top 12 of the Sophomore, Junior Varsity, Varsity move on for a total of 60 students.

## **11. Where can I find more information about the Florida Braille Challenge regional events?**

[www.fimcvi.org](http://www.fimcvi.org) or Facebook

## **12. How can I help?**

Check your e-mails, check FIMCVI.org or Facebook frequently for updates, find resources at [www.braillechallenge.org](http://www.braillechallenge.org) to help your students prepare, help with fundraising (chocolate bars, t-shirts, local efforts), register to help run the event, volunteer to assist with the Pre-Braille group!!

***Florida Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Impaired wishes to gratefully acknowledge the generous support of our 2012 Regional Braille Challenge sponsors:***

\* Humanware \* National Braille Press \* Seedlings Braille Books for Children  
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