



# AMESVIEW

February 2009

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

### HAPPY NEW YEAR!

January marks not only the beginning of a new calendar year, but the halfway point of the AMESVI year which began on July 1<sup>st</sup> of 2008 and ends just over 5 months from now on June 30, 2009. Your Board has been active during the past six months, having met a number of times both in person and via conference call. Remember that we have been elected to represent all of **YOU, our 147 current members**, so if at any time you have questions, ideas or business to bring before the board, please call on any one of us, especially your Regional Reps (listed in sidebar).

We have recently appointed **Amy Mason to fill the position of Western MA Rep** to replace Miryam Vesset, who had to resign for personal reasons. Thank-you and good luck to Miryam and welcome to Amy!

Our **Fall Conference on the Legal and Educational Implications of IEPs vs 504 Plans**, presented by speakers Dr. Richard Jackson and Attorney Miriam Freedman, and coordinated by Michelle Antinarelli, was extremely successful. With many thanks to Tim Traut-Savino and Susan Stager, we also confirmed some long overdue revisions to the bylaws at our business meeting.

**SAVE THE DATE!!** Our **Spring Conference on Implementing the Expanded Core Curriculum** is scheduled for Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> at the Carroll Center Technology Building in Newton from 8:30AM - 3:30PM. We're fortunate to have as our presenter Dr. Karen Blankenship who is currently on the faculty at Vanderbilt University and is co-chair of the National Agenda. Registration information will be posted on the list serve very soon!

The Board has also recently had vigorous discussion on the topic of **The National Agenda** and the possibility of convening a group of interested people from each of the ten Goal Areas with the intent of creating a **statewide "master plan" for the education of students with visual impairments, including those with multiple disabilities**. Information about the National Agenda can be found at [www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu). The initial meeting of this group will take place on Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup> to begin identifying existing resources and

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#### The AMESVI board members for the 2008-2009 year are:

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programs across the Commonwealth, as well as areas in need of attention. We will report to the membership at the spring conference the following day. If you are interested in participating in this work group, please contact me off list. In line with the State Agenda initiative, a subcommittee is being appointed to re-examine and update the 2005 version of the **Role Guidelines** document, which was compiled by Barbara Bing and Laura Koester, and to add an historical perspective on how this document has evolved over the years.

Perhaps the most exciting thing that's happened in the past few months is the celebration last week at the MA State House in honor of the **200<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Louis Braille**. It was a wonderful event at which AMESVI was well-represented by Paula Bress, who spoke poignantly about the crucial role of the educator in promoting Braille Literacy. Paula's speech is reprinted in this newsletter. Another highlight of this great event was high school student Avana Morris who very fluently read aloud a Braille copy of a **Proclamation from Governor Deval Patrick declaring January as Braille Literacy Month**.

I've been reflecting a lot recently on what it means to be a teacher. I still get a thrill when observing a young student having an "AHA" moment when he first recognizes a new Braille contraction or when I proudly remember the 9<sup>th</sup> grader who taught me many years ago that she "couldn't read with dirty fingers". I love hearing about the middle-schooler who thinks that Braille "feels like pimples on a ducks behind", or watching the blind child with additional disabilities discover the relationship between the symbol on his communication board and the object in his hand. These are the moments that make me realize how much I love our profession. Whether our role is that of TVI, COMS, RT, AT Specialist, PARA, Administrator or Student, and no matter what age or level of visual/cognitive/physical development our students present to us, we all have an important job to do and AMESVI is here to help us do it well. AMESVI may never receive the acclaim that Louis Braille continues to receive after 200 years, but its function as a peer support network and as a channel for improving the educational well-being of our students, is unmistakable. Please stay involved, take what you need and contribute when you can. AMESVI needs you.

**Travel safely, teach wisely and be proud of what you do!**

Karen



## **The AMESVI CONFERENCE SPRING 2009**

**SAVE THE DATE!!**

### **Implementing the Expanded Core Curriculum**

**Guest Speaker: Dr. Karen Blankenship**

**Project Coordinator, Vision Studies Program, Vanderbilt University**

**Saturday, March 28th, 2009, 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM**

**Carroll Center Technology Building, More Details Coming Soon**



## Calling All Nominees

It is that time of year again ... time to refresh the AMESVI Board. Here's your opportunity to join the AMESVI board. The following positions are open for the upcoming 2009-10 school year:

- President-elect
- Treasurer
- Recording Secretary
- Western Mass. Rep
- Greater Boston Rep
- South Shore Rep

Which position fits your interests best? The board meets face-to-face approximately four times a year, via conference call another four times a year, and communicates regularly via e-mail. It is not a huge time commitment, but the benefits are great – strong networking opportunities, form new friendships, good foods to eat at the face-to-face meetings, and meet in your PJs for the conference call meetings.

To get on the 2009 ballot, contact Eileen Curran at [ecurran@nbp.org](mailto:ecurran@nbp.org) or 781-784-0733.

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## REGIONAL UPDATES

January 6, 2009

### GREATER BOSTON REGIONAL REPORT

The Greater Boston Region met on December 4, 2007 at Tom Miller's house in Watertown, 8 members were in attendance. The agenda and discussion included the following items:

1. AER membership: The topic of membership in AER and its advantages was discussed as part of the email forwarded about trying to increase membership in AER. In addition, those present raised the question about membership in the DVI division of CEC as another organization that would be useful to partner with and build a coalition around issues. Connections with these organizations may be beneficial to allow for broader advocacy.
2. The 6<sup>th</sup> addition of the OREGON PROJECT was passed around for review. Tom also shared how the graphing component was being utilized within the Perkins Early Learning Center; Preschool and Transitional Kindergarten to track student progress and demonstrate outcomes to districts and parents.
3. The Quality Program for Students with Visual Impairments (Nancy Toelle, TX) was also passed around and discussed as a tool for TVI's and O&M staff to better enable districts to understand what they do. Tom overviewed how we were using it to look at issues within our itinerant service delivery to infants, toddlers and school age children including areas like caseload management, time studies, eligibility, the expanded core curriculum, etc.
4. Information was shared on a new publication regarding services to learners who are deafblind as a useful tool for families and providers.

The publication ***Deafblindness: Educational Service Guidelines*** is a best practice guide that educational administrators at the state, local and program levels can use to understand the implications of combined vision and hearing losses on learning; to recognize the need for specialized assessment, program planning and service delivery.

[www.Perkins.org/publications](http://www.Perkins.org/publications)

5. The role of AMESVI was also discussed as to how it could best serve its membership. Those present agreed that position papers and other advocacy materials would be helpful. Tom also raised the concept that if such papers or other materials existed it might be to AMESVI's benefit to join the Association of Special Education Directors as a vendor which then enables you to have a table at their meetings and to have items placed in SPED director packets.

The following areas were suggested as possible position papers or fact sheets that might be helpful to the AMESVI membership:

- ✓ Rationale for coding vision as a primary diagnosis on eligibility determination form
- ✓ Ways to more effectively deal with principals, teachers and team facilitators or the multiple layers of people in an itinerants life (politics)
- ✓ Information to help SPED and other decision makers understand the role of technology for VI students (Gayle Yarnell has a note to this effect)
- ✓ Service Delivery Guidelines or ways to decide more effectively on levels of services for students.
- ✓ Participants noted that the AMESVI role of TVI document has been helpful

Submitted by:

Tom Miller and Paula Bress: Greater Boston  
Regional Representatives

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Braille Challenge



**Join us for the 9th Annual Regional Braille Challenge to be held at the Carroll Center for the Blind on Saturday, February 28th, 2009 in Newton MA. Students in Grades 1-12 from throughout New England are welcome to attend. Pre-registration is required and is due by February 6th. Contact [Sue.Malone@Carroll.org](mailto:Sue.Malone@Carroll.org) or call the Braille Literacy Hotline at 617-969-6200 ext 287 for details. This event is offered at no charge to children and their families. If you would like to support the event with a monetary donation or a student prize, contact [joe.quintanilla@carroll.org](mailto:joe.quintanilla@carroll.org)**

## Perkins Outreach Activities Winter & Spring

Outreach Short Courses offer a variety of activities, paired with support and training from staff, in age groups that range from elementary through high school for students who are blind or visually impaired. We provide opportunities for school-aged students to focus on Expanded Core Curriculum areas that can be difficult to address within a structured school day, such as personal care, independent living and social skills.

Staff work with family members and teachers to identify the best program fit for each student. Each program concludes with an informational meeting for families and their supports. The course themes for these overnight programs change yearly. Flyers are distributed in August and December.

Outreach is currently hiring staff for weekends and summer programs...consider joining in on the fun! For further information about Perkins Outreach please visit

<http://www.perkins.org/community/outreach/> or contact Kelly Cote, Outreach Activities Coordinator at 617-972-7867 or [Kelly.Cote@Perkins.org](mailto:Kelly.Cote@Perkins.org)

### Carroll Center Summer Youth Program Dates:

**Carroll Kids/Teens--one and 2 weeks sessions during July 6 to August 14**

**Youth In Transition--July 20 to August 21**

**Real World of Work--July 6 to August 7**

**Transition to College--June 22 to July 31**

**Computing for College--(2 week sessions):**

**July 6 to July 17 or August 10 to August 21**

Contact Dina Rosenbaum at [Dina.Rosenbaum@carroll.org](mailto:Dina.Rosenbaum@carroll.org) for more information.

### Massachusetts Resource Directory

The Perkins Library has updated the *Massachusetts Resource Directory of Agencies and Organizations Serving the Blind & Visually Impaired*. Single copies of the updated version of this 45-page directory are now available in large print, braille, cassette, or electronic format from the Perkins Library upon request.

The directory is available on the Perkins website where it will be kept updated until the next edition is produced. To view it, visit [www.perkins.org/resourcedirectory](http://www.perkins.org/resourcedirectory).



### Celebrating Louis Braille's 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday

Written and presented by Paula Bress on January 14, 2009

I am very pleased to be here today to participate in this wonderful celebration of Louis Braille's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday and to represent AMESVI – the Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students with Visual Impairments. Some of us are teachers in private school settings; many of us teach in public schools. As educators of students who are blind or visually impaired, we have many responsibilities –

one of these responsibilities is to teach braille. And that happens to be the part of my job that I love the most!

I became intrigued with the braille code when, as a teenager, I stumbled upon the alphabet in an encyclopedia. It has remained a passion for me to this day. Two years ago, I was very fortunate to receive a grant that allowed me to travel in Europe, and among other things, to visit the birthplace of Louis Braille and the school at which he taught. In many ways this trip helped to solidify this long-standing passion for braille and to further my growth as an educator.

To me, there is nothing more exciting and fulfilling than to watch as a student discovers the magic of literacy and the independence that comes from learning to read and write braille. One of the most powerful and lasting memories I have is that of simply standing outside of a classroom and looking in at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade student whom I had known and taught since she was in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. If it is you, rather than me, who happens to be that person standing on the outside, looking in, nothing immediately distinguishes this child from the other students. It is only upon closer observation that you will notice her braille book, which contains the same words as the print books her classmates are reading from, or her braille notetaker, which she uses instead of paper and pencil. As she did then, and as she does now, this student uses braille reading and writing tools that allow her to be independent in the classroom and to learn side-by-side with her sighted peers.

I'd like to quote my 10<sup>th</sup> grade biology teacher, who wrote the following words in my high school yearbook: "My very best wishes for you – always – I know you'll be an excellent teacher of the blind (a marvelous ambition)." And it has been a marvelous ambition, not only for me, but for my many colleagues in Boston and across Massachusetts. Today we celebrate Louis Braille's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday and the incredible and enduring legacy he has left with his development of the braille code. As we do so, let us also celebrate our teachers and the students whom we teach. As educators, we see the power that comes with literacy through our students' ability to read and write braille. I think that I can speak for my fellow teachers and members of AMESVI, when I say that these students inspire us every day.

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## **Blind Scituate boy wins national award for his self-portrait, Provided by Jean Shea:**



SCITUATE —

Sam Borek doesn't fancy himself an artist. But looking at his self-portrait – a mix of bold paints, ribbon and seashells that bears an uncanny resemblance to the second-grader – you wouldn't believe him.

You also wouldn't believe he is blind.

"I didn't even know there was a contest for art, but I won first place," said Sam, fingering the blue ribbon that signifies his win.

The portrait, which he painted last year as a first-grader, was picked for the top award in his age group by the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Ky.

One of four visually impaired students at Jenkins Elementary School in Scituate, Sam is in a class with students who do not have difficulty seeing, like his triplet brothers, Max and Connor.

He gets help in many subjects from Jean Shea, a specialist who has taught visually impaired students for nearly two decades.

Shea, who has known Sam since he was 3 years old, entered his portrait in the national contest last year. The organization holds the contest for visually impaired children and adults annually, and puts out a calendar featuring the first-place artwork.

Sam, who can barely see the paper he painted the portrait on, admits the portrait looks a great deal like himself.

“That one is the real me,” he said, pointing at a picture of himself beside the painting.

The mixed-medium assignment is one that art teacher Eileen Rotty assigns to first-graders every year.

“First-graders are so guileless in the way they draw themselves,” Rotty said. “They are so free to paint and draw exactly who they think they are.”

While the assignment posed a particular challenge for Sam, who walks with a cane and reads Braille, his creativity bridges any gaps left by lack of sight, Rotty said.

“He’s got an imagination,” she said. “I don’t think Sam will ever be at a loss for ideas.”

Sam, who has completed paintings “tons of times,” said there may be some challenges he is not up to.

“I don’t know, making the Great Wall of China would be hard,” he said. “It’s longer than this school.”

Shea said Sam has always been an independent student who keeps up with his peers despite many challenges. While opportunities have opened for visually impaired students and adults in recent years, there will always be challenges, she said.

“There is still a bias, still the idea that you have to prove yourself,” said Shea. “For these children to succeed, they need to take spend two or three times longer on their schoolwork.”

For Sam, keeping up is the furthest thing from his mind.

He will add the blue first-place ribbon to his trophies in karate and swimming.

“I’m going to get one in chess this year, too,” he said.



## RESOURCES

### Fun Keyboarding for Low Vision Students

I have used the following website for the past few months with some of my elementary low vision students. It has been very helpful keeping students engaged and motivated.

Dance Mat Typing - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing/>

My students love it because each level has characters who speak in funny, accented voices (Scottish accented goat, Italian accented octopus). Not all text is spoken, but there is enough to keep interest and an unobtrusive sound effect to alert to mistakes.

I like the fact that you can enlarge to full screen that it has different levels that you can start on (home row, then e/i, etc.) and I have not yet gotten on a school computer that blocks the BBC website. I use it with a wide range of students, including those that are legally blind, sometimes making the accommodation of moving the screen closer. (Aren't the new flat screen monitors great for that!!) It also works well with Zoom Text.

Diane Bleier  
SEEM Collaborative

### **Seeing Eye Seminar for Youth (SESY)**

By Tim and Katrena Traut-Savino, [savino@sharon.k12.ma.us](mailto:savino@sharon.k12.ma.us)

We had the pleasure of participating in a wonderful program for teens hosted by The Seeing Eye in Morristown, New Jersey in June. Several times a year, The Seeing Eye offers a 3-day seminar in dog guide management. The goal of the program is to expose prospective dog guide users, 16 years or older, to the realities of training, using, and living with a dog guide. There are generally six students and three O&M Specialists who participate in the weekend. Staff from the Seeing Eye who run the program are dog guide users themselves!

Participants learn about the history, philosophy, and programs at The Seeing Eye; tour the campus and kennels; participate in a 1:1 juno walk with a dog guide trainer; travel on a downtown business district route with a cane, and then with a guide dog, comparing the differences in each mode of travel. Day two is spent traveling Morristown learning about aid solicitation, mapping skills, Accessible Pedestrian Signals, GPS travel, and dog guide care and grooming. After the practical and hands-on experiences, students leave the seminar knowing if they're going to pursue a dog guide in college or as an adult!

The SESY has been in existence for about 4 years. It was developed, hosted, and taught by Mr. David Loux and Mr. Jay Stiteley from The Seeing Eye. Independence is stressed and encouraged throughout the weekend. Free time for students is built into the program. Students can use the hotel amenities, travel or shop downtown; take in a movie, etc. It's an excellent social experience for everyone involved, including the O&M chaperones! Lodging is double occupancy for students and single occupancy for adults. Dining at the Seeing Eye and local restaurants is a part of the program. Students have the opportunity to meet peers from across the country. The various seminars that we participated in hosted students from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Florida, Colorado, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Maryland. The Seeing Eye funds the entire program

including airline travel, accommodations, and meals. There is an application process for students and O&M chaperones.

We found this experience a wonderful refresher for us as well. The last time we had a comprehensive introduction to guide dog use was almost thirty years ago. It re-affirmed the need for strong problem-solving skills and the benefit of learning through mistakes. O&M Specialists receive certificates of participation that can be used toward AER certification.

The experience of spending three days with successful, independent adult travelers was immensely beneficial for the students and strengthened our resolve to help our students to have more opportunities such as this. The students came away with a clear understanding of what it takes to be dog guide user. They also gained a deeper understanding of their own travel skills. We highly recommend this program if your students are thinking about, interested in, or want a guide dog!

For more information, contact The Seeing Eye at 800-539-4425.

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