Report of the Educational Products Advisory Committee

to the Trustees of the

American Printing House for the Blind

Fiscal Year 2017

# Purpose

The purpose of the Educational Products Advisory Committee (EPAC) is:

* To advise the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) in establishing priorities, standards, and policies regarding products.
* To review research and development priorities, suggest additional areas of interest, and advise APH staff on the prioritization of needs and projects.
* To review products under development and to consider approval of finished products for purchase with Federal Quota funds.
* To recommend parents, caregivers, students, clients, and professionals in the field serve as subjects for research or field-test purposes, as project consultants, and/or as committee members.

# Introduction

In May 2017, the EPAC met for the sixteenth year as a formal advisory committee to APH—meeting with project leaders and other APH staff. The committee appreciated the time dedicated to project discussions and preparation for the EPAC visit. The APH staff clearly demonstrates passion, enthusiasm, and commitment to the vision of the company and is dedicated to the development of products for students who are blind and visually impaired.

# The EPAC Commendations 2017

1. The EPAC commends APH for its unwavering commitment to the company’s original mission in the face of inevitable exponential change and in light of unavoidable internal and external pressures.

2. The EPAC commends APH for recognizing and honoring the ideas and skill sets of the company’s talented and dedicated employees and for allowing considerable behind-the-scenes access in order to facilitate more comprehensive understanding of critical internal methods and processes.

3. The EPAC commends APH’s determined pursuit of grant opportunities which enable the purchase of productivity solutions designed to maximize efficiency--thereby facilitating more streamlined development and completion timelines.

4. The EPAC commends APH for exploring process management solutions (e.g., Microsoft Project, Enterprise Resource Planning--ERP) to facilitate more seamless procedural collaboration between departments resulting in increased efficiency.

5. The EPAC commends APH’s planned shopping website redesign, particularly with regard to greater visibility of parts lists and links to additional resources, which will provide increased product clarity for educators and other customers resulting in a more satisfactory purchasing experience.

6. The EPAC commends APH’s development of a new strategic plan which will enable the company to:

* respond nimbly to dynamic market conditions and customer needs
* acquire and employ human capital and other resources to strengthen the brand
* serve underrepresented populations
* explore additional funding streams
* locate new product markets, and
* become a “go-to” information clearinghouse for students, practitioners, families, administrators, researchers, and others.

7. The EPAC commends APH for developing cross-platform solutions (e.g., mobile browsing), allowing for greater availability of highly-relevant instructional software and exploration of other products.

8. The EPAC commends APH for making available no-cost and low-cost digital offerings including Braille Blaster, Talking Typer for iOS, Draw2Measure protractor, and others under consideration/ development.

9. The EPAC commends APH’s expansion of mutually beneficial outside partnerships.

10. The EPAC commends APH for undertaking relevant product modernization.

11. The EPAC commends APH staff for their passion, dedication, creativity, and responsiveness.

# The EPAC Recommendations 2017

*Consistent with the Act to Promote the Education of the Blind (1879):*

1. In order to foster a positive company culture, communication, and willingness to work together as a team is vital. Therefore, the EPAC recommends that APH:

1. engage the services of outside consultants to improve interpersonal relationships, positive and constructive interdepartmental communication, cooperation, and teamwork—with the goal of relating in a positive, professional, and cooperative manner with coworkers, supervisors, and other staff, to share information in a timely manner keeping appropriate people informed, listening to and understanding differing perspectives as well as addressing and identifying problems to be solved;
2. evaluate and implement protocols for in-person staff meetings and include these in its Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). For example, project leaders, pre-production, and production staff should interface in-person to provide frequent progress updates and make necessary adjustments to include materials and process changes;
3. departments work collaboratively to enhance job-by-job prototyping, production processes, and the utilization of materials and methods (high, medium, low, and no-tech) to ensure product quality.

2. In the event of current field test opportunities, calls for product evaluations, and announcements of new products available for purchase, the EPAC recommends that APH disseminate a concise email to Ex Officio Trustees for distribution to the field.

3. The EPAC recommends that APH carefully examine product repair procedures, including data collection, primarily those surrounding quality control and turnaround time.

4. The EPAC recommends that APH clearly define departmental/staff roles and responsibilities—communicating the same across all departments.

5. Given acknowledged production concerns inclusive of braille and binding errors (e.g., bottlenecks, transcription errors, inverted labels and pages, collation, and assembly issues), the EPAC recommends that APH establish, implement, and adhere to clearly-defined standard operating procedures (SOP) to address quality control issues while incorporating realistic timelines.

6. The EPAC recommends that APH phase out the traditional enlargement process while allowing resources to be redirected to the enhanced enlarged texts/digital files.

7. The EPAC recommends that APH increase marketing efforts, prioritizing the education of consumers about APH enhanced texts and digital file access.

8. The EPAC acknowledges the training opportunities provided to staff and recommends that APH expand similar offerings to cross-train personnel as appropriate, resulting in increased skills, efficiency, and development and production of quality products.

9. For greater visibility of the Braille Tales program, the EPAC recommends that APH consider providing a demonstration pack for each Ex Officio Trustee as well as to interested university personnel preparation programs for students who are blind/visually impaired and/or DeafBlind. This pack would include marketing materials (i.e., display boards and flyers) and books with the Braille Tales logo on the front cover.

Respectfully Submitted,

Educational Products Advisory Committee 2017

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May 7, 2017 – May 11, 2017