# Report of the Trustee Advisory Committee

# to the American Printing House for the Blind

# Fiscal Year 2023

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Trustee Advisory Committee (TAC) is:

* To advocate for and support the administration of The Act by APH.
* To advise APH in planning future federal initiatives based on innovative ideas and current trends by helping APH staff keep informed of trends and important discussions/debates occurring in the field.
* To advise APH in establishing priorities, standards, and policies regarding publications and products.
* To advise APH generally on topics relevant to the education and rehabilitation of persons who are blind and visually impaired.
* 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 provide oversight and leadership in the planning, evaluation, and delivery of product-related services provided by the Act to Promote the Education of the Blind.
* To assist in the promotion of APH products through services and identify new services needed.
* To advise APH on general operations and communications as they relate to the accountability of services provided.
* To facilitate communications and partnerships between APH and appropriate entities.
* To recommend consumers and professionals in the field to assist with research or field-testing or as project consultants.
* To help keep APH staff informed of trends or important discussions/debates occurring in the field.

## INTRODUCTION

In April 2023, the TAC met in Louisville, KY, at APH, to address the 2022 Educational Products Advisory Committee (EPAC) and Educational Services Advisory Committee (ESAC) reports and to develop commendations and recommendations for the current fiscal year. To assist with this endeavor, presentations were made by APH’s leadership staff, including progress updates on the 2022 recommendations, operations, and information on new initiatives.

## COMMENDATIONS

**The TAC commends APH for the following:**

* Production Team: Overall increased efficiency. One example is the decreased production time for the Lite Box Kit from 15 days to 1 day. EOTs receive shipping notifications and tracking numbers when available.
* APH Team: The roll out of the Monarch and their company-wide collaboration. APH is leading the development of the eBraille format utilizing world-wide partnerships.
* Outreach: The use of the CATT Centers is a productive way to reach large groups of individuals who could benefit from support in using APH equipment.
* Outreach: The scoring rubric for the APH Scholars is now a living document with an active review each year by TAC.
* Outreach: Combining EPAC and ESAC into TAC was successful.
* Technology: Improvements were made in the FQ balance system by creating a new process to provide current balances in real time. The website provided an improved shop filter access tab.
* NIMAC and Louis Database: The Louis database is easier to navigate, and the improvements include adding email links for a purchased downloadable file and re-ordering the filter alphabetically. Product status was created to better identify discontinued products.
* Educational Product Innovation: The Science team’s resource document which aligned STEM Products with Next Generation Science Standards is a great resource. The Math team’s roadmap provided robust information about gaps in products for elementary, middle, and high school.
* The Hive: The Hive is easy to navigate and provides free ACVREP credit hours. Data shows a significant increase in registered users, course enrollments, course certificates and event certificates. The addition of the Professional Community is a great resource to offer vetted high-quality resources.
* The Dot Experience: The design process demonstrates great wide-ranging stakeholder input. Moving the perspective from third to first person creates a more unique personal experience.
* ConnectCenter: There is progress in the organization and ease of use of the new web site, including detailed drop-down menus. The Jobseeker’s Toolkit is an accessible, self-paced, free online training course.
* Accessible Textbook Department: Textbook requests for titles that have already been transcribed in UEB or Nemeth by another accessible materials producer can now be requested in the unavailable code.
* APH Census: The improvements to the structure of the SRS related to grade level were effective. The instructions provided were clear and concise.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Consistent with the Act to Promote the Education of the Blind (1879), the TAC recommends that APH:**

1. Depending on funding and congressional permission, expand the current Center for Assistive Technology Training (CATT) programs and provide targeted training. Communicate the timelines, scope of work, roles and responsibilities of CATT vs. regional specialists, and interim plans for support to the northeast, south central and north central regions to help stakeholders better understand the process.
2. In the APH website, move the “shop search” function to the top tool bar of the APH store.
3. Allow users to filter products by individual grade level to find materials that will address the curriculum standards of individual students.
4. Change eligibility for quota definitions as outlined in the report given in FY2022 titled “Education Products Advisory Committee (EPAC)/Education Services Advisory Committee (ESAC) Combined Statement for Consideration of Eligibility Determination for Census Registration” (attached below).
5. When discontinuing a product, provide alternative access when possible. This could be other available products, access to braille files, or images in the TGIL.
6. Include Quick Response (QR) codes on product packaging and/or startup manuals that teachers can scan to access related videos and training.
7. Utilize subject lines in EOT emails to clarify content. Decrease the EOT newsletter to once per month. Possibly combine the content of some emails.
8. Provide department email contacts useful to EOTs on the EOT Resource section of the website.
9. Include information on the Louis Database that identifies producers who are willing to make teacher-made materials and/or partial books.
10. Continue to explore a high-quality camera product which can connect to a laptop and provide near and distance magnification.
11. To better ensure software updates for devices, like the Chameleon and Mantis, explore use of a single button to connect to the internet to initiate downloads.
12. Improve communication between Regional Outreach Specialists and EOTs to avoid duplicating and increase awareness of upcoming training opportunities. Explore regional and state level needs in planning training activities.
13. The APH Hive should increase the amount of content in the platform. Having additional staff may allow for expansion and building of content.
14. Increase transparency by providing estimated timelines and updates on braille production progress.

Respectfully Submitted,

Trustee Advisory Committee 2023

Brian Darcy, Idaho – Co-Chair

Leslie Van Orman, Wyoming – Co-Chair

Tanya Armstrong, Nebraska

Roxanne Balfour, Michigan

Patricia Beecher, New Mexico

Donna Cox, Virginia

Rob Hair, Maryland

Scott McCallum, Washington

Kristin Oien, Minnesota

Pamela Parker, Washington

Beth Pieters, Iowa

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# Education Products Advisory Committee (EPAC)/Education Services Advisory Committee (ESAC) Combined Statement for Consideration of Eligibility Determination for Census Registration

# Fiscal Year 2022

## PURPOSE

The Educational Products Advisory Committee (EPAC) and the Educational Services Committee (ESAC) met at the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) March 28, 2022, through April 1, 2022. The meeting was to hear reports from APH programs and to address critical needs facing the education of blind and low vision individuals. This combined EPAC/ESAC report is regarding the eligibility of persons who are blind and low vision to maximize the number of persons identified and counted in the annual census under The Act to Promote the Education of the Blind of 1879 and enable them to qualify for support with annual quota funding.

## FINDINGS

The current definition of legal blindness used by the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), i.e., meet the definition of blindness (MDB)\* or function at the definition of blindness (FDB)\*\* is too restrictive and limiting for the full breadth of support for blind and excludes low vision individuals. There is no evidence to support the rationale for the use of these definitions and they are believed to be an historical arbitrary agreement between law makers and previous APH advisors.

Additionally, the definition of educational placement for adults to be counted in the census is an adult “must receive a minimum of 20 hours of documented instruction per week for twelve weeks in an educational or rehabilitative program in the previous calendar year to be registered. The twelve weeks do not need to be consecutive.” This definition is unclear and has led to ambiguity thus limiting an adult’s ability to receive APH products and services. The EPAC/ESAC committees became aware of this during a census report that the limited definition has resulted in a diminished number of adults who are eligible and a closure of adult services quota accounts.

\* A central visual acuity of 20/200 or less (using a Snellen chart or an acuity determined in Snellen equivalents) in the better eye with the best correction or a peripheral field of vision no greater than 20 degrees

\*\* As determined by an eye care specialist (ophthalmologist or optometrist) or other medical doctor such as a neurologist. Students in this category manifest unique visual characteristics often found in conditions referred to as neurological, cortical, or cerebral visual impairment (e.g., brain injury or dysfunction).

## STATEMENT

### Level of Blindness

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reauthorized in 2004, defines a visual impairment including blindness as an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Furthermore, an Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) memorandum dated May 22, 2017, clarifies the eligibility criteria for IDEA services and supports negating the widely held belief that visual acuity is the criteria for services. The memorandum states, “The regulations do not contain a modifier; therefore, any impairment in vision, regardless of significance or severity, must be included in a state’s definition, provided that such impairment, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. States may not use criteria or other definitions for “visual impairment including blindness” that result in the exclusion of children who otherwise meet the definition in 34 CFR §300.8(c)(13). For example, State eligibility guidelines and definitions for “visual impairment including blindness” may not exclude a child with convergence insufficiency or other visual impairment from meeting the IDEA’s definition of “visual impairment including blindness”.

The EPAC and ESAC committees recommend that the APH definitions for MDB and FDB be expanded to those students qualified for services under IDEA for Blind/Vision Impairment (Low Vision) which addresses the need of the students who are educationally impacted by their vision regardless of acuity, field, and neurological conditions.

### Adult Services

In order to better serve and qualify adult populations to qualify for quota programs EPAC and ESAC recommends a change in the requirement of 12 weeks of 20 hours/week of documented work in the previous calendar year. The committees recommend that adults who are working toward an educational, independent living and/or vocational training goal be counted in the census and eligible for products and services delivered through APH quota.

Respectfully Submitted,

Educational Products and Services Advisory Committees

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