

InFocus

Winter/Spring 2017 Edition

New Mexico School for the Blind & Visually Impaired

Student Feliz Ruiz Visits Santa Fe

by Jeff Killebrew, Teacher of the Visually Impaired

On February 27, 8th grade student Feliz Ruiz spent the day at the State Capitol as a student page for Representative Yvette Herrell. Feliz earned this privilege by writing an essay describing her reasons for wanting to be a page. Among her reasons, she listed her desire to learn more about the legislature and to represent students who are blind. Oh, did she represent! An absolutely amazing day was experienced by all who were fortunate to be in Feliz's "entourage"! After arriving at the capitol and getting oriented to the legislative chambers, Feliz impressed all as she easily made her way from the rostrum to Representative Herrell's desk, even receiving a standing ovation from the legislative body after being introduced by Rep. Herrell. Feliz met many of our state's representatives and senators as she toured the capitol. In particular, she visited with legislators who represent districts where both NMSBVI campuses are located, speaking about herself and the impact NMSBVI has had on her education. Feliz even made her way up to the Governor's office where she explored much of the New Mexican artwork that is exhibited there; but unfortunately, Gov. Martinez was out of the office so they couldn't meet one another. After an awesome lunch at nearby Rio Chama Steakhouse, Feliz completed her adventure at the capitol by posing with an enormous, artistic buffalo head mounted above the rotunda. After a bit of a rest back at the hotel, she was off to finish the day as most teenage girls would – shopping, pizza, and ice cream. What an exciting day it was!

Pictured here, Miss Ruiz paused in the middle of her very busy day for a quick snapshot in front of the iconic State Capitol Building.

1st Annual Innovations Fair

by Linda Lyle, Retiring Superintendent

On April 26th at the Albuquerque campus, and on April 28th at the Alamogordo campus, NMSBVI held its first annual Innovations Fair. A direct result of the department's strategic plan, the event's goal was to showcase the remarkable, creative work of NMSBVI staff. The Fair was set up similarly to a science fair, and staff shared information about twenty-seven different initiatives at the school. The displays ranged from an update on current and planned capital projects on the Alamogordo campus... to a Language Arts class which has opened the world to students through book sharing discussions with students in Canada.

One popular display was hosted by Datha Peters, NMSBVI Life Skills instructor, who shared three-dimensional games that were developed by Life Skills staff and are used as part of instruction to help students learn the complexity of adult independence and decision-making. The ECP staff shared early results from their Neuro Imaging Vision Impairment (NIVI) research project as well as early Braille literacy strategies and ideas related to the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for young children. Low Vision Clinic adaptations highlighted the increased information that is available to families when educators and doctors are able to work together. The Infant Toddler Program reminded those attending the Fair that abuse continues to break families apart and to cause irreparable damage to our children. They also demonstrated the value of reflective supervision as well as the many ways videotaping can be used to document progress in a child and to provide a venue for collaborating and reflecting on one's work.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the Fair occurred in the thinking of participants who visited the displays. Many expressed amazement at the breadth of the school and its involvement in developing strategies and products in the field of blindness education. For many staff, though, it triggered ideas; helped them realize that they, too, had something unique to offer to the field; and perhaps planted a spark to motivate them to be ready to participate in next year's event!

Shown here, Jessica Matney presented information about the school's "Communication in Action" project; the website serves as a resource to help facilitate teachers' and parents' communication with students who have intensive support & complex communication needs.

Diagnostic Taskforce

by Julie Johnson, Outreach Coordinator

NMSBVI partnered with teachers of students with visual impairments (TSVIs) and diagnosticians from around the state to create a unique and vital training to help diagnosticians know the best way to proceed when they need to evaluate a student with a visual impairment or blindness. The exceptionality of visual impairment, including blindness, is a low incidence disability and makes up less than 1% of the population. Therefore, many diagnosticians will see very few students with visual impairments in their careers. These students each have unique learning needs, and it is very important that evaluations, used to help make decisions around eligibility in the various disability categories, are done with appropriate accommodations and modifications.

The presenters are Jennifer Tierney, TSVI and certified orientation and mobility specialist for Las Cruces Public Schools and Sheila Thornton, TSVI and diagnostician for Lovington Municipal Schools. The training stresses the importance of collaboration between the diagnostician and the TSVI before testing takes place. It also stresses the importance of the TSVI completing a functional vision evaluation and learning media assessment before the diagnostician tests the student. Sheila also provides specific information about the tools that diagnosticians use to help guide them in choosing appropriate assessments. The training was presented in three locations: Roswell, Las Cruces and Rio Rancho. Close to one hundred people from around the state attended these trainings. The next step is to put the video, power point presentation and frequently asked questions online so that the information will be available whenever someone needs it.

Shown here, Sheila Thornton spoke at the podium during one of the three initial training events.

NMAER Conference: Better Together

by Cindy Faris, Family-Infant-Toddler (FIT) Coordinator

After a number of years of dormancy, the NMAER organization (Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired) was revived this year by NMSBVI staff Luanne Stordahl and Linda Lyle. They reorganized NMAER and a work committee to plan the NMAER conference in Albuquerque, which was subsequently well-attended by both NMSBVI staff and participants from other agencies in New Mexico, as well as from out of state.

Parents set the tone of the conference by opening with the keynote speech as well as each day of the conference; and a student panel was also a highlight. Dr. Amanda Lueck and Dr. Gordon Dutton presented a preconference session based on their book, "Vision and the Brain: Understanding Cerebral Visual Impairment in Children." Dr. Linda Lawrence, pediatric ophthalmologist, presented a session about "Autism and Vision" and Dr. Lawrence also arranged for Mrs. Flora Joseph, a vision rehabilitation specialist from the Aravind Eye Hospital in India, to present on her work in India. Dr. Sandra Lewis presented on "Expanded Core Curriculum" and there were also breakout sessions for Orientation and Mobility as well as Assistive Technology for Academic and ISP students.

The conference was well-received by professionals, parents, and students, and there was excitement that NMAER is once again a viable professional organization in New Mexico. For more information about membership opportunities and upcoming NMAER events, please visit www.nmaer.weebly.com.

Shown below: the conference was very well-attended, and participants enjoyed the large conference facilities of the Albuquerque Marriott Hotel.

(Photo Section)

Shown here... Several students attending the STEMfest event on the NMSBVI Alamogordo campus watched eagerly to see if an egg would survive a fall when Mr. Killebrew dropped it from his perch atop a tall step ladder; and Carybeth blew air through a drinking straw to make big waves during a tiny boat experiment. Wood shop can be a dirty job, as Alex demonstrated with his sawdust-covered shirt... safety goggles... hair... everything. Together, ECP instructor Miss Anne and RJ mixed up a big

bowl of something delicious. Diego grinned as he proudly displayed his latest work of art created at the ECP.

Commencement 2017

by Carolyn Delone, Admin. Assistant for Instruction

Pride, joy and tears filled the air as the Class of 2017 made its way down the aisle to their seats in Quimby Gym at the Alamogordo campus on May 26th. As participants in the Post Secondary Preparation Program this year, seniors Zackery Jones and Lawrence Perez spent their entire senior year together learning essential life skills and preparing themselves for their next steps after graduation. Datha Peters, Life Skills Instructor, was the perfect fit as graduation speaker for these young men as she had been their mentor all year long. She gave an upbeat speech full of thoughts about their future and memories of their senior year. In addition, former graduate Cody Broyles returned to sing the song "Friends" for the graduates. The most anticipated memory of the entire graduation was the video presentation with wonderful pictures from youth to graduation of these fine young men. Lawrence even wrote and sang one of the songs for the presentation! After the graduation ceremony, friends & families joined the graduates in the Rose Garden, under beautiful sunny skies, to eat and remember all the wonderful times at NMSBVI. Congratulations, Class of 2017!

Shown here: together, Zackery and Lawrence happily cut their graduation cake; Lawrence received his diploma from Superintendent Lyle; and Zackery was escorted to the stage by his mother.

ECP Graduation Ceremony

by Patty Beecher, Acting Superintendent

On Wednesday, May 24th, 13 preschool and kindergarten students lined up in their caps and gowns and proceeded down the walkway to "Pomp and Circumstance".... It was their graduation day! The theme for the graduation was "Rainbow Fish". The

audience was filled with family members, staff members, honored guests and even our bus drivers; we were all there to celebrate the joys of being part of a community.

NMSBVI Early Childhood Program School was decorated as an under-the-sea fantasy land, covered with colorful decorations that were hand-made by the staff. The students performed two different songs for the crowd: "Let's Go Swimming" and "Slippery Fish". A recent graduate read the theme book to the crowd and much applause followed.

As the NMSBVI community celebrated the success and growth of the ECP students, we took the opportunity to reflect upon the importance of giving a little of ourselves in order to share in the joys, hardships, strengths and love that the NMSBVI community continually supports. We relished the fact that each of these 4 and 5 year old unique & strong students were ready to share more of themselves and to take their places within their larger communities.

NMSBVI also celebrated the families; because the school's partnership with families is precious. We honor the families' triumphs and struggles and offer our support throughout their children's school years. Sharing our stories, ideas, experiences, & knowledge allows us to create the best learning experience for our children. As written in the "Rainbow Fish", "the more he gave away, the happier he became...." Our heartfelt congratulations to the ECP Class of 2017!

Shown here: after the ceremony, ECP graduate Ronnie, in blue cap-and-gown, paused to play with some fancy mylar helium balloons.

Special Olympics 2017

by Jeremiah Vaughn, Transportation Supervisor & Athletic Coordinator

NMSBVI Special Olympics athletes trained very hard this year working towards their goal of becoming Special Olympic champions. Athletes trained four times a week with Coach Noah and Coach Kris with the help of the related services team and classroom staff. Unfortunately, the Area 3 Athletics competition to be held at Cobre High School in Bayard, NM was cancelled this year due to inclement weather, preventing our athletes from competing. Even though the competition did not occur as planned, Isaiah Watts was selected as Athlete of the Year from the NMSBVI delegation.

Although the Area games were canceled, four of our athletes were able to attend the State Summer Games at the UNM Track complex in Albuquerque on May 19-21. Our athletes each competed in two events, placing in each of their respective classifications. Lily Nambo, Clarissa Meza, and Katie Enos all placed first in their divisions in the 10M and 25M assisted walk events. Thristan Tucker placed 3rd in the 200M run and 1st in the Softball Throw event. Even though only four of our athletes were able to attend the Summer Games in Albuquerque, we are very proud of all of our athletes' work ethics & their commitment to excel!

Shown here, Lily trained on the NMSBVI track with Coach Noah Fountain; and Thristan ran toward success on the track at the Albuquerque event.

2017 New Mexico Regional Braille Challenge

by Julie Johnson, Outreach Coordinator

This year we had 16 students come to the NMSBVI Alamogordo campus for the Braille Challenge. They worked hard showing off their braille skills and had a lot of fun along the way. We had a new braille enrichment class for younger students who were not yet ready for the competition; they did all kinds of fun braille activities and had a blast! About 30 folks from NMSBVI, Santa Fe, Gadsden, Rio Rancho, Espanola and the NM Commission for the Blind helped make the day possible, and we look forward to next year's annual event.

Shown below: Faith & Gabby looked very pleased with their prizes; Alex got his paper set up in his Perkins braille writer; all the Braille Challenge participants wore this year's special Braille Challenge t-shirts as they gathered for a group photo on the steps of the NMSBVI Watkins Education Center before beginning the Challenge events.

AT&T Pioneers: Beeping Egg Hunt and iPads

by Beth Lyle, Innovations & Development Specialist

The Albuquerque chapter of the AT&T pioneers sponsored a beeping egg hunt for the students at the NMSBVI-ECP. The students were able to hunt specialized eggs that make a beeping noise. They could then trade in the eggs for a basket filled with goodies.

The AT&T Pioneers plan the event every year and come prepared with many treats for the students. This year the students and staff were surprised to receive an extra-special donation of new iPads for the classrooms, fidget and sensory toys and braille books! The Pioneers presented the staff with the donations at a special breakfast to thank them for all of their hard work. The NMSBVI-ECP is extremely thankful for the amazing generosity of the AT&T Pioneers and we look forward to many more beeping eggs in the future.

Shown here: ECP student Ronnie used an iPad for some learning & fun. Bonnie had a good tight grasp of the Easter-eggy treasure she found on the NMSBVI campus in Albuquerque.

NMVI Count Database

by Mary Vaughn, IRC Coordinator

Orders for 2017-2018 have started coming in; and the Instructional Resource Center (IRC) at NMSBVI is excited to send them out to districts and students throughout the state! This is all possible through the American Printing House (APH) Quota Fund. Funds are allocated based on a national census of students who meet the federal definition of blindness, have an educational program that meets the guidelines, and have a written educational plan (IFSP or IEP).

NMVI Count is the new web-based database system that districts will use to register eligible students for APH. After a district ensures that their students meet certain requirements, they'll register them through the database. Once a student is registered, the district has access to APH resources including Braille and large print textbooks, as well as other specialized equipment used by students with visual impairments. Those students who don't qualify for APH, still have access to materials because they are covered through provisions under IDEA; instead of APH, they are registered through the Supplemental Registry.

We're looking forward to a fun and productive year! If you would like more information regarding the American Printing House Quota Fund and resources for a student who is blind or visually impaired, please call the Instructional Resource Center staff at (575) 439-4438 or (575) 439-4437.

Shown here, IRC staff (Andrew Wilmott and Lisa Meisch) gave a Braille writer a thorough "tune-up" before it was sent out to a school.

B-3 Feeding Research Project

by Luanne Stordahl, Developmental Vision Specialist

The NMSBVI Birth-to-Three Program was fortunate to be chosen this year to participate in a mealtime routines research project through the University of Northern Colorado, in order to learn more about how to help our littlest NMSBVI learners to develop their feeding skills. The purpose of this project is to develop an intervention that trains providers to work with families on positive mealtime routines for infants and toddlers with severe visual impairments. Staff took part in a week long training in Colorado to learn about the development of feeding skills, fine motor and oral motor skills, growth, social-emotional interaction, parent learning styles, and routines-based intervention. Monthly assessments and videos are uploaded to the researchers who will gather information about the development of the child's feeding skills, growth, and parent confidence with mealtime routines. At the conclusion of this study, researchers will develop a family-centered intervention - the Mealtime Routines for Visual Impairment Intervention (MRVI) - to support infants & toddlers with visual impairments in gaining independent mealtime skills.

A Farewell to Superintendent Linda Lyle

by Carolyn Delone, Administrative Assistant for Instruction

The Early Childhood Program in Albuquerque and the Residential Campus in Alamogordo each hosted farewell celebrations for our beloved Superintendent, Linda

Lyle on two separate dates in May. Superintendent Lyle retired at the end of her contract in June 2017 after 22 years of dedicated service to the students who are blind & visually impaired in the State of New Mexico. Those who know Linda also know that her reach has gone far past the state level, and her positive influences have been felt throughout the United States. She is looking forward to her new role as grandmother to a beautiful baby boy with another little one on the way!

On May 11th, the Residential Campus in Alamogordo hosted two separate events. The first one was a goodbye from the students to Superintendent Lyle. The students presented Supt. Lyle with two baby quilts that were made for her by the students, as well as a wooden bowl made out of different types of woods. There were also presentations from different classes of handmade cards for her. In the afternoon, Board of Regents President Alicia McAninch was the Master of Ceremonies for a more formal farewell. State Representative Yvette Herrell and City Commissioner Nadia Sikes both spoke to the crowd regarding their high regard for Supt. Lyle and the welcoming and positive atmosphere at the school. They spoke of the impact the school and Supt. Lyle have had on the City of Alamogordo as well as the State of New Mexico. Heartfelt thanks were given by both for Supt. Lyle's dedicated service. A signed print of the Gazebo was presented to Supt. Lyle by a member of the staff. In addition, Superintendent Lyle will have a building named after her at the residential campus and a large framed and matted portrait was revealed that will hang in the building in her honor. Renovations of the Linda Lyle Administration Building are presently underway.

The Early Childhood Program in Albuquerque hosted a reception for Supt. Lyle a week later. Greg Trapp from the NM Commission for the Blind and Regent Christine Hall were among the speakers at the event. Both highlighted the impact that Supt. Lyle has had in the blindness community and how much she will be missed. In addition, a proclamation was read and presented to Supt. Lyle by Kelly Burma of the NM Commission for the Blind, declaring their appreciation of the many contributions that Supt. Lyle has made to the education of students who are visually impaired in the State of New Mexico. There were also families of former students who spoke about all that Supt. Lyle has done for their families. The ECP staff presented Supt. Lyle with a beautifully inscribed Nambe bowl as a tribute to her dedication to the school, students and staff. Surrounded by tables filled with memory trees, mementos and fabulous food, Superintendent Lyle graciously accepted her gifts and spoke from her heart about the gratitude that she had; she thanked everyone for working together; and encouraged them to continue working toward the common goal of ensuring that our students get the education they deserve. Her parting words emphasized her overarching philosophical vision: "Me & you.... we do this together. It doesn't happen in a vacuum."

Superintendent Lyle has been an inspiration to so many people, and she will be fondly remembered for the humble and visionary leadership she has provided during her 22 years with NMSBVI!

Shown here: At the Albuquerque event, Superintendent Lyle greeted “Bob the Builder”, construction coordinato of the ECP building; and NMSBVI Regent Hall made a speech. At the Alamogordo event, Supt. Lyle visited with her father-in-law, son, and grandson; and she got a big hug from a student.

(Photo section)

Shown here... Ezekial cruised across an ECP classroom with a little help from Superintendent Linda. Pedro worked diligently on hand-sewing a very complicated quilt. Xavier & Zantiago celebrated Valentine’s Day and Christmas by wearing funny hats at the ECP. While dancing at the Prom in Alamogordo, Lavon held two white canes - one for himself, and one for his dance-partner, Feliz. After a field trip to the Alameda Park Zoo, the NMSBVI group stopped for cool treats; Clarissa laughed with education assistant Miss Molly about having an “ice cream mustache.” Over a period of weeks, students watched caterpillars transform into butterflies; at the butterfly release event which followed, Beau carefully examined a beautiful butterfly which had landed on his finger!

inFocus is published by the New Mexico School for the Blind & Visually Impaired / Innovations & Development group, and is distributed free to friends of NMSBVI. If you know someone who would like a Braille copy of this publication, or to be added to our postal mailing list, please email a request to InFocus@nmsbvi.k12.nm.us

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Photography: Carla Gonzales

PrintShop Production: John Tatum

Graphic Design: Joanna Bradley

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