

JANUARY 2026

VOL. 6, ISSUE 1



Best News

Blind Early Services TN - Newsletter for Caregivers and Providers

Access Beyond Screens: Celebrating Braille Literacy

In a world filled with audiobooks, tablets, and smart devices, it's fair to ask why braille still matters. At BEST, we believe braille is foundational to literacy. Just as print supports strong readers for sighted children, braille gives children who are blind or low vision direct access to language, spelling, and written expression. While technology can enhance learning, it should complement—not entirely replace—braille. This Braille Literacy Awareness Month, we're sharing a short video from Perkins School for the Blind featuring braille users of all ages reflecting on the value of braille in school, work, and daily life.



At BEST, we know that many of the young children we serve may not yet be ready for formal braille instruction. Still, early exposure to tactile experiences, books, and meaningful literacy routines

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

January 17 (10:00 AM - 11:00 AM)

Mindful Melodies

at BEST's Brentwood office in collaboration with Empower Music Therapy LLC.

January 22 (4:00 PM)

Vanderbilt TVI Masters Online Information Session

[Register here](#)

January 26 (12:00 PM)

Toilet Training

TRIAD's Family First Program from Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

[Register here](#)

February 12 (6:00 PM - 8:00 PM)

All Access Night

Discovery Center at Murfree Springs

Families of children with special needs are invited to enjoy a relaxed, sensory-friendly evening. Explore favorite exhibits with reduced noise, softer lighting,

lays critical groundwork for future braille learning. To help families and providers support this early foundation, we want to make sure families and providers know all of the programs and options available to them. So take a look at the list of programs available, put together by Paths to Literacy, or just check out a few of our favorites directly.

and plenty of space to play at your own pace.

February 18 (9:00 AM - 2:00 PM)

Deaf Day on the Hill

Sign Language Studios, LLC: 699 President Place, Suite 400, Smyrna, TN 37167

Learn more about the day's event here

Learn about Free Braille Book Programs

Seedlings Book Angel
Program & Program for
Teachers of the Visually
Impaired

APH Braille Tales
Collaboration with Dolly
Parton's Imagination
Library

Storybook kits from Braille
Institute's Special
Collections



Final chance to join us for musical fun this spring!

Our Mindful Melodies program is kicking off this weekend—and we still have space for two more families to join the fun!

This free, in-person music therapy program is designed for children ages birth–6 and **meets twice monthly on Saturday mornings from January 17 through April 25, 2026**, at BEST’s Brentwood office. Families will explore music together in a supportive group setting led by Empower Board Certified Music Therapists, along with BEST Teachers of the Visually Impaired and an Orientation & Mobility Specialist. Whether your child already loves music or is just beginning to explore it, Mindful Melodies offers a joyful way to learn and connect.



a FREE, 8-session
group music therapy program!



Interested? Email aclougherty@blindearlyservices.org to learn more or reserve a spot.



Caregiver of a Child with Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)? Share your experience!

From our friends at Prevent Blindness | the National Center for Children's Vision & Eye Health,

I am writing to extend an invitation to you regarding our [Retinopathy of Prematurity \(ROP\) Education and Support Program](#). Prevent Blindness is working with [Dr. L. Penny Rosenblum](#) to conduct focus groups with parents and guardians to gain an understanding about:

- *Experiences families have had when their child has been in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and been diagnosed with retinopathy of prematurity (ROP).*
- *Families' journeys raising a child with ROP in relation to medical care, social/emotional support, and educational services.*
- *Barriers families experience in accessing and attending eye care appointments for their child's ROP.*

Dr. Rosenblum is seeking parents/guardians who have a child 10 years of age or younger who has spent time in the NICU and has been diagnosed with ROP. I am hoping you are able to help recruit a few families. For those interested in participating in a focus group, please contact Dr. Rosenblum at evaluation@preventblindness.org. Dr. Rosenblum plans to hold the focus groups in mid-February.

Following the focus group, participants will receive an Amazon gift card from Prevent Blindness for \$75.



Explore Program & Funding Options at Vanderbilt to Become a Teacher of the Visually Impaired

From our friends at Vanderbilt,

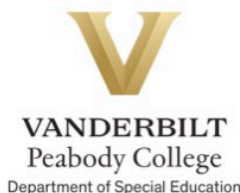
Did you know there is an ongoing shortage of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs)? To address this need, we are offering substantial scholarship opportunities through state and federally funded grants for individuals pursuing a TVI/vision endorsement or initial licensure along

with a master's degree.

We know people choose to become teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) from many different walks of life and often as career changers, so we are reaching out widely to share information about our TVI master's program, as we have three options to accommodate different career paths. All track options have applications open now and start June 2026!

[Learn More About the Programs Here](#)

[Apply Here](#)



**Spring 2026
Visual Disabilities
Virtual Info
Session -
Thursday,
January 22nd,
4pm CT**

Register Here:



Thursday, January 22,
4pm CT

Hosted By:



Dr. Rachel Schles
Coordinator &
Assistant
Professor of the
Practice, Visual
Disabilities Track



Mrs. Katherine
Prioletti
Admissions
Coordinator,
Department of
Special
Education

Interested in becoming a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI)? Join us to learn about the Visual Disabilities M.Ed. program. Hear student perspectives, understand admissions requirements, funding options, and get your questions answered! We will discuss options in both our on-campus full-time graduate and hybrid working-professional tracks, along with both initial licensure or getting an add-on endorsement.



Join BEST in supporting the arts in TN!

At BEST, we believe every child deserves access to experiences that help them grow and thrive—including the arts. From music and movement to tactile art and creative play, the arts play a vital role in early development for children who are blind or have low vision. That's why statewide arts advocacy matters to the families we serve across Tennessee.

TN4Arts is Tennessee's statewide arts advocacy organization, led by individuals who believe deeply in the civic and personal value of the arts. Nearly 80% of Tennessee Arts Grants are funded through the purchase of state specialty license plates.

JOIN THE EFFORT!



[Learn More About Getting a TN Arts Specialty Plate Here!](#)



What We're Loving This Month

In honor of Braille Literacy Month this January, we are sharing a these unique playdough stamps that introduce Braille alongside print letters. The set even includes thoughtful design features including...

- Raised text and braille with a new slightly raised border on the tops of stamps
- The addition of a border to the stamp around each braille cell to help with dot location.



[Find this set on Etsy!](#)

About Us

BEST ensures that families are empowered and equipped to provide children with blindness or low vision their BEST start.

Links

The Best Story

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Let's be BEST friends



If you no longer wish to receive emails [unsubscribe here](#)

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