
Suggestions for Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers of Blind Students

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**National Federation
of the Blind**

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Introduction—Barbara Cheadle, Editor of *Future Reflections*, the National Federation of the Blind Magazine for Parents and Teachers of Blind Children.

Where's the best place for a blind preschooler and kindergartner to go to school? How about a small town school in the sparsely populated mountains of Montana? Seems unlikely, but even a small town can do it right given the ingredients of a cooperative school district, committed and resourceful parents, a competent Braille teacher, good information about blindness, and a supportive network of parents and blind adults. So far, all these ingredients have come together in just the right mix for six-year-old Hannah of Lima, Montana. With a firm foundation in academic and social skills, Hannah is on grade-level with her peers and is ready and eager to start first grade this fall.

In the interest of helping other parents of blind preschoolers or kindergartners, Jill Weatherd, Hannah's mom, sent me some materials she has developed and gave me permission to edit and reprint them for our readers. The two items she sent—"Suggestions for Working with Hannah" and "Suggestions for Hannah's Kindergarten IEP Goals and Objectives"—are printed below. But first, let's begin with the letter from Jill in which she explains why and how she put these items together:

Dear Mrs. Cheadle,

I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your taking the time to give me some input on the phone last month. I felt so much better and so much more informed about the use

and misuse of the Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) with partially sighted elementary school kids. We've decided to ask the school to put off the purchase of a CCTV until middle school and instead invest in more Braille and cane travel lessons.

Our daughter, Hannah, is five and will enter kindergarten at our local school this fall. I've enclosed the goals and objectives we've drafted to present to the IEP team this spring. In addition, I've enclosed "Suggestions for Working with Hannah." I wrote these for her preschool teachers, and I will adapt it for the kindergarten school personnel. I got the idea for this "bullet list" from some information that was presented at the 1997 Montana Association of the Blind meeting [Editor's Note: This is the NFB affiliate in Montana]. Ramona Walhof of Idaho, the NFB representative to the meeting, suggested that I send these documents to you in case they can be of use to others.

Marty Greiser, who's our NFB parents' division contact in Montana, gave me a copy of Cody's kindergarten IEP, and we used that as a starting point for Hannah's. Marty has been very helpful. Others who helped were Barb Rolfe, Montana School for the Blind; Melanie Bush, Montana Family Outreach; and Linda Roselle, Resource Aide, Lima school district; and, of course, the NFB.

The NFB has become such a strong presence in our lives, and we're so glad to be members! Thanks again, and we hope to see you in Dallas at the National Convention!

Sincerely,
Jill Weatherd



Suggestions for Working with Hannah

by Jill Weatherd

- Please do not lead her around by the hand any more than you would her sighted peers. Our goal is for her to be as independent as possible.

- If she drops something, encourage her to search for it (verbal prompts are O.K., if needed). Try to use directional words (to your left, in front of your right knee, etc.) instead of pointing and saying “over here” or “that way.”

- It is very helpful if you will periodically let her know who is sitting near her, who is in the room with her, and describe what the other children are doing (i.e. “Oh, look. Sara, Hannah, and Josh are playing with blocks in the block room”). Sometimes she comes home from school and she’s not sure who was there that day, who played near her, or even who sat next to her in the car on the field trip. I find that I have to be a constant source of information so that she will know what’s going on. She can tell a lot with her other senses, but not everything.

- Please try to facilitate or intentionally arrange situations where she must interact with her peers. She can go a whole day surrounded by children and never have one interaction. This is the skill area with which she needs the most help.

- Please make sure that she uses her cane whenever she leaves the building. I would also encourage (but not require) her to use it in the building. It’s important that the adults around her have a positive, encouraging attitude where

her cane is involved. She has a pretty good attitude and is getting better at using her cane,



but she needs consistent encouragement and positive reinforcement of her attitude and skills.

- Please make sure she faces the appropriate direction when sitting in a circle, in a group, speaking to the group, pledging the allegiance to the flag, etc. Sometimes it’s hard for her to know, or she gets bored and deliberately turns around (which should not be allowed).

- We are working with her on standing still and facing the person to whom she is speaking. It would be a great help if you would prompt her to do this while she is at school.

- Don’t worry about teaching her Braille—she has a Braille teacher (Barb Rolfe).

- Probably the most important thing is that you expect the same things of her that you do of the other children. She is capable, she will just do some things differently.

- Try not to assume that she can’t do something. Give her the same chance as you do the others, and she might surprise you.

- Please encourage her to sit up straight and to use good table manners.

- Please tell her your name when you speak to her. It helps her if she isn’t trying to guess who is speaking to her.

- Crayons don’t “show up” very well for her. Please let her use the washable markers we’ve sent to school for her. They work best.

- We are all doing our best for Hannah, but we will occasionally mess up. It’s OK, we are all learning.

Suggestions for Hannah's Kindergarten IEP Goals and Objectives

by Jill Weatherd

Goal #1

Hannah will demonstrate Braille and print reading and writing skills at the same level as her sighted peers.

Objectives:

1. Hannah will identify all 26 Braille letters, their phonetic sounds, and their corresponding single letter contraction.

2. Hannah will distinguish between upper and lower case Braille letters.

3. Hannah will identify and Braille the literary Braille numbers 0-10.

4. Hannah will learn to handprint her name, all letters of the alphabet, and numbers 0-9.

5. Hannah will correctly load paper into the Perkins Braillewriter and identify the keys, levers, and various other parts of the Braillewriter.

6. Hannah will become familiar with the slate and stylus by inserting the paper and punching with the stylus.

7. Hannah will learn to use the abacus for beginning math concepts that are taught at the kindergarten level (i.e. counting, simple addition and subtraction).

Related Services:

1. Hannah will receive Braille instruction five times per week for 1 hour per lesson by a teacher

working toward Braille certification by the Library of Congress. Hannah will complete the "Readiness," "Pre-Primer," and "Primer" portions of the Patterns Program during the kindergarten year.

(Note: Summer Braille lessons would be extremely helpful because she has more to learn than her sighted peers, and she will need the continuity of instruction.)

2. Classroom materials (i.e. textbooks, worksheets, handouts, and bulletin boards) are to be prepared in advance in Braille and/or in enlarged, high-contrast print, or, in the case of non-text material, raised line format. Her adapted materials are to be available at the same time the regular print materials are given to others.

3. The school library will access Braille books from Montana's Braille library to provide an assortment of books for Hannah's use during library time and/or during free reading time in the regular classroom.

Goal #2

Hannah will use the long cane for safe, efficient travel.

Objectives:

1. Hannah will demonstrate and use proper grip and hand position with her cane.

2. Hannah will demonstrate and use the touch technique, including proper arm position, hand position, grip, wrist movement, and arc width and height.

3. Hannah will demonstrate proper



technique used when ascending and descending stairs.

4. Hannah will travel independently within the school.

Related Services:

Hannah will receive orientation and mobility instruction once or twice per week, 30-50 minutes per session (not during class) by a certified O&M instructor.

(Note: Summer instruction would be very beneficial in order to maintain and expand her skills.)

Goal #3

Hannah will begin to explain her needs and methods to others, and begin to obtain her own materials.

Objectives:

1. Given materials and equipment readily accessible (e.g. Braille paper, scissors, glue), Hannah will have them ready when needed eighty-five percent of the time as measured by teacher observation.

2. In a situation which Hannah does not know how to handle (e.g., not finding a needed item despite reasonable effort) she will ask for help in an appropriate manner eighty-five percent of the time as measured by teacher observation.

3. With assistance from a familiar person, she will explain her methods upon request to the satisfaction of the teacher.

4. Given a situation (real or contrived) in



which someone is offering help which is clearly unnecessary, she will state that she is able to do the task without help eighty-five percent of the time as measured by teacher observation.

General Related Services:

1. Hannah will be expected to perform and participate at the same level as her sighted peers.

2. Students and teachers will attend a demonstration by a blind adult competent in the skills of blindness and will attend a short presentation about blindness (video, Q&A). Hannah's parents will provide "Suggestions for Working With Hannah" for school staff review (including teachers, playground helpers, lunchroom helpers, secretary, lunchroom staff, and others who will encounter Hannah).

3. Hannah will participate fully in all regular school activities which others must attend (physical education, recess, field trips, etc.). For PE, please consider any needed special adaptations in advance and use them wherever they would not interfere with her social development (i.e. running along a black gym floor line or a white blacktop line, or toward a sound would be better for her than running toward a target that she can't see).

4. Hannah will participate in all regular classroom instruction. Special training will be given outside of class hours.

5. Hannah will practice the lunchroom routine so that she is able to do it independently by first grade. Hannah's mom is willing to assist with this.

Miscellaneous Notes:

- Monthly scheduled meetings between kindergarten teacher, aide, and parents to discuss

progress and areas of concern would be much appreciated.

- The use of a notebook for daily reporting between teacher and parent may be helpful.

- Areas of skill development which need special attention are: social skills, cutting with scissors, snapping, tying, printing, spreading, painting, riding tricycle/bike, throwing.