



# Iowa Department for the Blind

## Financial Facts

Category	Cost
Personnel	\$305,000
Production supplies: (Swell Paper/Embossables)	\$8,938
Communications	\$2,077
IT Services	\$36,932
Athena Production Tracking System and Vendor Bidding Portal	\$105,000
Consumable Accessible Educational Materials	\$182,103
Nonconsumable Accessible Educational Materials	\$231,767
Total	\$871,818

## What is the Instructional Materials Center?

The Instructional Materials Center (IMC) and the Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled at the Iowa Department for the Blind are state resources for accessible educational materials (AEM).

The IMC produces and acquires educational materials in alternative formats for eligible students who are unable to access standard print throughout the State of Iowa. Our focus is on timeliness, quality, and reducing costs to taxpayers.

## Background Information

For more than 30 years, the Iowa Department for the Blind's Instructional Materials Center (IMC) had contracted with the Iowa Department of Education (DE) to provide accessible educational materials to blind and low vision students across the state. Local school districts would order materials, the IMC would produce or procure them, and IDB would bill the DE.

In June 2022, IDB was informed by the Iowa Department of Education (DE) that DE would be discontinuing their contracts with IDB for the production of braille materials. IDB would be required to bill each individual district for the cost of accessible educational materials (AEM) after September 30, 2022. No explanation was given as to why the contracts were being discontinued or where the funds that had been used for these contracts would now be spent.

The local districts were informed of this change in July 2022.

IDB expressed concern to DE regarding two consequences of this change:

1. Districts would decide not to purchase braille or large print for the student due to lack of funds.
2. Districts would have untrained para-professionals produce braille and students would receive incorrect materials that were inferior to their sighted classmates.

In order to reduce the number of students effected by these consequences, the Iowa Commission for the Blind authorized IDB to subsidize AEM for the 2022–23 school year using Gifts and Bequests (G&B) funds. This allowed IDB to reduce the costs of non-consumable materials by 70% and consumable materials by 50%. However, even with these subsidies, a large number of districts have stopped ordering and we fear that students are not getting materials in their preferred reading medium. One local district told us that they had decided a former large print user is an audio learner now.

During the 2021–22 school year, we had 80 students (braille and large print) placing orders with us. Since the switch in funding, 52 of these students or 65% have not completed an MOU or ordered materials.

### Break down by format:

- Braille – we have not received an MOU or orders from 38 of our 59 students which means that 65% have not ordered
- Large Print – we have not received an MOU or orders from 14 of our 21 students which means that 66% have not ordered

IDB has been receiving questions from districts regarding whether the subsidies will continue into the 2023–24 school year. We are unable to answer these questions because the Iowa Commission for the Blind is currently not able to do business. In August, one board member needed to resign to return to school and the Board chair passed away November 18th. Despite there being multiple qualified candidates who have asked to serve, the Governors office has not yet appointed replacements. The Board lacks quorum and cannot authorize an extension of the subsidies. In addition, we were told that we would receive an extension of the portion of the DE contract that covers our personnel costs for SFY23. We have asked repeatedly for this contract and agree to DE's terms, however, we are still awaiting to get DE to send the contract.

Because of this IDB had been seeking an ongoing state appropriation to ensure that all blind and low vision students can receive the educational materials they need as a part of their free and appropriate public education.

# How Does the IMC Save Taxpayers Money?

By maintaining a library of materials and a network of vendors across the country, the IMC can obtain accessible educational materials at the lowest possible price. Because the IMC is a part of state government, it does not make a profit and can focus on doing the best possible job for students, schools, and taxpayers.

In the examples below the IMC was able to purchase the braille textbooks as a braille reproduction. Textbooks are returned to the library collection, and are available for free to another student to use during the next school year and subsequent school years. As part of our braille library collection, these textbooks are available for any Iowa School District to borrow for student use.

When the IMC handles textbook procurements, taxpayers save tens of thousands of dollars each year. Here are two examples of how this works:

## Example 1

In 2020, a student needed the textbook: "SOCIAL STUDIES ALIVE! AMERICA'S PAST". This textbook consists of 529 print pages, 1,142 braille pages, and 110 tactile graphics. The IMC was able to purchase this textbook as a reproduction through its vendor network. in the 2019–20 school year. The student used this textbook in the 2020–21 school year and then returned it to the IMC. The next year, another student was able to borrow this textbook from the IMC

Because the IMC handled this procurement and each of the two local districts that needed this textbook did not reinvent the wheel by ordering it to be made from scratch or having it transcribed by a para-professional, taxpayers saved between \$4,970 and \$5,936 over the course of those two years. The savings will increase as future students borrow the textbook in later years.

	Amount
Cost to Produce From scratch	\$2,960 – \$3,443
Cost To Purchase as a Reproduction	\$950
Taxpayer Savings	\$4,970 – \$5,936

## Example 2

In 2020, a student needed the textbook: "BRIDGES IN MATHEMATICS, STUDENT BOOK, VOLUMES 1 AND 2". This textbook consists of 350 print pages, 866 braille pages, and 217 tactile graphics. The IMC was able to purchase this textbook as a reproduction through its vendor network. The student used this textbook in the 2020–21 school year and then returned it to the IMC. The next year, another student was able to borrow this textbook from the IMC.

Because the IMC handled this procurement and each of the two local districts that needed this textbook did not reinvent the wheel by ordering it to be made from scratch or having it transcribed by a para-professional, taxpayers saved between \$3,958 and \$5,368 over the course of those two years. The savings will increase as future students borrow the textbook in later years.

	Amount
Cost to Transcribe from scratch	\$2,275 – \$2,980
Cost to Purchase as Reproduction	\$592
Total Savings	\$3,958 – \$5,368

## What do IMC staff do?

Instructional Materials Center (IMC) has five certified braille transcribers on staff to ensure that materials are high quality. They transcribe materials, place projects, track progress, manage volunteers, answer questions from teachers and paraeducators, ship materials, and prepare invoices. These hard working and highly knowledgeable staff coordinate the production of hundreds of projects each year. They work with 42 national vendors and volunteers to place materials, provide quality control, and excellent customer service.

As an Authorized Media Producer (AMP) in Iowa for braille, large print, audio and electronic text formats, the IMC has resources to provide timely, quality, and cost-effective materials to students and schools.

The IMC provides all Iowans access to accessible materials that are timely, high quality, and cost effective for their educational and vocational needs. Through the implementation of Athena, ordering and production tracking software, the IMC has streamlined the production of accessible educational materials of all types through a web-based portal. Athena leverages the current library system/catalog, the breadth of the library collection and the expertise of the IMC staff to provide quality accessible materials for Iowans. Ensuring blind and low vision students have the materials they need to maximize their educational success.

The Instructional Materials Center also provides a website with information and training for Iowa educators working with students who use accessible educational materials. Along with the website the IMC staff provide various online trainings and learning opportunities for educators.

## What is the difference between consumable and non-consumable materials?

Non-consumable materials are items that can be added to our library collection and used by other students across the state who need them. Our library collection has over 200,000 titles in braille, large print, and audio with over 5,000 titles that are core collection accessible educational materials. These materials are available for loan to eligible students at no cost. Last year almost 400 textbooks and workbooks needed by students were provided to students for free from our collection.

Non-consumable materials provided by the IMC include:

- \* Textbooks
- \* Core related materials such as workbooks

Consumable materials are items such as worksheets and handouts that are specific to a classroom are not added to our library collection because they are student specific. The IMC does retain the files in case they can be used or adapted for future use.

Consumable materials include:

- \* Supplemental materials such as worksheets and teacher-created worksheets
- \* Online class materials and curriculum

## What does the IMC provide?

- Alternative format experts on staff. Access to librarians to research and find quality materials quickly and cost-effectively. Staff ensure materials that need to be procured are acquired at the lowest cost available.
- Transcription Services (Braille, Large Print, Electronic Text and Audio)
- Five Certified Braillists on staff. Over 20% of orders are completed by staff, keeping transcription costs down.
- Access to a nationwide network of vendors and contractors
- Quick Braille Program for braille transcription needed immediately
- Athena Web Based Ordering Portal for Schools - an easy online ordering system
- Braille Embosser and eReader Loaner Program - Students can check out from the library IRIE braille embossers and braille eReaders at no cost. An embosser is a braille printer and having an embosser at the school speeds up the production of consumables so that students can have them in hand right when they are needed. Braille eReaders provide braille in electronic form. An eReader can hold thousands of pages of braille materials as well as connect to a tablet, computer, or phone to display online content in braille.

## Other available services and trainings for schools and educators provided by the IMC:

- Assistance with accessibility and Learning Management Systems, such as Google Classrooms and Canvas
- Open Educational Resources Accessibility Assistance
- Universal Design for Learning Training
- Training on how to read and write braille for educators and families
- Assistance in locating materials in alternative formats
- Reference and information assistance

## Glossary of Acronyms

AEM: Accessible Educational Materials. This includes all textbooks, worksheets, tactile graphics, 3D printed models, STEM kits, and educational toys and games, and other items used in education that are produced in an alternative format for those unable to access standard print.

DE: Iowa Department of Education

FAPE: Free and Appropriate Public Education, "Section 504 and Title II require public schools to provide appropriate education and modifications, aids and related services free of charge to students with disabilities and their parents or guardians." (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/issues/dis-issue03.html#skipnav2>)[- Federal Department of Education OCR: Office for Civil Rights]

G&B: Gifts and Bequests Fund, a fund administered by the Iowa Commission for the Blind that was established to provide grants and no interest loans for independent living tools and equipment as well as provide support to other programs and services that support blind Iowans self-sufficiency.

IDB: The Iowa Department for the Blind

IMC: Instructional Materials Center, located within the Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled which is a division of the Iowa Department for the Blind and affiliated with the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled a part of the Library of Congress.