October is Blind Awareness Month

By Jeannie Standal

Blind Awareness Month and World Sight Day are among the important observances spotlighted in October. According to the National Center for Special Education Research, 81% of students with blindness or visual impairments (BVI) attend regular school and other BVI students, many living with coexisting disabilities, attend specialized schools like the wonderful Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind in Gooding. Since students with low vision or blindness are not alone in benefiting from audio and ebooks, you're a sure to have a student in class who can use this information.

It's obvious that audiobooks are valuable tools for students with visual impairments, and physical and learning disabilities, but anyone who has shopped for audio materials knows that they are expensive—gold-plated expensive. But there is good news: there are audio resources available at no cost to your school or your students. Ebooks can also be useful since most devices have the option to change the size and style of the font, making them easier to read.

The Talking Book Service from the National Library Service provides audiobooks to those whose vision, physical, or learning disability (dyslexia, for example) prevents them from reading standard print. Recently, the authority requirements have been updated to allow school librarians to authenticate a child's eligibility for TBS, removing one more barrier to access to books for students. For more details, visit https://libraries.idaho.gov/tbs/ and find out how your qualifying students can access digital, braille, and cartridge audiobooks.

IDEA (Idaho Digital eBook Alliance) is a collection of ebooks and eaudiobooks provided by the Idaho Commission for Libraries. Access to the IDEA collection costs your students, school, and school district nothing. Students check out books from the collection using the SORA app from Overdrive, which they download to their school-issued or personal device for free. If your school district is not a member, work with your administrator to join.

Many local public libraries have large print, braille, ebook, and audio materials. Some also have special student cards for students to use the library, even if they live outside the library's service area. Call your friendly local public librarian and ask about their offerings!

Ask your school librarian to help you find these tools to get your students the materials they need.

LINKS TO MORE LEARNING

ICfL's DHH—BVI resources page
Though geared toward libraries, this roundup of resources contains plenty of useful information for everyone, including low vision terminology, best practices for communicating with blind and visually impaired people, and links for further education. https://libraries.idaho.gov/dhh-bvi/

Idaho Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Find local and national resources for blind and visually impaired people, information for Idaho peer support groups, and videos on everything from assistive technology to adjusting to vision loss. http://icbvi.idaho.gov/default.aspx

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Idaho Talking Book Service
The Idaho Talking Book Service (TBS) loans free audiobooks, magazines, and playback equipment to any Idaho resident who is unable to read standard print due to low vision, blindness, or a temporary or permanent physical, perceptual, or reading disability (including dyslexia). Materials are mailed directly to and from registered users via Free Matter for the Blind. Learn more about TBS, and apply for the service, by calling (800) 458-3271, or visit https://libraries.idaho.gov/tbs/.

DIGITAL TOOLS

IDEA
The Idaho Digital E-Book Alliance (IDEA) is a statewide partnership between the ICfL and public and school libraries to expand access to digital e-books and e-audio content via Overdrive. View the IDEA collection, learn the ins and outs of school library participation, and view a list of participating libraries here: https://libraries.idaho.gov/idea/#school.

ICfL Idaho Commission for Libraries