



# **THE BESB BUZZ...**

**A Newsletter for Families of Children  
who are Blind or Visually Impaired**

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**The BESB Buzz is now fully digital. You can find back issues in English and Spanish on our website. Feel free to contact the newsletter's co-editors at [Jessie.Mabry@ct.gov](mailto:Jessie.Mabry@ct.gov) or [Danielle.valente@ct.gov](mailto:Danielle.valente@ct.gov). We welcome your comments and ideas for future newsletter topics.**

# Student and Family Events

## ***Leap into Life Ridgefield Holiday Stroll December 2, 2023***

Five High Schoolers participated in BESB's Leap into Life Ridgefield Holiday Stroll. Two teachers of the visually impaired (TVI's) and one orientation and mobility (O&M) instructor led the group from the Ridgefield Public Library to the toy store. Participants learned additional mobility skills at a street crossing with an audible pedestrian signal (APS). They practiced money management skills making holiday purchases with ApplePay, credit cards, and cash.



Students socialized and exchanged phone numbers over a pizza lunch that included braille and large print menus. The toy store owner gave each student a complimentary stuffed animal/pillow. They also got to meet a police dog accompanying an officer at the event. Finally, the students had the opportunity to select chocolates at the sweet shop.

## ***Skip into Skills Pinspiration Splatter Room and DIY Slime December 27, 2023***

The BESB Skip into Skills Committee hosted a Splatter Room and Do-it-Yourself Slime Making event at Pinspiration in East Lyme for students age Kindergarten through Fifth Grade. Two students (grades 1 and 3), as well as two siblings to one of the students, attended the event. The students were exposed to multiple areas of the Expanded Core

Curriculum. During the event they explored recreation and leisure activities in the area of art: creating slime, painting a canvas, and using watercolors. They began the event by mixing ingredients to create personalized slime. They used self-determination skills to make color and scent choices for their slime. Next, they each painted the background of a canvas. After the canvas dried, it was brought into the Splatter Room, where each student chose paint colors and threw them towards their canvas hanging on the wall to create beautiful masterpieces. There was a black light in the Splatter Room and one student yelled out, "Let's have a dance party!", when she realized her clothes were glowing. During some downtime, we played hide-and-go-seek, working as a team to find the other group. Students used watercolors to paint oceanic themed pictures.

Participants worked on social interaction skills throughout the day, interacting with peers and adults during activities. The group increased their independent living skills by washing up before enjoying pizza for lunch. Students and their parents expressed that they had fun at the event and hope to attend more events in the future.



### ***Middle School Movie and Pizza Event February 20, 2024***

Seven students in grades 7 and 8 met in the Center of West Hartford with four TVI's and two O&M instructors. We saw the movie *Wonka* at Cinepolis Theater. Students enjoyed soft drinks and popcorn while accessing audio description through headsets.

After the movie, we walked approximately 4 blocks through West Hartford Center to Luna Pizza. The O&M instructors addressed Audible Pedestrian Signals and Truncated domes with the students, four of whom were long cane users. At the restaurant, participants socialized with old and new friends over pizza, garlic knots, and beverages.



***Preschool Field Trip to Lutz Children's Museum  
February 24, 2024***



We had eight families attend our event titled “Fur, Feathers, and Scales” at the Lutz Children’s Museum in Manchester. The museum was closed to the public during our event. Participants spent an hour exploring the Main Street Exhibit, where they engaged in play at the post office, school, store, farm, and a variety of other buildings. Next, we listened to a story, *Animals Should Definitely Not Wear Clothing*, and spent time learning about turtles, birds, and furry animals. We were also given an opportunity to touch a variety of small animals, which the students really enjoyed. This activity was followed by a textured craft. Afterwards, the families could have a snack, look at different animals in their museum homes, and/or continue to play on Main Street.





***Children's Ski Event  
February 29, 2024***



Ten students in grades 1 through 12 gathered at Ski Sundown in New Hartford with parents, BESB staff, and our partners from Summit Adaptive Sports. Besides six skiers, we had two sit-skiers, one snowboarder, and one snowboarder-turned-sit-skier. There was one student who had participated in the event before and nine who hadn't previously.

The weather was beautiful! Parents talked to BESB staff and each other in a relaxed setting. Summit Adaptive provided hot cocoa, cookies, water and chips in the lodge as people came in to warm up.

Student Quote: Over cookies, one student said to another, "If we go to another event and you see me, will you say hi to me?"

**Parent Education Program Hartford Brailers Event  
March 9, 2024**



The Parent Education Program held a gathering at the Hartford Brailers vs New York Metro blind hockey game. This was a free event and open to all BESB families. We had a great turn out to support the Hartford Brailers. Our group was a total of approximately ten BESB Families plus their friends equaling about sixty-five people.

For many participants, this was their first time attending a game played by a hockey team made up of all visually impaired and blind players. The puck is larger than normal and is metal with ball bearings inside to create auditory feedback. The puck gives better sound once broken in and dented. It was noted that the goalies are blindfolded to level the playing field for both teams. Also, unlike a typical hockey game, the teams did not switch goals after each period to allow the players better orientation on the ice.

The final score of 4-3 was an exciting win for the Brailers!



***Middle School Duckpin Bowling Event***  
***March 26, 2024***

Six students in grades 6-8 went bowling at Highland Bowl in Cheshire, including two who had never come to a BESB event before. They played one game and socialized over lunch. Students used menus provided in their primary learning media to select what they would order. Many ordered themselves. Some poured their own drinks. Each student was tasked with choosing a lunch that didn't go over \$15.

Parent quote: "Thank you so much for sharing. [My daughter] has difficulty sometimes at school with her other peers, and I wonder if it's because she feels different. However, she has enjoyed going out with you guys and is always happy to talk about her new friends. It is exactly what she needed. I appreciate you guys and what you do for these children."

***Leap into Life College Experience Q&A***  
***March 26, 2024***

Two former BESB students, now in their third and fourth years of college, joined six high school students and five BESB staff virtually via Teams to share their college wisdom, accomplishments, and experiences. The program was scheduled for 1-1.5 hours, and the full 1.5 hours was needed, as LIL students asked great questions and were engaged.

College students Paige and Lizzy each took turns discussing agenda items previously sent to them, and LIL students asked questions throughout. They talked about requesting accommodations, accessing materials digitally, communicating directly with their professors and advocating for their needs, getting involved in clubs, dorm life and roommates, the challenges of the cafeteria, and traveling around and beyond their campuses. One mentioned traveling in a country where they do not speak English, being lost and trying to get directions. Both were very well-spoken and their maturity and independence levels shone.

Lastly, a TVI asked, "What would you tell your 'younger self' about what you know now?" Their responses were: know and use your technology, take reasonable risks, join clubs around activities you never thought you would, don't be afraid to ask for what you need, be more comfortable with your O&M, be confident in the decisions you make, and "ask questions—the worst anyone can say is 'no'".

All LIL high school students thanked them for sharing their expertise. One said, "Everything you said was really enlightening, and I found all the information to be really helpful as I think about going to college."

***Leap into Life Cooking and Wellness Program***  
***April 11-12, 2024***

Five students in grades 8-11 attended this two-day event at the Sound Retreat in Chester. They had the opportunity to prepare a variety of meals and desserts including bagels, smoothies, sandwiches, quesadillas, brownies, and ice cream sundaes. They worked solo and in pairs. Those who didn't participate last year received a blender to take home with them.

In the afternoons, the students were led in a drumming circle, and on the second day, they enjoyed a sound meditation. By the end of the program, they were sharing their experiences of visual impairment with each other and would have chatted all afternoon.

## **Staff Events**

### ***Spring In-service for Teachers of Students with Multiple Disabilities March 19, 2024***

BESB was proud to host an enriching full-day teacher training at the Pitkin Community Center in Wethersfield. With over sixty teachers and education professionals gathering from around the state, this event was a valuable opportunity for collaborative learning and professional development.

The program highlighted Adapted Orientation and Mobility, featuring hands-on sessions aimed at engaging students in active learning. Bri Killoran, from the Carroll Center in Massachusetts, was an amazing guest speaker, presenting "Beyond Mobility: Providing Effective and Meaningful O&M Services to Students with Significant Multiple Disabilities." BESB was excited to facilitate this valuable spring training, sharing resources and knowledge with teams throughout Connecticut, as a follow-up to our Fall In-Services.

The goal of the training was to equip educators with insights and tools to better support students with visual impairments and additional disabilities. The event also aimed to foster collaboration and resource-sharing among professionals in the field. The training proved to be successful, not just in terms of attendance, but also in demonstrating the genuine commitment of teachers to support their students. Participants left with valuable ideas and tools that they were eager to implement both in the classroom and in their lessons.

## **Around the Web**

Our BESB TVI's continue to publish articles to help others in the field. A great example is Jackie Dettore's recent piece, *Transcriptionist Talk: Collaboration Behind the Scenes*. She discusses a platform she created for our students' Braille transcribers and material modification specialists to network and problem-solve together. You can find her article at:

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/transcriptionist-talk-collaboration-behind-the-scenes/>.



**Save the Dates**  
***Preschool Field Trip to New Pond Farm***  
***May 18, 2024***

BESB students and their siblings will become farmers and help care for the animals. They will brush a cow and learn how she produces milk. New arrivals in the barnyard may include newly hatched chicks, young piglets, lambs, and possibly a new calf. As the students explore the area, they will learn about the fascinating adaptations of the animals as well as their importance to farmers. Families are welcome to bring a picnic lunch and enjoy the picnic area following the field trip. RSVP is first come/first served, and the field trip is rain or shine.

**Saturday, May 18, 2024**

**10:30 am - 12:00 PM**

**New Pond Farm Education Center**

**101 Marchant Road**

**West Redding, CT 06896**

Registration opens Friday, April 26 at 9:00 AM

Registration can be found at:

<https://ads-besb.jotform.com/231135162724852>

Please email [Jessica.Gibson@ct.gov](mailto:Jessica.Gibson@ct.gov) with any questions

We hope to see you there!

***Birth to Three In-Service for Educational Teams***  
***May 21, 2024***

If you have a little one in this age group, please encourage your child's service providers to attend this helpful training in Wethersfield.

***Leap into Life Yard Goats Dunkin' Park Tour***  
***June 18, 2024***

This event is open to students in grades 6-12 who can self-regulate their behavior and are excited to make new friends. Students and TVI's will tour Dunkin' Park Stadium, locker rooms, and press box; get a chance to trial their voice as the game announcer;

ask questions of Yard Goats staff; and possibly explore the baseball field. The Yard Goats will be playing an away game that day, which will allow us to explore the baseball park. Students will leave with a better understanding of the stadium and receive complimentary tickets to return with one parent for an afternoon game on Sunday, June 30th. You can sign your child up using this [EVENT REGISTRATION LINK](#).

### ***Fall In-services for Educational Teams***

Each year in late September and early October, BESB provides a full day of in-service trainings for teachers and paraprofessionals across the state. Participants will learn about BESB services, common eye conditions that cause vision impairment, and intervention strategies tailored to specific eye conditions, as well as techniques for working with students with visual impairments. Teams should attend the program that best fits the student(s) they work with:

- Teams working with academic students who use Large Print: September 30, 2024
- Teams working with academic students who use Braille: October 1, 2024
- Teams working with academic preschool students: October 15, 2024
- Teams working with students with CVI completing academic tasks: October 15, 2024
- Teams working with students who have multiple disabilities: October 21 and 22, 2024; teams can pick either day.

Registration for these free programs will open in late August. Please feel free to check in with your child's team and encourage them to take advantage of these opportunities!

**Enjoy the rest of the school year and have a wonderful summer! We'll return in the fall.**