

Transcript: Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind: 'Chronic shortage' in Braille teachers

Bruce Hamilton: [00:00:00] No doubt that literacy is a critical life skill and for the visually-impaired reading and understanding Braille offers that key to success. But now there aren't enough teachers available to teach it.

Jennifer Waugh: [00:00:10] News4Jax reporter Ashley Harding is joining us now live. Ashley, you spoke with the president of the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, which is in St. Augustine. She's worried a Braille teacher shortage could really have a trickle-down effect.

Ashley Harding: [00:00:24] Yes, Jen and Bruce, good morning to you both. She's very concerned about that, and she says this teacher shortage in Braille is due to cuts and at teacher training programs. She says this is something that's going on nationwide and she says it's been going on for decades. And her fear is that it will have a serious consequence for visually-impaired students in the long run.

Justyn Keller: [00:00:42] As Y equals. Negative one third x .

Ashley Harding: [00:00:49] It's one of the most engaging middle school classrooms we've ever visited. While they can't see the problems, Braille brings the world of math right to these students fingertips.

Addison Burgess: [00:01:01] I have to line up a linear equation, that needs Braille. I can't picture that if it were given to me in audio. If everything went to technology, I would have way less of an understanding of math than I have now.

Ashley Harding: [00:01:14] But it goes beyond that. Braille is a lifeline for these students.

Taylor Sherman: [00:01:18] Honestly, without Braille I wouldn't know how to read. Unless I read humungous print letters, like I can see really large print. I would not know how to read.

Ashley Harding: [00:01:33] That's why making sure visually-impaired students had the success tools they need is crucial. That includes the teachers who guide them.

Dr. Jeanne Prickett: [00:01:40] Since the day I started, there's been a chronic shortage of teachers who are able to teach reading in Braille.

Ashley Harding: [00:01:48] Dr. Jeanne Prickett says while audio technology is amazing, Braille is what ensures student literacy. Without enough teachers, it could have an impact.

Ashley Harding: [00:01:56] "What's your biggest fear with that, in the long term?"

Dr. Jeanne Prickett: [00:01:58] My fear is that children won't get the skills they need and will...they'll end up not being as competitive as they could be if they could read and write for themselves.

Ashley Harding: [00:02:11] To give you guys a sense of how important braille is to these young students, this is a standard print Webster's dictionary. Now look around us all the way around, all that blue, that sea of blue. That's just one dictionary in Braille.

Ashley Harding: [00:02:25] With her braille computer in tow, Taylor Sherman is already working toward her goal.

Taylor Sherman: [00:02:30] I want to help design more technology for the blind because I think it would be helpful. But, I also still think Braille is a really important part of learning.

Ashley Harding: [00:02:48] And with there being a need, Dr. Prickett says anyone who is interested in teaching Braille as a career path can reach out for more information. We posted a link to the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind website on ours,

News4Jax.com. Reporting live this morning, Ashley Harding, Channel 4, the local station.