



ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2023

MDE - LOW INCIDENCE OUTREACH

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

ROXANNE BALFOUR

Michigan Department of Education - Low Incidence Outreach (MDE-LIO) Director

MDE-LIO has a mission to provide consultation, training, and resources to families and educational teams serving students who are Blind or Visually Impaired (BVI) and/or Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH). Our vision is to ensure equal access to a quality education for all students who are BVI and/or DHH. These two pieces, which are tied to Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan, help guide us in our annual planning.



IT IS AN HONOR TO SERVE STUDENTS WHO ARE BVI OR DHH, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE FIELD THAT SUPPORTS THEM.

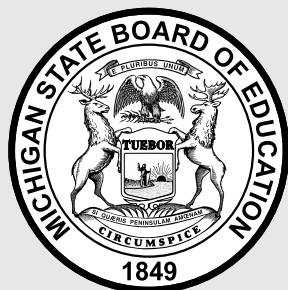
At MDE-LIO, we are committed to researching and gathering information to provide equitable opportunities for students who are BVI or DHH, both academically and through the expanded core curriculum. Despite challenges and barriers, it is our responsibility as a community to foster independence in our children, encouraging them to advocate for their needs and reach for the stars.

This annual report offers a glimpse into our efforts, with the help of many others, to make a difference.

Finally, I want to thank MDE-LIO staff for supporting our efforts to provide equal access to a quality education for all students who are BVI or DHH.



OPTIMISM IS THE FAITH THAT LEADS TO ACHIEVEMENT. NOTHING CAN BE DONE WITHOUT HOPE AND CONFIDENCE. - HELEN KELLER



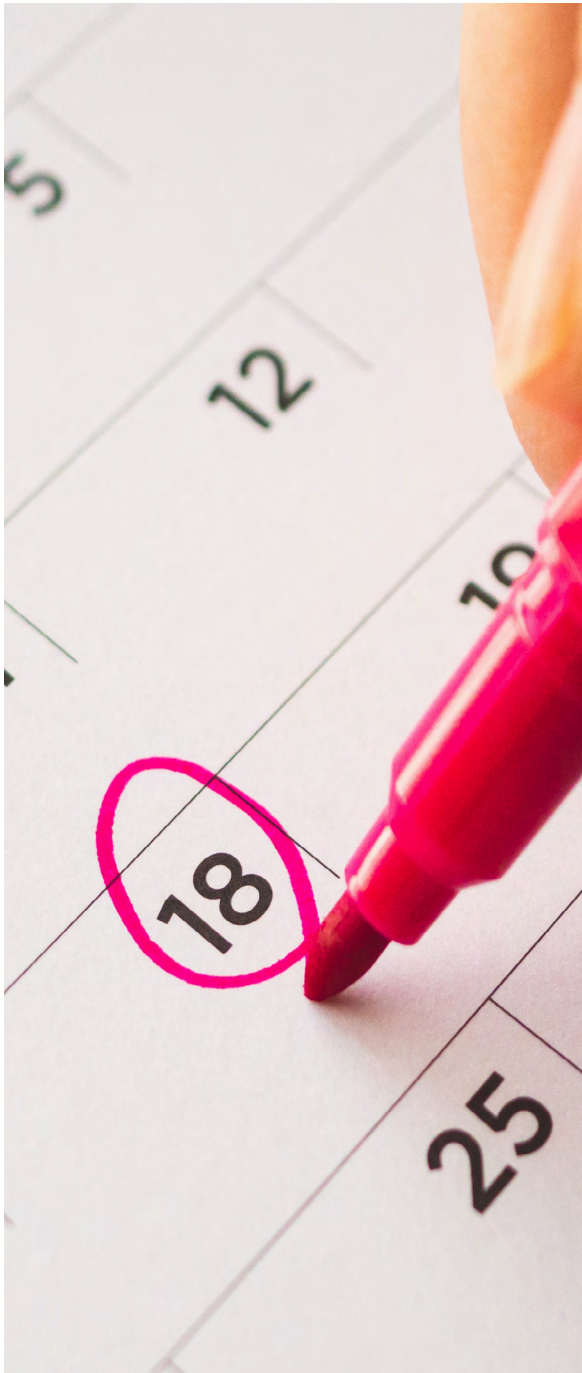
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The Michigan Department of Education - Low Incidence Outreach is funded under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act through the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education.



A GREAT YEAR OF EVENTS



1,714

PEOPLE ATTENDED MDE-LIO EVENTS IN FY23

Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) was another great year of events for students who are Blind/Visually Impaired (BVI) or Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH), their families, and school personnel who support them. MDE-LIO continued offering online, in-person, recorded, and hybrid events. Some events even included at-home kits for families to have fun and learn together in the convenience of their own home.

Student events offered experiences such as:

- camping
- demonstrating orientation and mobility skills
- learning about financial literacy
- practicing social skills

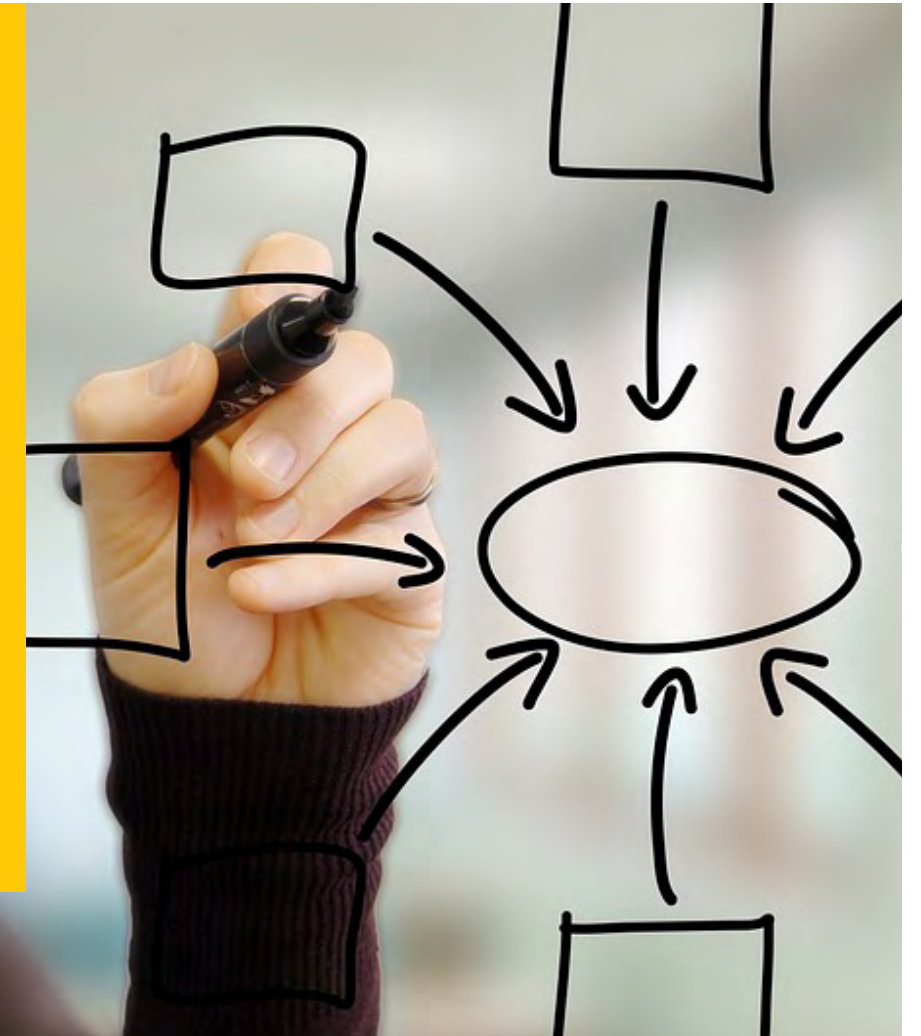
Events for school personnel focused on a variety of topics, including:

- braille
- American Sign Language
- assessments
- assistive technology

In the coming year, MDE-LIO will continue to offer many learning opportunities in a variety of platforms for students, families, and school personnel.

EVENT REGISTRATION

In FY23, we began using a new registration system, Cvent, for our events. In addition to focusing on user accessibility and streamlining the registration process, Cvent offers a variety of features for in-person and virtual events. For our Building Connections conference in spring 2023, we offered an event app via Cvent for attendees to access during the conference. Attendees appreciated being able to download handouts, view the schedule, get conference notifications, and more. We are rolling out more features as we continue to explore the platform.



89
MDE-LIO
EVENTS

60
BVI
EVENTS

28
DHH
EVENTS

1
BVI/DHH
EVENT

1,714
TOTAL EVENT
PARTICIPANTS

1,408
BVI EVENT
PARTICIPANTS

306
DHH EVENT
PARTICIPANTS

20
BVI AND DHH
PARTICIPANTS

MDE-LIO CONFERENCES

During FY23, MDE-LIO hosted two in-person conferences for participants throughout the state to connect and learn about the latest in their fields.

Knowledge Is Power: Conference for Administrators of Blind/Visually Impaired (BVI) or Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) Programs or Services was held in November 2022 and offered necessary knowledge and resources for understanding the unique roles and responsibilities of teachers and related staff supporting students who are BVI or DHH. General sessions included presentations by Michigan Department of Education Deputy Superintendent Scott Koenigsknecht and keynote speaker Jason Hunt, CEO and founder of Eye Squared Leadership.

Administrators learned about:

- terms and tools providers use when supporting students who are BVI or DHH
- assessing teachers who serve students who are BVI or DHH
- unique assistive technology aids and equipment
- the educational impact of hearing differences and vision loss

20

PARTICIPANTS

ASL interpreters were on hand to provide accessibility to all in attendance.

7

VIDEO RECORDINGS

Recordings included a keynote, breakout sessions, and two panel discussions.



Building Connections for a Bright Future, held in April 2023 for school personnel and parents, was a two-day conference all about DHH topics. Leaders and professionals at the national and state levels shared current research and evidence-based practices participants could start using immediately. Keynote presentations were given by Carrie Lou Bloom, PhD, co-director of the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, and Michael E. Skyer, PhD, assistant professor at the University of Tennessee.

Conference topics included resources for:

- literacy
- social and emotional learning supports
- assessments
- DHH personnel roles and responsibilities
- postsecondary transition
- American Sign Language
- connection opportunities
- language-rich environment

All sessions were recorded for participants who attended in person as well as registrants who signed up to receive the recordings only. Accessibility was a priority; using video and audio equipment, as well as specialized software, staff were able to record and display the speakers, interpreters, PowerPoints, and live captioning all at once. This highly accessible format was a hit among participants.

82

PARTICIPANTS

Six ASL interpreters were on hand to provide accessibility to all in attendance.

12

VIDEO RECORDINGS

Session recordings were available for participants in Cvent after the event.

2023 BRAILLE CHALLENGE



Braille Challenge, the only academic competition of its kind, is held in January through March each year for students who are Blind or Visually Impaired.

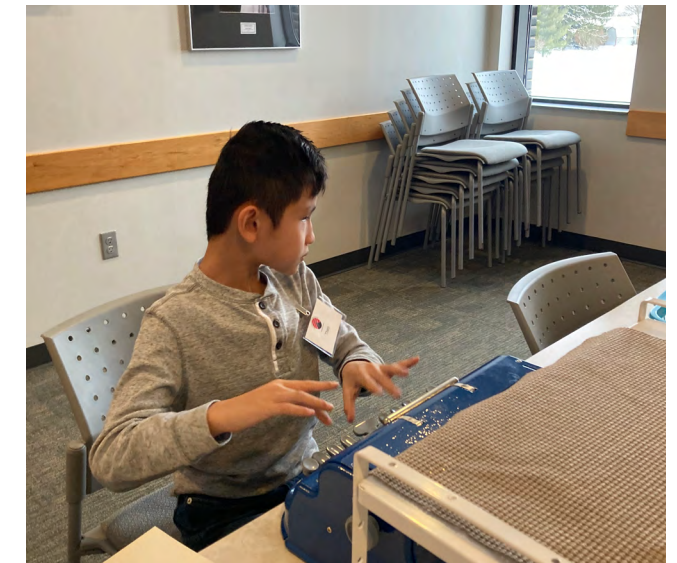
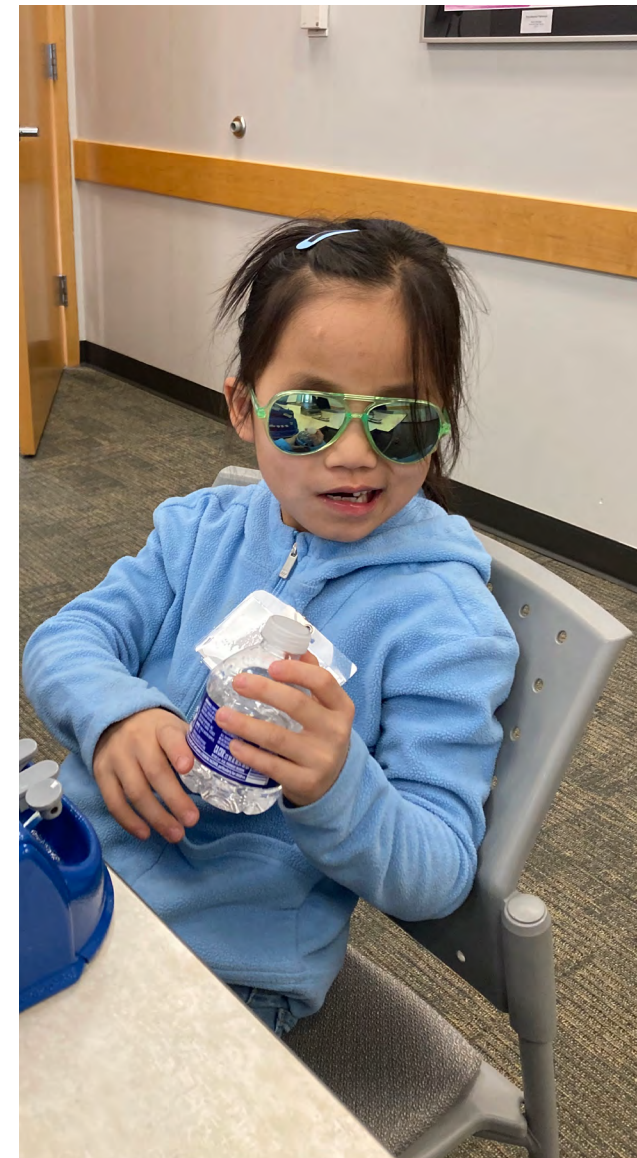
“Braille on!” On June 24, these words echoed throughout the University of Southern California campus, where 51 contestants from North America and the United Kingdom had gathered for the 2023 Braille Challenge Finals.

Braille Challenge was created in 2000 by Braille Institute, a nonprofit organization in Southern California with a mission to positively transform the lives of individuals with vision loss. Braille Challenge is the only academic competition of its kind to foster and promote braille literacy. Students compete in several contests that test their spelling, proofreading, listening, reading comprehension, and ability to decipher charts and graphs.

Michigan Students Compete at Finals

For the eighth year in a row, students throughout the state participated in the Michigan Regional Braille Challenge, hosted by the Michigan Department of Education – Low Incidence Outreach (MDE-LIO) and partnering intermediate school districts (ISDs). Students had a choice to take the challenge virtually, in person, or individually with a proctor. In total, 20 students competed in this year’s Michigan Regional Braille Challenge.

Two of these students secured a spot at the 2023 Braille Challenge Finals: Yilin, from Ottawa County, competed in the Apprentice category (grades 1–2), while Elena, from Newaygo County, competed in the Junior Varsity category (grades 7–9). Ultimately, both contestants finished in the top ten of their categories at Braille Challenge Finals.



800
STUDENTS COMPETED
INTERNATIONALLY

20
STUDENTS COMPETED
IN MICHIGAN

2
MICHIGAN STUDENTS
WENT TO FINALS

2022 MICHIGAN REGIONAL CANE QUEST

At the start of FY23 in October 2022, MDE-LIO teamed up with Leader Dogs for the Blind to celebrate White Cane Day in an exciting and meaningful way, by hosting the Fall 2022 Michigan Regional Cane Quest. Cane Quest® is a challenging orientation and mobility (O&M) contest for students in grades 3-12, created by Braille Institute of America. Regional Cane Quest events are held across the country, and contestants are divided into three grade categories: Scouts in grades 3-6, Explorers in grades 7-9, and Trailblazers in grades 10-12.

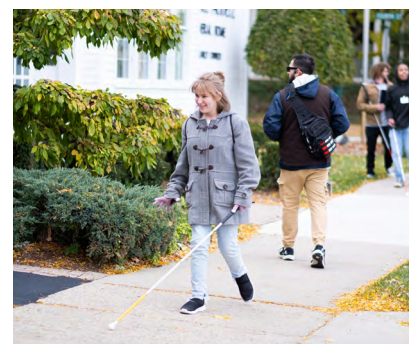
Thirteen participants competed in the Michigan Regional Cane Quest, representing all three age groups. In the morning contestants were tested:

- going up and down stairs
- using a human guide
- entering a vehicle
- using a cane
- finding cardinal directions
- caring for their cane

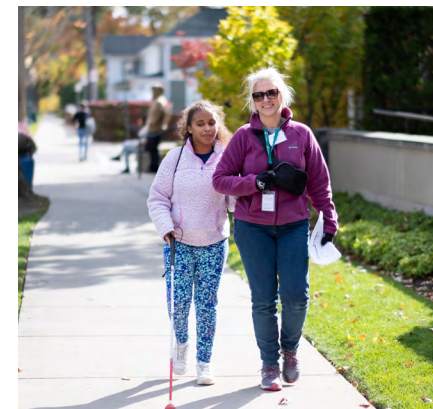
In the afternoon, the Explorers and Trailblazers continued the contest in downtown Rochester, where they demonstrated their ability to:

- cross busy streets
- ask for assistance from the public
- use traffic sounds for orientation
- use street crossing signals
- negotiate obstacles
- locate alleyways and driveways

In addition to the competition, the Michigan Regional Cane Quest offered fun for the whole family. Parents participated in a workshop to learn about how their children can travel independently with a cane, how to repair a broken cane, and how to change the tip on a cane. Siblings spent time playing games and learning about how to be a human guide for their sibling with vision loss. Contestants and their families also had a chance to tour the Leader Dogs for the Blind facility and learn about guide dogs.



It was great, very informative, loved that we got to experience and do things also. Made the time go fast, and interaction with others always a great ice breaker.
- Parent feedback



LIO: MDE TOP 10 STRATEGIC GOALS

When planning events, programs, and resources, we strive to align with the Michigan Department of Education's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan. Below are a few areas in which we worked toward these goals in FY23.

To expand early childhood learning opportunities and improve early literacy achievement, we continued offering virtual story time events with literacy activities for families of young children who are DHH. We also offered a webinar series for educators and parents/guardians supporting young children who are BVI, covering a range of topics from early literacy to independent living skills. Additionally, we expanded our selection of books with characters who are DHH and invited several children to share a video report about a book from the collection to spread awareness.

To improve the health, safety, and wellness of learners, we hosted our first Michigan Regional Cane Quest event, which challenges students who are BVI to demonstrate physical navigation skills they will use throughout their lives. We also continued to host online social events for elementary, middle, and high school students who are DHH to connect with peers across Michigan.

To increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school and expand secondary learning opportunities, we offered a webinar series for high school students who are DHH to learn from adults who found their own path to success after high school. We also offered a career-focused webinar series and financial literacy workshop for students who are BVI, in partnership with the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons.

To increase the number of certified teachers in BVI and DHH fields, MDE-LIO continued to manage the Consortia for Teacher Preparation, partnering with out-of-state colleges and universities to help teachers in Michigan earn a BVI or DHH endorsement.

COLLABORATIONS

MDE-LIO would like to acknowledge the agencies, schools, districts, and individuals that collaborated with our office to provide content expertise and share information that is crucial to our field. Thank you!



LIVE WITH LIO

MDE-LIO continued to offer LIVE with LIO webinars throughout the school year. Two live webinars were held per month, one for those working in the BVI field and one for those working in the DHH field. Webinars were presented by MDE-LIO consultants and guest presenters covering important topics related to:

- programs
- resources
- tools

Feedback from our surveys:

“I love that you have done the work in compiling resources that are research-based and directly align with our discipline.

“Everything was nice. I always like to go back and review all of the links that are presented. Such a wealth of information!



This was a short, concise presentation that provided some wonderful resources we can peruse on our own. I loved it!

- Survey Response

471

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

20 TOTAL WEBINARS

Average of 23 participants

161

BVI PARTICIPANTS

10 BVI WEBINARS

Average of 16 participants

310

DHH PARTICIPANTS

10 DHH WEBINARS

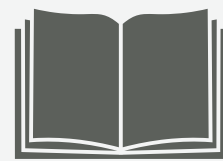
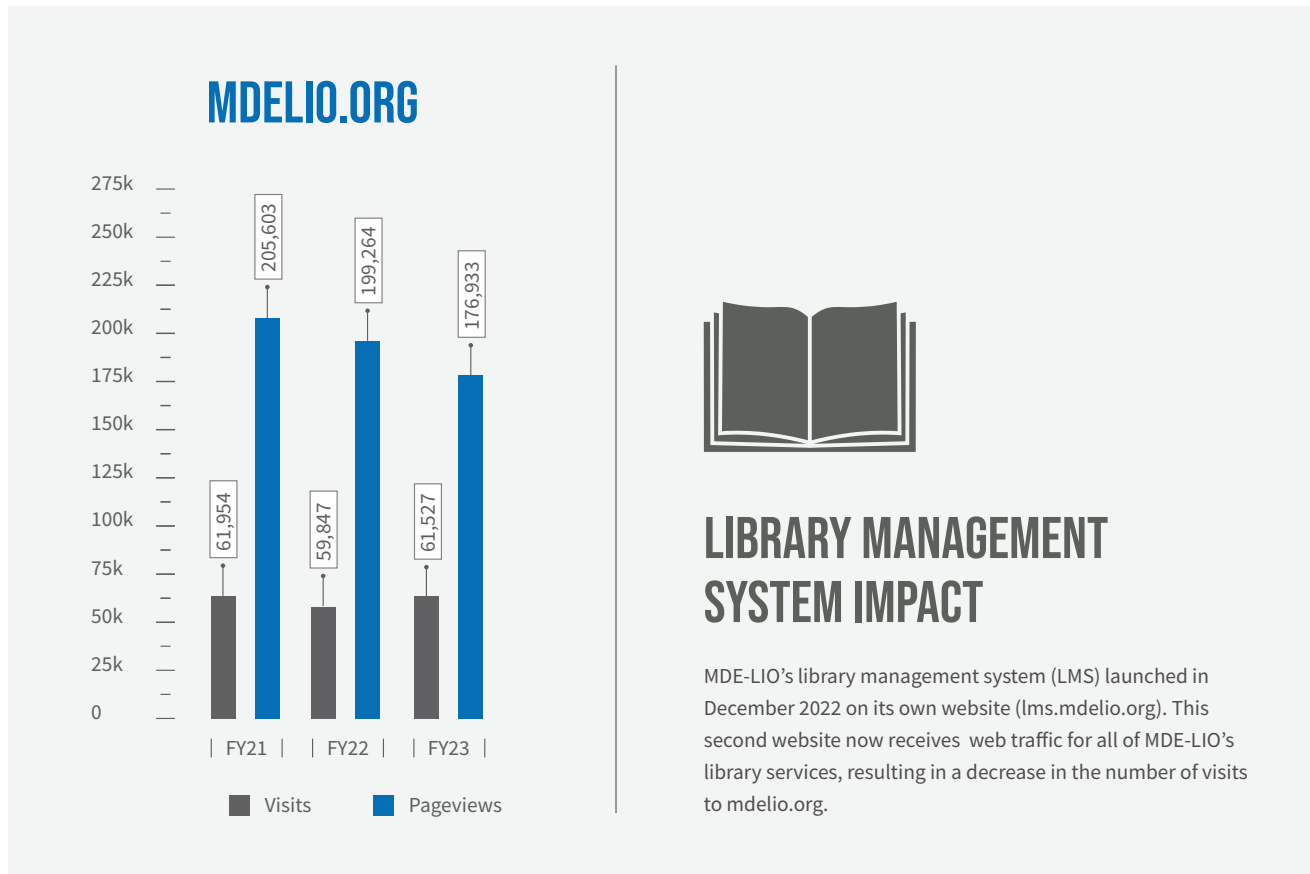
Average of 31 participants

LIVE WITH LIO PROVIDES ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

To ensure accessibility, the following features were offered:

- communication access real-time translation (CART) for every DHH LIVE with LIO webinar
- American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for every DHH LIVE with LIO webinar
- CART and ASL interpreters for BVI LIVE with LIO webinars when requested
- hosted via Zoom to integrate with screen readers and allow interpreters to be pinned
- recordings, with accurate captioning, for registrants who couldn't attend the live webinar

COMMUNICATIONS



LIBRARY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IMPACT

MDE-LIO's library management system (LMS) launched in December 2022 on its own website (lms.mdelio.org). This second website now receives web traffic for all of MDE-LIO's library services, resulting in a decrease in the number of visits to mdelio.org.

FACEBOOK

In FY23, MDE-LIO reached 1,000 Facebook followers. Our target audience is very specific and relatively small, so we focus on fostering engagement with our followers. We post about upcoming events, resources on our website, fun features, and information from other organizations. We have also begun sharing short videos featuring tips, resources, and news.

4,906

PAGE VISITS

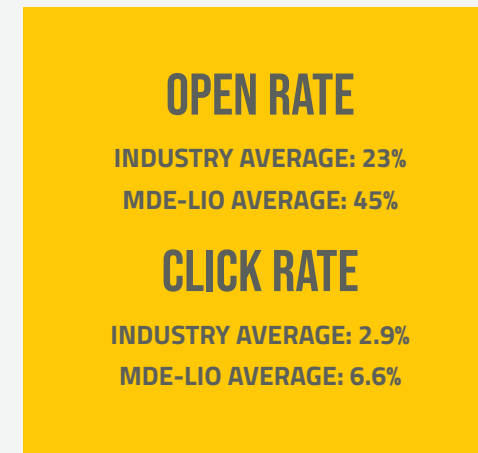
INCREASED 127% FROM LAST YEAR

275

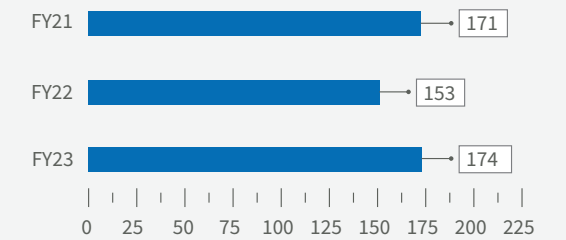
NEW PAGE LIKES

INCREASED 175% FROM LAST YEAR

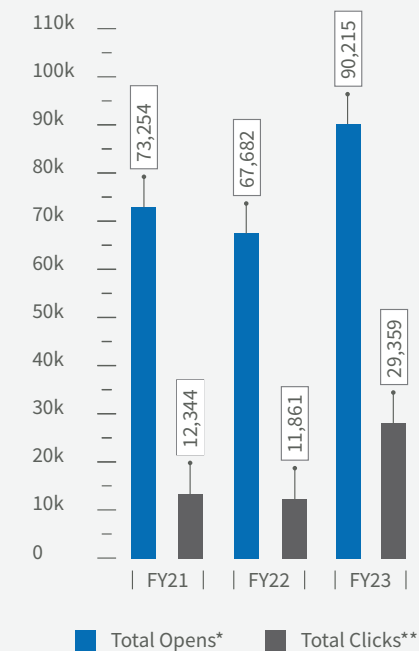
EMAILS



EMAILS SENT



TOTAL OPENS AND CLICKS



EMAIL IMPROVEMENTS

MDE-LIO has made meaningful improvements to our email design. Our goal was to increase our email reach and further capture our audience's attention. Our average email open rate and click rate for this past year offer evidence for our success. Improvements include using:

- concise subject lines
- high-quality images with descriptive alternative text
- buttons instead of links to increase engagement

Toward the end of FY23, MDE-LIO began sending what we call "event digest" emails. These emails spotlight events for which registration just opened, include save-the-date announcements, and provide a quick overview of all the upcoming events we have to offer.

*Total Opens: The number of times someone opened an email (includes multiple opens from the same subscriber).

**Total Clicks: The number of times someone clicked on a link in an email (includes multiple clicks from the same subscriber).

FEDERAL QUOTA CENSUS

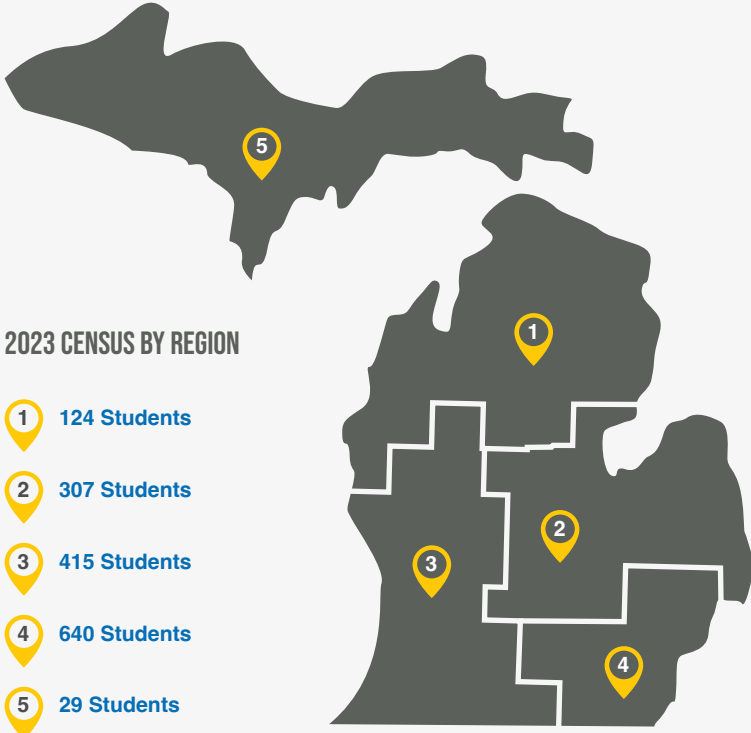
1,515 STUDENTS WERE REGISTERED ON THE 2023 APH FEDERAL QUOTA CENSUS

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) provides educational materials for students who are BVI. Each year, the Federal Quota (FQ) Program allocates funds to states that can only be used to purchase items from APH.

To receive FQ funds, an annual census is conducted for students who are BVI. Students must meet federal guidelines to be eligible. MDE-LIO collects student data from school districts between January and March and reports the final list of students to APH.

Funding is distributed to states based on the number of students that are on the census. MDE-LIO oversees FQ funds for Michigan and uses them to purchase APH books, products, and equipment for students.

WHEN A SCHOOL NO LONGER NEEDS AN ITEM, IT IS SENT BACK TO OUR LIBRARY FOR ANOTHER SCHOOL TO BORROW.



WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE MDE-LIO LOAN LIBRARY?



IN FY23, MDE-LIO LOANED APH ITEMS VALUING A TOTAL OF \$1,057,151

MDE-LIO's loan library includes more than 10,500 items. Loaning materials to schools significantly reduces costs.

School budgets are often stretched thin, making it challenging to provide necessary resources for students. Education materials designed to assist students who are BVI are particularly expensive. A single piece of assistive technology equipment could cost \$4,295.

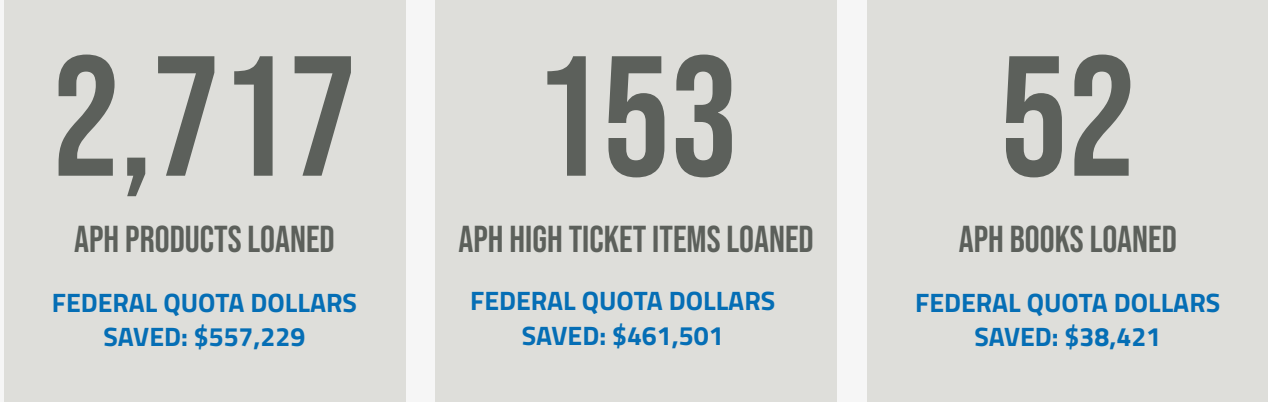
By borrowing materials such as textbooks, assistive technology, and APH products, schools can allocate their funds more efficiently, ensuring a wider range of learning resources without the burden of high expenses.

Loaning items also stretches MDE-LIO's capacity to provide materials using FQ funds. MDE-LIO oversees Michigan's FQ funds, which can be used to purchase books, products, and equipment from APH.

By loaning out items, MDE-LIO can more efficiently use FQ funds to purchase high-value items that would otherwise be a significant financial burden to schools.

In FY23, MDE-LIO's APH loans totaled a value of \$1,057,151. This allowed MDE-LIO to purchase more materials for students, which would not have been possible without our loan library.

VALUE OF APH ITEMS LOANED BY MDE-LIO, BY ITEM TYPE



WHAT ARE LIBRARY SERVICES?

Our library services are carried out by our Instructional Materials Center (IMC). The IMC processes requests for books, products, and equipment. Items can be borrowed from the library, purchased with Federal Quota funds, or produced in alternative formats.

LIBRARY SERVICES



MDE-LIO launched its new library management system in December 2022. This request system enhances efficiency by automating processes, integrating the catalog, and linking user information with shipping procedures.



815
BOOKS REQUESTED



3,728
PRODUCTS REQUESTED



327
EQUIPMENT ITEMS REQUESTED



15
BUDDING SEEDLINGS REQUESTED



436
ITEMS ORDERED FROM APH



3,224
ITEMS LOANED FROM MDE-LIO

BRAILLE PRODUCTION

WHY USE MDE-LIO BRAILLE TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES?

Transcribing books is expensive and time-consuming. It can take several months and cost up to \$60,000 to transcribe a book. There are many organizations who provide this service, but there is an added benefit to using MDE-LIO. After a book is transcribed, MDE-LIO creates a master copy that can be used to produce new copies at a fraction of the cost. When organizations use MDE-LIO transcription services, it expands our library of master copies. In turn, this lowers the cost to produce braille for students in Michigan.

BRAILLE PRODUCTION NUMBERS

MDE-LIO has been producing braille for 17 years. Our primary focus is to serve students across Michigan.

However, we produce braille for organizations across the country, and even internationally on occasion.

Our team produces high-quality braille materials using top-of-the-line equipment from Braillo, a Norwegian company.



299
BRAILLE PRODUCTION REQUESTS



1,235
VOLUMES PRODUCED



36,496
TACTILE GRAPHICS PRODUCED



124,513
BRAILLE TEXT PAGES EMBOSSED

ENLARGED-PRINT PRODUCTION

AN IMPORTANT SERVICE FOR STUDENTS IN MICHIGAN

Enlarged-print text (14- to 16-point font) is quick to produce and inexpensive compared to large-print production (18-point or higher), which is time-consuming and expensive. MDE-LIO's staff makes every effort to find large-print books for students from vendors, but sometimes the only option is to produce an enlarged-print book.



186
BOOKS REQUESTED



31,591
PAGES PRINTED



260
VOLUMES PRODUCED



124
BOOKS PRODUCED

MDE-LIO receives requests from across the state for books that may need to be produced. Our staff researches every request to find the fastest and least expensive option for schools and teachers.

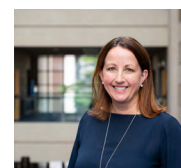
Enlarged-print books are printed on 11x14-inch paper. The font in a book is typically about 8-point. By enlarging books and printing them on larger paper, the size can be increased to about 14-point font.

An enlarged-print book typically has one to three volumes. Each volume gets its own front and back cover and is cut to size using a paper guillotine trimmer. Lastly, our staff drills and binds each volume by hand.

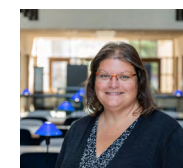
Completed books are ready to be packaged and shipped. MDE-LIO's library management system is updated by staff to indicate that a book has been shipped. Users then receive an automated email with tracking numbers.

MEET THE TEAM

BVI CONSULTANTS



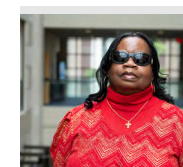
JOHANNA BRUTVAN
BVI Education Consultant



SARA CRUCHELOW
BVI Education Consultant



AMANDA ENGLISH
BVI Education Consultant



PAT LOVE-SYPHO
BVI Education Consultant



AMY SHEPHERD
BVI Parent Liaison

CAMP T



JASON BARNES
Camp T Maintenance Lead



PATTI ENSING
Camp T Office Coordinator



LEANNE MERRIN
Camp T Assistant



MATT POLZIN
Camp T Consultant

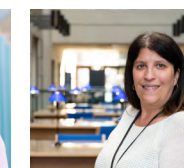


JILL TEEGARDIN
Camp T Director

IMC



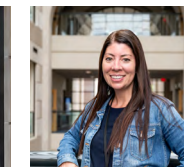
ROBERT BEATON
Braille Production Coordinator



KARRIE BOWEN
IMC Assistant

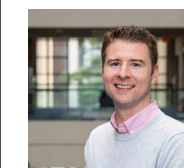


KELLY FROST
IMC Assistant

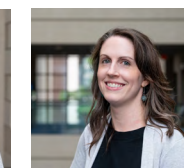


SARAH OBERLIN
APH Coordinator

COMMUNICATIONS



RORY GOODINE
Graphic Designer

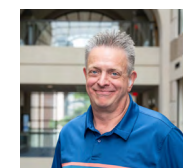


KAITLIN SHOPE
Communications Specialist

DHH CONSULTANTS



KELLY DUNHAM
DHH Education Consultant



JOHN KIRSH
DHH Education Consultant

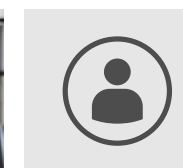


AMANDA SCHNEIDER
DHH Education Consultant

MANAGEMENT

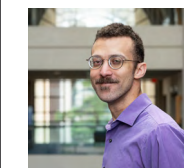


BRENDA MAHONEY
Event Manager



PAMELA MCGINISTER
Business Manager

SUPPORT



JORDAN JACKSON
Business Technician



HEATHER JEFFREY
Secretary

