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## **Top Blind Students Test Skills at Unique Competition**

Columbia, S.C. – On Thursday, February 4th, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., 30 blind and visually impaired students from across the state will meet in Columbia to test their Braille skills in an academic competition unlike any other. The students will take part in The South Carolina Regional Braille Challenge, which will be held at the South Carolina State Library Talking Books Services, located at 1430 Senate Street, in Columbia.

The Braille Challenge™ is the only national academic competition for blind students in the United States. This unique competition is a national program of the Braille Institute of America, Inc., and serves to encourage blind children of all ages to fine-tune their Braille skills, which are essential to their success in the sighted world.

During the competition, participants, ages 6 to 21, will compete in six challenging categories requiring them to transcribe and type and read Braille using a device called a Perkins Braille. Each category is designed to test their Braille skills in several areas—reading comprehension, Braille spelling, chart and graph reading, proofreading and Braille speed and accuracy.

The SC Regional Braille Challenge is the first step on the road to the national competition, which will be held in June at the Braille Institute's headquarters in Los Angeles. Students from across the nation are already completing preliminary testing in hopes of qualifying for the 60 spots available in the national competition. The top scorers in the preliminary round will advance to nationals and get the opportunity to represent their state as they compete against the top blind students from across the United States and Canada.

Of all the literacy issues in America, Braille literacy is the most underrated and overlooked, but advances in technology have not replaced the need for blind children to learn to read using this vital medium, created by Louis Braille in 1824. The Braille Challenge was created to motivate blind students to continue their study of Braille. Studies show that only 30 percent of blind adults gain full-time employment, but 90 percent of those who beat the odds are Braille readers. If you would like additional information on the event or any of the participants, please contact Marty McKenzie, SC Department of Education Consultant for students who are blind or visually impaired at 803-351-3043.

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### ***About the S.C. State Library***

The South Carolina State Library is the primary administrator of federal and state support for the state's libraries. The Library is a national model for innovation, collaboration, leadership and effectiveness. The Library's mission is to optimize South Carolina's investment in library and information services. In 1969, as the result of action by

the General Assembly, the State Library Board was redesignated as the South Carolina State Library and assumed responsibility for public library development, library service for state institutions, service for the blind and physically handicapped, and library service to state government agencies. Headquartered in Columbia, S.C., the Library is funded by the state of South Carolina, by the federal government through the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and other sources. For more information, visit [www.statelibrary.sc.gov](http://www.statelibrary.sc.gov) or call 803-734-8666.