

## **Celebrating Its Centennial Year Braille Institute Names Kateri Gullifor 2019 Teacher of the Year**

**Illinois Teacher Honored for Excellence  
While Braille Institute Cites Need for More Teachers of the Visually Impaired**

**Los Angeles — May 23, 2019** — Celebrating 100 years of positively transforming the lives of those with vision loss, Braille Institute has named Kateri Gullifor as its 2019 “Teacher of the Year” for excellence in braille instruction. The award is part of the Institute’s annual Braille Challenge competition, the only academic competition of its kind in North America for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Gullifor has been with the Huntley Community School District in Algonquin, Ill. since 2013. She works with students across all grade levels who have visual impairments.

“Kateri is very well deserving of this honor,” said Peter A. Mindnich, president, Braille Institute. “She takes the time to understand her students individually and customizes instruction to fit their specific needs. She works tirelessly, showing love and dedication to her students, who thrive under her guidance.”



Gullifor was drawn to the teaching profession from an early age. While in seventh grade she was paired with a blind preschooler as part of a student mentor program called Little Angels. She became close with the student’s family over the years, and it had a tremendous impact on her. But it was only years later during a major showcase at Illinois State University, where she received her Bachelor of Science in Education, that she recognized her true calling.

“While walking through the event, I came across the booth for special education, and a lightbulb went off. At that moment, I completely connected the dots between my long-time desire to become a teacher and the experience with my Little Angel. I said to myself, ‘Of course! This is exactly what I’m supposed to do!’”

Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) make an indelible contribution on students who are blind or have severe vision loss. They have a unique and special relationship with their students, teaching life skills in addition to academic. However, in recent years school districts have suffered from a declining number of TVIs, which has left some children without access to the instruction they need.

“There is an ongoing critical shortage of TVIs, and the need for highly qualified TVIs will continue to rise with the large number of retiring teachers,” said Dr. Ting Siu, program coordinator and assistant professor in the Program for Visual Impairments at San Francisco State University. “Our blind and visually impaired children need skilled teachers who can help these students achieve independence and equity in their education and future. TVIs instill confidence in their students and create community supports so that visually impaired students and their families can overcome limitations that a society might impose.”

“Imagine you couldn’t find someone to teach your child how to read. This is exactly what some parents are facing,” said Mindnich. “Audio readers are no substitute for learning braille, which teaches spelling, grammar, and punctuation. It is literacy just as reading is for sighted children. And for the visually impaired, it offers them a gateway to independence.”

While requirements vary from state-to-state, to become a teacher of the visually impaired, accredited teachers need to obtain an Education Specialist Credential in Visual Impairments. The program is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Education, which can cover the cost of tuition, fees and often offers a living stipend for students while they are training to be teachers for visually impaired.

“Becoming a TVI has been an amazing career,” said Gullifor. “I feel purposeful. I feel appreciated. I have job security, and my education was paid for. If people knew how rewarding my job was, everyone would want to do it.”

In 2018, 63,501 total students met the definition of blindness, while only 5,011 (7.9 percent) of them were primary braille readers according to the nonprofit American Printing House for the Blind. According to the National Federation for the Blind, in 2016 only 15.7 percent of adults reporting significant vision loss had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Over 70 percent of them are not employed full-time, with 27.7 percent living below the poverty line.

To learn more about becoming a teacher of the visually impaired, visit <https://www.brailleinstitute.org/braille-challenge/teacher-of-the-year>.

### **About Braille Challenge**

Braille Challenge, sponsored by Braille Institute, is an annual academic competition designed with two stages to motivate students who are blind or visually impaired to emphasize their study of braille while rewarding their success with fun-filled, challenging local and national events. Any blind or visually impaired school age student can participate in a regional event (held January – March) in communities around the US and Canada. Top participants are invited to the National Braille Challenge Finals Competition (hosted this year on June 21 - 22 by Braille Institute in Los Angeles). Celebrating its 18th year, #BrailleChallenge offered more than 1100 students (this year alone) a chance to compete in five categories: reading comprehension, braille spelling, chart and graph reading, proofreading, and braille speed and accuracy.

### **About Braille Institute of America**

Braille Institute of America is a nonprofit organization that has been positively transforming the lives of those with vision loss for 100 years. It serves thousands of people of all ages each year through an array of educational, social and recreational programs and services designed to help people with vision loss lead enriched and fulfilling lives. Funded by private donations, all services are completely free-of-charge. Braille Institute's Los Angeles headquarters are located at 741 N. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles. For additional information, please visit [www.braillechallenge.org](http://www.braillechallenge.org) or [www.brailleinstitute.org](http://www.brailleinstitute.org). Follow on Facebook @Brailleinstitute and on twitter @BrailleInst.

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