

# The Spectacle

**-Dare to stand out**

**January 2025**

# ****What’s included this month?****

* Invite to the Quinzhee building event with SSB and Wilderness Inquiry
* 2025 Midwest Regional Student Seminar
* SSB’s Jesse Anderson on Blind Abilities discusses the feature of accessibility
* NLS Aspiring Leaders internship program information

# Just for Fun

Did you know Minnesota has an official state muffin? In 1988, a class of third graders from South Terrace Elementary School in Carlton successfully lobbied to make the blueberry muffin the state muffin after learning about the legislative process. Why blueberry muffins? Because wild blueberries are abundant in northern Minnesota and have been a delicious part of the state's culture for generations. Check out a [**blueberry muffin recipe**](https://www.sos.state.mn.us/about-minnesota/state-symbols/state-muffin-blueberry/#:~:text=The%20blueberry%20muffin%20was%20adopted%20as%20the%20official%20muffin,state%20of%20Minnesota%20in%201988.) if you want to make a sweet treat or learn about other state symbols.

## A Note from SSB Counselors

Hello, students! We hope you all had a fantastic end to 2024, celebrating the holidays and welcoming 2025! A new year often brings a new semester, and with that comes our reminder to share updated copies of your grades. As part of our program, SSB asks students to provide their grades twice a year. This helps us ensure that the individuals we serve are making progress toward earning a diploma or credential that will support their employment goals. Collecting grades also strengthens our funding and highlights the incredible strides students like you are making toward academic and career success. Please watch for our requests and help us meet our program standards. Your achievements inspire us and pave the way for a brighter future!

Thank you, and best wishes for a successful semester ahead!

# Upcoming and Ongoing

## Quinzhee Building Event

Join SSB and Wilderness Inquiry outdoors at Fort Snelling State Park on **Saturday, February 15th,** for a one-of-a-kind winter adventure! This event will focus on team-building skills while constructing a quinzhee—a snow shelter made by shaping and hollowing out a large pile of snow.

Students will dive into the magic of winter as they craft snow shelters, combining teamwork, creativity, and plenty of snow-filled fun. Whether you’re a seasoned winter enthusiast or new to outdoor exploration, this hands-on experience will teach essential winter skills and create lasting memories.

Let’s make memories, embrace the cold, and discover the wonders of winter together!

Click here to register: [Quinzhee Building Event Registration](https://registration.wildernessinquiry.org/groups/rZDAX54L/registration-details?expires=1739685599&signature=ed85cb728a8a7fe0f21b6ece1e5b458dda3f53824e5e9b0602b13ee11348ec44&printNow=). If you have any questions, contact Shane DeSantis at shane.desantis@state.mn.us or 651-358-5205.

## SSB Peer Ambassadors

Two SSB students are leading peer-to-peer programming across the state to support students with vision loss. They’re available for one-on-one peer discussions and plan virtual and in-person group activities.

Want to learn more or connect with them? ContactAmyat [amyarias0508@gmail.com](mailto:amyarias0508@gmail.com)orMaddyat [major.madeline7@gmail.com](mailto:major.madeline7@gmail.com)**.**

Stay tuned for upcoming opportunities to connect, learn, and grow with your peers!

## 2025 Midwest Regional Student Seminar

Join the National Association of Blind Students with the National Federation of the Blind at the Midwest Student Seminar March 7th – March 9th, 2025, in Chicago. This year’s theme, “Beyond the Handshake: Networking in the Windy City,” focuses on career exploration and planning, offering practical insights and strategies to help students thrive. Together, they will dive into how to forge meaningful connections, open new doors, and envision possibilities beyond the expected.

The Regional Seminar is a weekend-long, immersive experience where students can gain exposure to insightful presentations, educational seminars, innovative services, quality training, and social and professional networking that will assist them to obtain competitive integrated employment in the career of their choice.

Contact SSB or Joshua Olukanni at [joshuaolukanni2002@gmail.com](mailto:joshuaolukanni2002@gmail.com) to learn more.

## Attention Parents! Parent Engagement Survey

We know how valuable it can be to connect with other families of students with vision loss. We’re considering piloting parent engagement opportunities for parents of children ages 14-22 who are blind, have low vision, or are DeafBlind and would love your input. This initiative aims to provide a space for parents to connect, share experiences, and learn best practices for supporting their children’s journey toward success.

Please take a moment to complete this brief survey: [Survey Link](https://forms.office.com/g/vM5zyhc96J). Your feedback is vital in shaping initiatives that best serve our community. Responses are anonymous.

## SSB Communication Center

The Communication Center is here to put your books into accessible formats that work for you. Custom audio, e-text, DAISY markup, and Braille – we can do it! The Communication Center is Minnesota’s Accessible Reading Source – we’re here for you. Email us at [ssb.audioservices@state.mn.us](mailto:ssb.audioservices@state.mn.us)

## PACER

PACER Center “enhances the quality of life and expands opportunities for children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities and their families so each person can reach his or her highest potential. PACER operates on the principles of parents helping parents, supporting families, promoting a safe environment for all children, and working in collaboration with others.” For upcoming webinars and workshops, visit [PACER's workshops website.](https://www.pacer.org/workshops/)

## ****Disability Hub MN****

“Disability Hub MN is a free statewide resource network that helps you solve problems, navigate the system, and plan for your future. We can help you create your best life, your way.” This website has a variety of resources on topics such as disability benefits through the [DB101 website](https://mn.db101.org/), information on housing resources through their [HB101 website](https://mn.hb101.org/), and a plethora of employment and transition resources for individuals with disabilities. Visit the [Disability Hub website](https://disabilityhubmn.org/) to learn more. They have a great chat feature and a call-in number for anyone who has questions or is seeking specific resources.

[Youth in Transition Toolkit](https://disabilityhubmn.org/for-professionals/youth-in-transition/) – “This toolkit will introduce you to Minnesota's youth in transition framework. Explore tools and resources you can use with the youth you support to plan for their best lives.”

## APH

APH CareerConnect is “an employment information resource offered by the American Printing House for the Blind for job seekers who are blind or visually impaired. CareerConnect provides employment information, career exploration tools, and job-seeking guidance for individuals with vision loss and the professionals who work with them.” Visit their website at [aphcareerconnect.com](https://aphcareerconnect.org/) to learn more. Check out their new [*Getting Started Guides*](https://aphconnectcenter.org/familyconnect/getting-started-guides/)*,* featuring birth to 3rd grade and 4th to 12th grade guides for families. Archived APH webinars are available on the [APH ConnectCenter YouTube page.](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUj6DcM1nN3HCfWxJIMLPeD8roKZt8xyu)

## Blind Abilities Podcasts

Check out Blind Abilities on the web at <http://www.BlindAbilities.com>. You can also download the app from the Google Play store or use the Blind Abilities Alexa skill on your Alexa device by saying, “Alexa, enable Blind Abilities.”

Here are some of the people and topics featured on Blind Abilities recently:

* Hear from three blind individuals about their stories of becoming strong self-advocates: [Advocacy in Action: Stories of Persistence and Change](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8540).
* Listen to SSB’s College 101 webinar: From High School to College: [Navigating Accommodations and Independence – Meet the College 101 Panelists, Amy, Arianna, and Maddy](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8496)
* Hear from SSB’s Jada Johnson: [Navigating Pathways to Independence: Jada Johnson on Empowering Students Through Transition Services](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8488)
* Learn about disclosing vision loss in the workplace: [Wellness Wednesday: Disclosure and Belonging in the Workplace](https://blindabilities.com/?p=8483)

If you know a student interested in sharing their achievements, Blind Abilities would love to feature their perspectives. Send a note to <mailto:info@blindabilities.com>

## College Success Program

SSB is partnering with Envision’s College Success Program to offer mentorship, meet-ups, learning, and advocacy. Students in college are paired with recent college graduates who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind. Please email [shane.desantis@state.mn.us](mailto:shane.desantis@state.mn.us) with questions or to register.

## Website Updates

Check out [SSB’s Youth Services website](https://mn.gov/deed/ssb/teens/) to learn about upcoming events, access archived newsletters, read transition flyers, watch student videos, and more!

## Tech Tidbits

Freedom Scientific has released annual updates for all its software, including Jaws, ZoomText, and Fusion. These major updates include new features and fixes and can be downloaded from its website or directly through the Check for Updates feature under each program's Help Menu.

FS Companion is a great new resource where users can quickly find information on performing specific tasks or find keyboard shortcuts for Freedom Scientific products, Microsoft Office, and Windows. It uses AI to answer questions and explain software features, such as how to do a specific task or appropriate keyboard shortcuts. People may find this resource easier to use because they can ask a question in plain English rather than needing to know exactly what a feature or command is called: <https://fscompanion.freedomscientific.com/>.

In a recent episode of the Blind Abilities podcast, Jesse Anderson, SSB's Transition AT Specialist, was interviewed about the current state of mainstream and assistive technology and what might be around the corner next year, including new technology for Braille, mobility, and AI. <https://blindabilities.com/?p=8522>.

A new NFB podcast that largely focuses on technology is Access On, hosted by Johnathan Mosen. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/access-on/id1777481188>.

Google Gemini 2.0 is now available through mobile web browsers and will soon be available through the Google Gemini app. Open the below address in your smartphone's web browser, and you **can** use the new Show Gemini feature to have a live conversation with Gemini to get real-time descriptions of what you are looking at in your phone's camera. You don't have to stop and take a separate picture each time you need a different description. <https://aistudio.google.com/live>

## NLS Aspiring Leaders Internship Program

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), supported by the National Library for the Blind Endowment, has launched a paid internship that offers individuals who are legally blind the opportunity to gain work experience and explore career options working in the areas of collections building, program delivery, and business oversight and management. Application details can be found on the [NLS Aspiring Leaders Internship Program website](https://www.loc.gov/nls/who-we-are/internship-program/). Currently, enrolled undergraduate and graduate students and those who have graduated within the past five years from an accredited two-year or four-year college or university are eligible to apply. The deadline for the summer 2025 session is March 1. All interns will work remotely.

# Building BRIDGEs

Picture of a well-built and stylish bridge.
As students navigate the world of high school and begin thinking about the future, we offer services and resources that provide a foundation for success. Each of the core areas of our **BRIDGE** framework highlights an essential component that teenagers need in order to succeed after high school:

* **B**asic Skills
* **R**ole Models
* **I**nitiative
* **D**iscovery
* **G**oal Setting
* **E**xperiences

## Scholarships

Check out a list of scholarships for the 2025-2026 academic year on our website: <https://mn.gov/deed/ssb/teens/job-life-skills.jsp>.

## Vision Loss Disclosure Resources

When should vision loss be disclosed to an employer? Every situation is different, and here are three resources that can help you decide this question:

* American Printing House: [Disclosing Blindness/ Low Vision](https://aphconnectcenter.org/careerconnect/job-seekers/conducting-a-successful-job-search/disclosing-a-visual-impairment/)
* Job Accommodation Network: [Disability Disclosure](https://askjan.org/topics/Disability-Disclosure.cfm)
* National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision: [Who Needs to Know?: When and How to Disclose Vision Impairment](https://www.blind.msstate.edu/sites/www.blind.msstate.edu/files/2022-03/Who%20Needs%20to%20Know%20-%20Disclosing%20Your%20Vision%20Impairment.pdf)

## Ideas?

We are always looking for ideas you’d like to see featured in this newsletter. Please email [shane.desantis@state.mn.us](mailto:shane.desantis@state.mn.us) with any suggestions or brainstorms. ☺