

Florida Schools and Learning Ally



Learning Ally turns
struggling Florida students
into thriving readers

State funded program gives Florida public and charter school students with specific learning disabilities the opportunity to read and shine

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—ANNE HOOPER
*Santa Rosa School District
Education Teacher*

“They read, read, read their little hearts out,” says Anne Hooper, an exceptional education teacher in the Santa Rosa School District in Florida. She’s referring to her fourth and fifth grade students with dyslexia — a specific learning disability which can affect up to one in five Florida students. “My students with dyslexia are reading books that they would normally never be able to read,” she says. “They are able to read the same books that their peers are reading, and have a discussion — that is huge.”

Ms. Hooper’s dyslexic students — and thousands of students with specific learning disabilities across the Sunshine State — are reading books, and becoming strong, confident, independent students.

HOW THEY ARE DOING IT

Through Learning Ally, a 68-year-old national nonprofit organization that supports students who read and learn differently due to dyslexia, blindness, visual impairment and other disabilities. Learning Ally’s online library of over 80,000 human-narrated audio textbooks and literature titles can be downloaded by students and teachers, and read using computers, smartphones and tablets. Many of the audiobook titles feature VOICEtext, which allows students to follow along with the audio as they read highlighted text on their devices. In addition, Learning Ally’s technology allows students to read outside of the classroom on a computer or any iOS or Android device.



ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS ALIGNED TO FLORIDA STANDARDS

The 80,000 audiobook library features Florida state-adopted textbooks, literature, and other books used in Florida classrooms each day. Learning Ally’s Teacher Ally platform also allows Florida teachers to assign books to students’ “bookshelves,” monitor their reading progress and tailor lessons to meet their needs.

Anne Hooper's 4th grade class placed 3rd in the nation in the 2015 Learning Ally Great Reading Games contest for students with specific learning disabilities. They celebrate with their Learning Ally prizes.



Learning Ally memberships in Florida are made possible by a grant through the Florida Department of Education, which allows all Florida public and charter K-12 schools to provide Learning Ally programs and services — at no cost — to students who struggle with reading due to a specific learning disability. Students with visual and certain other physical disabilities, as well as those who have a documented learning disability such as dyslexia, qualify to use Learning Ally.

Learning Ally has partnered with the Florida DOE to help struggling readers in Florida for more than 10 years, and is recognized as a proven accommodation that improves reading comprehension and learning outcomes among this student population.

Learning Ally is now available to any public or charter school at no cost to the district.

In previous years, a limited number of schools were able to access the program through state funding. As of the 2015-2016 school year, access to Learning Ally audiobooks has been expanded statewide, so every student who qualifies can get the help they need at no cost to the school.

It is estimated that more than 135,000 students in Florida have a specific learning disability. Now with Learning Ally being offered statewide, the number of students and schools enrolled in the program is growing each day — and the results are remarkable.

Students across Florida, who had long struggled to read, cannot get enough of their favorite books, and are keeping up with assigned class text at the same time. While becoming avid readers in class for the first time in their lives, students are excited and motivated to read, both at school and at home with their computers and mobile devices.

“My students are able to access the audiobooks from the free Learning Ally app and can download books quickly to read in the car, on the school bus or whenever they are on the go,” says Jan Lockman, a teacher at Pace High School. “They just pop in their ear buds and go.”



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Mary Jo Chandler's
class in Oriole Beach

The Great Reading Games
continue in 2016 with
Diary of a Wimpy Kid author
Jeff Kinney teaming up
with Learning Ally.



READING ABOVE GRADE LEVEL

In Mary Jo Chandler's class in Oriole Beach, her 4th grade students with dyslexia are reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* — which traditionally is a 5th grade book. "My students are reading the same books as everyone else, just in a different and cool way," she says. "In fact, my students are reading above their grade level with Learning Ally. It is amazing." She adds that her students chose *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* because it is above their grade level.

For students with blindness and visual impairment, the Learning Ally program is also changing lives both in and out of the classroom. "Learning Ally opens up a huge range of titles for my students. My students, who typically read via braille, would not be as successful without access to audiobooks through Learning Ally," says Ms. Lockman.

Florida is a shining example of what great teachers, great parents, and the right technology can do to enhance and enrich the lives of students who struggle with reading, and help them reach their goals and achieve their dreams. As the Learning Ally program continues to grow in the Sunshine State, so will the confidence, achievements and success of their amazing students.

Learning Ally is proud to continue its mission to help each student in Florida who qualifies for services, get the help they need to shine.

To enroll, schools should contact Learning Ally state project manager Kimberlie Hiler at kHiler@LearningAlly.org, or 904-476-4009



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For more information, visit the Learning Ally Florida Project landing page at: LearningAlly.org/Florida