



## District-Wide Investments in Audiobooks and Professional Learning Lead to Big Results

### HOMEWOOD CITY SCHOOLS • BIRMINGHAM, AL

Homewood City Schools, located right outside Birmingham, AL, is a district of 4,300 students spread across three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Already one of the highest performing districts in the state, the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution was introduced to address the needs of a specific student population and has since blossomed into an important learning support for many students across the district, helping them to read more than 213,000 pages over one school year!

#### NUMBER OF STUDENTS

**4,300**

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

**65.2%** White

**16.4%** Black

**11.1%** Hispanic/Latino

**5.1%** Multi/Other

**2.2%** Asian/Pacific Islander

**14.6%** Free and Reduced Lunch

**8.0%** English Language Learners



## The Challenge

Homewood City Schools' pursuit of continued district success surfaced a key population of students in need of additional in-school support. With a significant number of students diagnosed with dyslexia, a local parent advocacy group had been helping to fund tools to support this specific population.

District administrators eventually realized they needed to implement a school-based, district-wide tool that would ensure quality support of these students as well as other struggling readers across all grades. While impressed with the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution's long record of proven results, Homewood City Schools' Director of Instruction, Cristy York, was sold on the solution's ease of use and how quickly the students engaged with it.

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**— CRISTY YORK,  
DIRECTOR OF  
INSTRUCTION,  
HOMWOOD CITY  
SCHOOLS**



## Implementation

While other dyslexia and audiobook-focused tools had been tested in the district before, Homewood City Schools' Director of Instruction, Cristy York, said of the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution: "it was so much more user-friendly, more human voice, more engaging for the kids."

Parents, students, and school administrators agreed that the solution's flexibility and ease of use made it an important addition to their existing learning accommodations and resources. Any early concerns about the availability of specific key texts—class novels and the like—were quickly resolved by Learning Ally's expansive, ever-growing library of over 80,000 titles and by working with the Learning Ally team to add their preferred resources to the library. It didn't take long for teachers to fully embrace the tool, even requesting additional professional learning opportunities around using the solution.

When district administrators saw the impact the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution had on their students with only a few teachers utilizing it, they decided to prioritize broader usage in their strategic goals. York's office partnered with the Assistant Principal of Instruction at each school in the district to leverage professional learning from Learning Ally that enabled teachers to more effectively use the solution in their classrooms. Educators even learned how to engage with parents and encourage usage outside of school.

"We tried to make it really accessible," York said of her school communities. "I do a district-wide push at the beginning of the year, and then I'll do it again at the beginning of the second semester. 'Remember, these are the resources we have, these are the things parents and students understand.' We just try to keep it in front of them and kind of over-communicate it and make it easy."

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## Outcome

Its immediate impact, paired with a multi-year investment in professional learning, has given the entire Homewood City Schools community, from teachers to parents to students, the confidence to invest in the use of audiobooks generally and with the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution specifically, making it an essential component of their literacy education.

Many Homewood City Schools saw an increase in literacy test scores in the second year of use, especially among students with dyslexia and other reading challenges. Homewood's administrative strategy to communicate and collaborate with teachers and parents about the tool has garnered huge results for this small school district. After one year with 300 students actively reading with the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution, students read over 213,000 pages, even surpassing some major metropolitan areas.

"We have become more proactive in assigning [the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution] to students as opposed to waiting for a request from a parent or teacher," York says. "Saying, here are the kids who need an account. One of our big focuses this year is that we've really tried to teach parents how to use it with students, rather than just saying, we've offered it and check the box."

The positive reactions and reviews have not come from just teachers; students have had a very positive response, too. "It's encouraged students who are more reluctant to read at home to do that more often," York said. "It's kind of brought an awareness to the benefits of having the audiobooks. I've seen classrooms utilize it more, now knowing it's a valuable resource, incorporating it into their regular instruction too."

"The teachers overall feel like it's a really good thing to be able to offer parents and students who are struggling and for students to be able to use year-round from home," York continued. "Teachers at the secondary level have seen that it's been helpful for kids who know the content but are struggling with the reading part of it. It's offered kids a chance to show what they know without reading being a barrier to that."

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