



Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader with the Help of the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution™

EAST ORANGE SCHOOL DISTRICT • EAST ORANGE, NJ

The East Orange School District in East Orange, NJ is an urban, traditionally underperforming school district located just miles outside of New York City. It is one of 31 “SDA Districts,” or districts where the state covers costs for all school building and renovation projects under the supervision of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority.

When suddenly forced to utilize a distance learning model due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they turned the unprecedented challenge into an **opportunity to implement a district-wide independent reading initiative** for all students across all grades. Although there was some hesitation with the implementation of a new program, staff are now totally on board and **seeing impressive increases in engagement, reading activity and assessment results.**

NUMBER OF STUDENTS

10,094

DEMOGRAPHICS

87.3% Black

10.8% Hispanic/Latino

> 0.1% White

> 0.1% Asian

> 0.1% Multi/Other



The Challenge

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the East Orange School District into a distance learning model in 2020, they were aware they needed to do something to help their struggling readers. **Based on STAR Reading Winter Screening results, 78% of students in grades 3-8 were below grade level.**

Distance learning introduced a completely new set of challenges for the district, most notably, how would they give their students access to the materials they needed to read? There were other obvious concerns, including questions about how they would support students who needed individualized attention and support to keep pace, calming students' nerves, and assuring them that, although the future was uncertain, continuing to focus on their education was important.

After one full year of implementing the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution, the district has seen **a 400% increase in student reading.**

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Implementation

Yukima Vannoy, Supervisor of Secondary ELA at East Orange School District, first learned about the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution through one of her reading coaches. As schools across the nation began shutting down in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Learning Ally, like many other education solutions providers, was offering free support in the form of access to its audiobook library. Ms. Vannoy seized the opportunity to create a new program that would get—and keep—all of her students reading.

Before students had even been introduced to the solution, she took advantage of the availability of tutorials and training to be better prepared to “sell” the idea to the administration. “We’ve had other reading programs before,” says Vannoy, who added that some in the district were skeptical at first because of the number of new digital platforms being introduced to teachers and the administration simultaneously during the COVID-19 school closings.

The Learning Ally Audiobook Solution was first rolled out to students in grades 6-12. Students and teachers alike enjoyed how simple it was to read with the solution, and as a result, usage was high. By the following September, the district was ready to introduce the program to all grades.

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As simple as it is, it's important...and the students love it!

**— YUKIMA VANNOY,
SUPERVISOR OF
SECONDARY ELA, EOSD**

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TODAY A READER, TOMORROW A LEADER

Beginning in September 2020, the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution was made available to students in all grades across the district. Ms. Vannoy, knowing the importance of reading, demanded the program require all students to read at least 20 minutes every day, saying, "We know the benefits of reading. You become a better reader by reading. You become a better writer by reading. You become a better mathematician by reading..."

To make this happen, the district began promoting their **Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader** program. Twice a year, they award the top three readers from each school with a backpack filled with swag, age-appropriate books, and an Amazon Fire Tablet that is theirs to keep. Teachers receive prizes and acknowledgment, too, allowing everyone to get in on the fun and excitement. The district backs this up with an extensive awareness program, and student has been off the charts ever since.

Anita Champagne, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Curriculum Services at East Orange School District, says "The program has brought fun back into reading through incentives that have been provided." She continues, "**Reading frequency has increased across the District.** We are proud to be a Learning Ally School District."

The district also enjoyed participating in Learning Ally's Great Reading Games, a 7-week event designed to help educators engage students and increase their reading stamina. In 2022, competing against schools of a similar size and makeup across the country, East Orange School District had ten schools finish in the top 10, including six schools in the top 3. **Two of their middle schools and the high school even took first place in the nationwide contest.** Altogether, the students in the district read nearly 1.4 million pages during the competition.

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— YUKIMA VANNOY,
SUPERVISOR OF
SECONDARY ELA,
EOSD

The program has brought fun back into reading through incentives that have been provided. Reading frequency has increased across the District without students even knowing they are learning.

— ANITA CHAMPAGNE,
ASSIST.
SUPERINTENDENT
FOR INSTRUCTION
& CURRICULUM
SERVICES, EOSD

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Outcome

By the time students had returned to in-person instruction, students across the district had begun to embrace reading with the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution and the Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader program. Part of it is the ease of use. They have access to all of their books on their phone or tablet, so there is no need to lug them around. Ms. Vannoy reported students having told her, "I like Learning Ally because I don't have to carry around all these books."

She says that students have also expressed an interest in choosing their own books. "I had a couple of students say to me, 'at first, I didn't like reading, but now that I can pick what I read, I like reading.'"

Reading data from the school seems to bear this out. At the end of 2021, the district had 4,037 students with books on their digital bookshelves; By March 2022, that number had increased by 62%, while the number of books added by students (as opposed to their teachers) had increased by 174%. During this period, **the percent of students Reading with Frequency (at least 20 minutes a day for at least 33 days) nearly doubled.**

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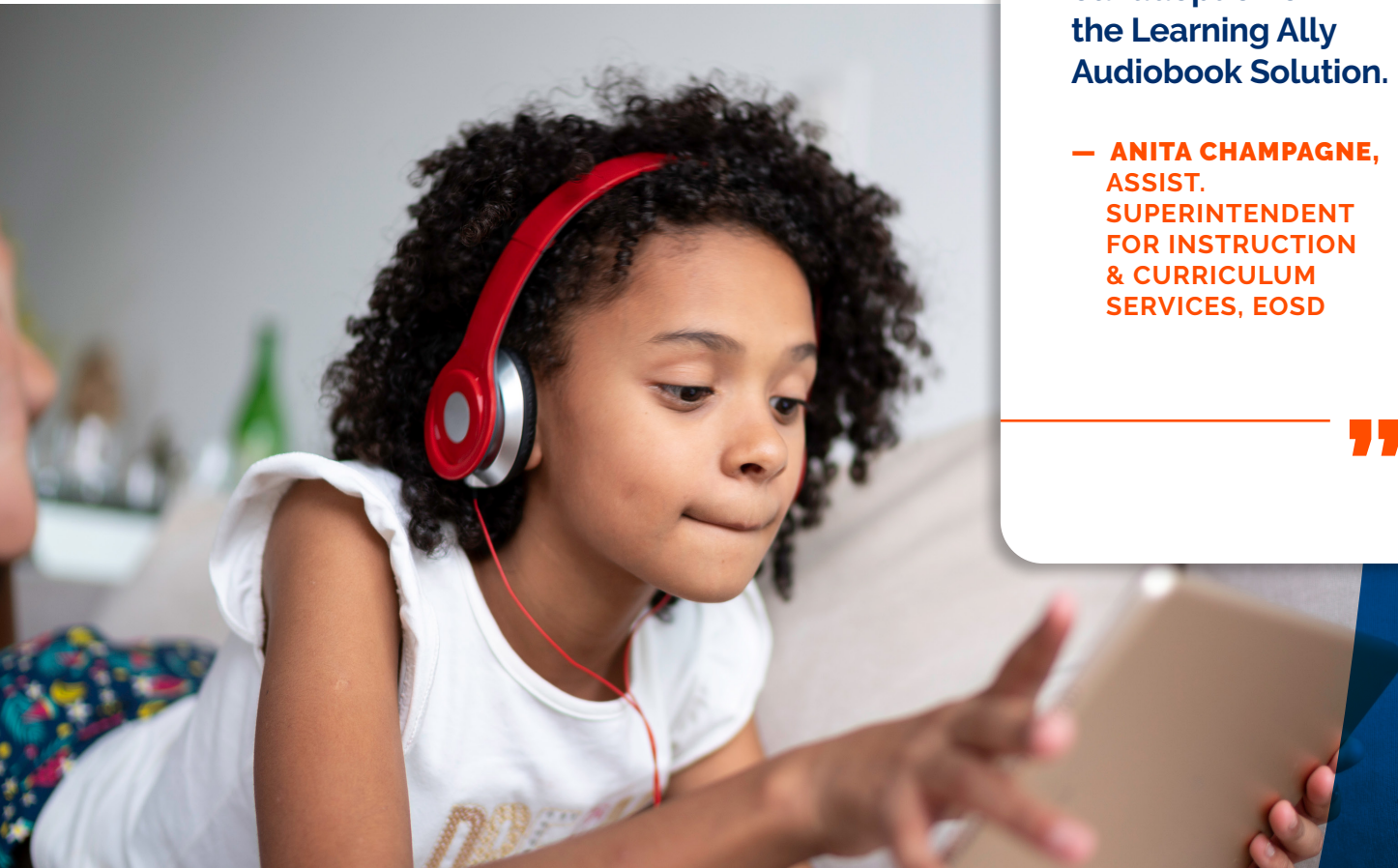
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— **YUKIMA VANNOY,**
SUPERVISOR OF
SECONDARY ELA,
EOSD

Reading has become contagious in the East Orange School District since our adoption of the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution.

— **ANITA CHAMPAGNE,**
ASSIST.
SUPERINTENDENT
FOR INSTRUCTION
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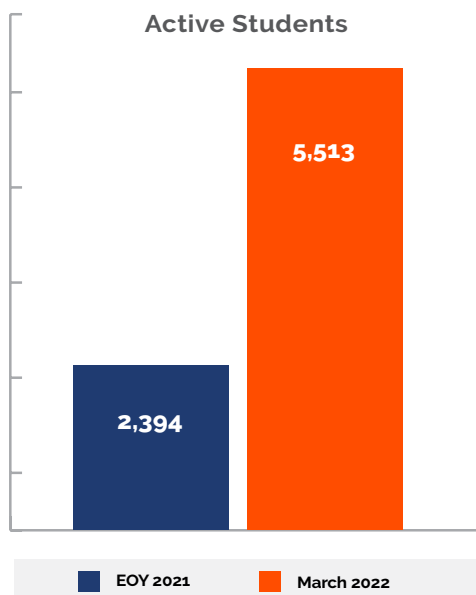
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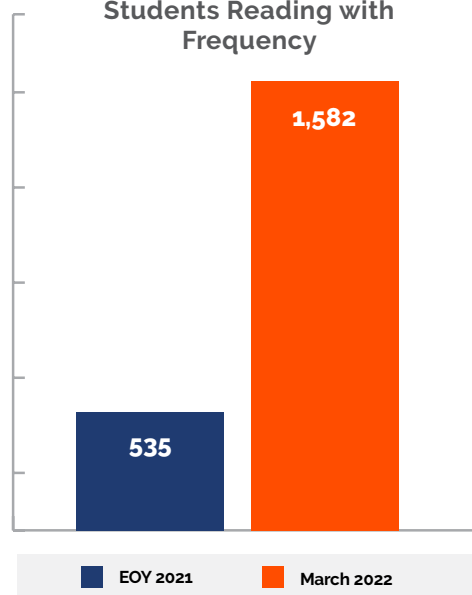
East Orange School District Student Usage of the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution

COMPARISON: EOY 2021 – MARCH 2022

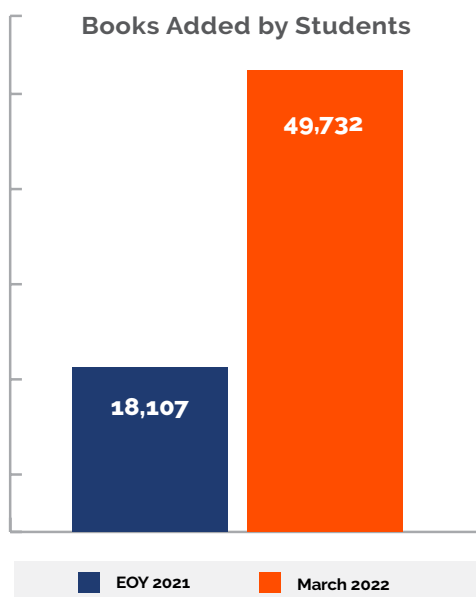
Active Students



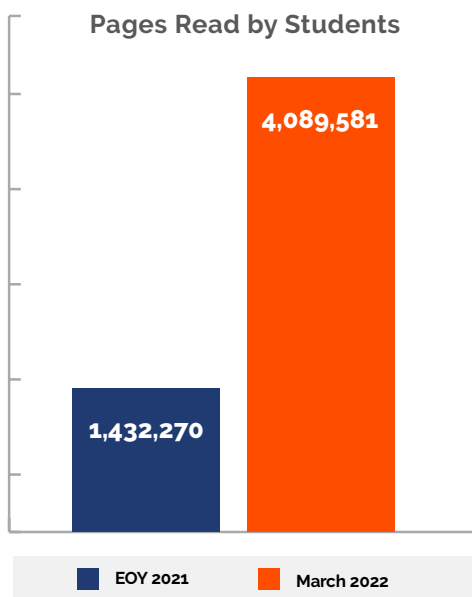
Students Reading with Frequency



Books Added by Students



Pages Read by Students



Yukima Vannoy is not surprised by the amount of reading her students are doing or that the increase of reading frequency is having an effect on her students' performance on ELA assessments, saying, "We just know you become a better reader by reading more."

A comparison of East Orange School District students, grades 3-8, NJ Student Learning Standards Benchmark Results from 2020-21 and 2021-22 showed a significant decrease in the percentage of students showing "low" growth and an increase in those showing "typical" and "high" growth.

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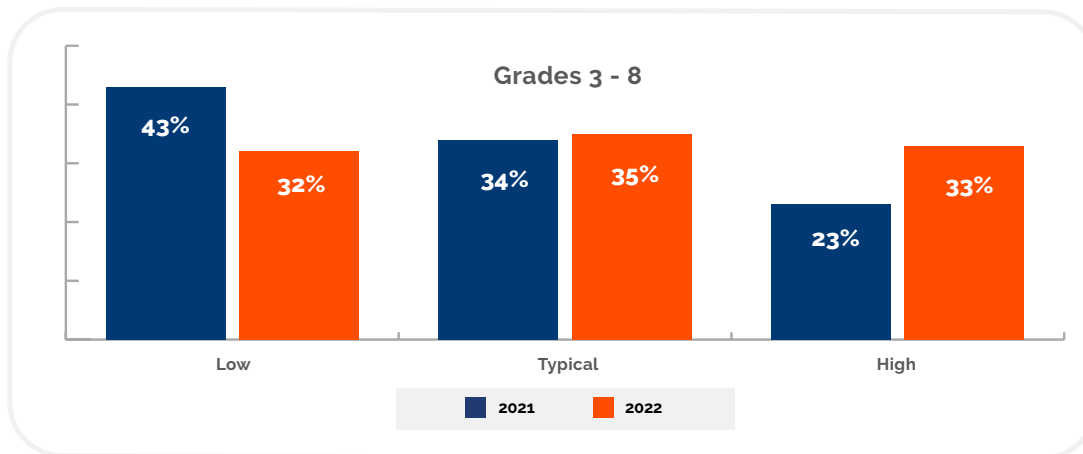
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East Orange School District LinkIt! Benchmark Results Percentage of Students in Each Growth Category

COMPARISON: 2020-2021 – 2021 - 2022



TESTIMONIALS

" I absolutely love the program! "



YUKIMA VANNOY
Supervisor of
Secondary ELA
East Orange
School District



ANITA CHAMPAGNE
Assistant Superintendent
for Instruction and
Curriculum Services
East Orange School
District

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