

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

EAST ORANGE SCHOOL DISTRICT • EAST ORANGE, NJ

East Orange School District in Essex County, NJ, a diverse school district outside of New York City, implemented a district-wide independent reading initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic which has yielded impressive increases in engagement and reading activity.

The Challenge

Even before the pandemic, East Orange School District was aware they needed to do something to help their struggling readers. Seventy-eight percent of their grade 3-8 students read below grade level (STAR Reading Winter Screening results).

And when the school buildings closed, distance learning introduced a completely new set of challenges for the district. How would they give their students access to the materials they needed to read?

Implementation

Yukima Hughes, Supervisor of Secondary ELA at East Orange School District, moved decisively to implement a solution. She first learned about the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution® from one of her reading coaches. As schools across the nation began shutting down in-person instruction, Learning Ally offered free access to its audiobook library. Hughes seized the opportunity to create a new program that would get—and keep—all of her students reading.

The Learning Ally Audiobook Solution was first rolled out to students in grades 6-12. Students and teachers 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.

Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader

Beginning in September 2021, Learning Ally audiobooks were made available to students in all grades across the district and students were required to read 20-minutes every day. To engage students and teachers in the reading program, *Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader*, they promoted it with prizes and acknowledgements.

The district also participated in Learning Ally's Great Reading Games, an eight-week national reading event. In 2022, East Orange School District had two of their middle schools and the high school take first place in the contest. Altogether, the students in the district read nearly 1.4 million pages during the competition.



NUMBER OF STUDENTS

9,337

DEMOGRAPHICS

79.7% Black

16.5% Hispanic/Latino

2.0% White

0.2% Asian



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.'

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



Results

Today, students embrace reading with Learning Ally audiobooks. Part of it is the ease of use, since they can access all their books on their phone or laptop.

Hughes says that students also enjoy 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.'"

Data confirms reading engagement and volume has increased. The number of students reading with frequency, defined as those reading 20+ minutes per day for at least 33 days within a school year, increased 279%, from 859 in May 2021 to 3,252 in May 2024. And the number of pages read in the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution increased ten-fold, from .10M in October 2020 to 1.06M in October 2024.

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

Comparing grade 3-8 students' NJ Student Learning Standards Benchmark Results from 2020-21 and 2024-25 shows a significant decrease in the percentage of students showing "low" growth and an increase in those showing "typical" and "high" growth..

