

Learning Ally, a national nonprofit, wants to change the way education works for the 30 million students who struggle to read in America's schools. The Princeton, NJ education solutions organization is leading the charge to champion a mission of "reading for all."

Learning Ally develops solutions and professional services to support new and struggling readers in general and special education, and the educators and now parents who teach them. Its flagship multi-award-winning product is the [Learning Ally Audiobook Solution](#). In 2018, Andrew Friedman the CEO of Learning Ally was named a Global EdTech Leader honoree by EdTech Digest. That same year, the organization received an honorary Library of Congress Literacy Award for its outstanding achievements and research-based practices to improve literacy worldwide.

Going forward, the organization's initiatives focus on equipping educators with solutions that can support their efforts for continuity of reading instruction in remote, distance and hybrid learning environments, fundamental reading skill practice for students with reading deficits, and fostering a better understanding of how students learn to read to improve their success academically, socially, and emotionally.

Learning Loss and the State of Education

Literacy remains a big challenge for U.S. schools. Too many students are at-risk of failing because of reading deficits that go undetected and an inconsistent understanding of how a student learns to read. Poor reading skills are a major factor in high school drop-out rates. During this Pandemic, learning loss has been exacerbated pushing already at-risk students into precarious circumstances, falling farther behind the required curriculum and their peers.

Learning Ally is helping educators pull struggling readers out of this cycle by encouraging a stronger emphasis on early literacy. Our partnership with Square Panda, a supplemental early learning curriculum, focused on helping students with phonemic-based decoding, combined with the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution builds comprehension by helping students gain background knowledge, vocabulary, and sight knowledge.

Couple these products with numerous professional development opportunities throughout the year for teachers and administrators, Learning Ally is helping educators make a big difference in improving student's ability to read at any age. This approach is geared to help the most vulnerable student populations - typically students of color, low socio-economic status, English Language learners and to accommodate and accelerate learning for students with disabilities and reading deficits.

Technology and the Evolution of Accessible Audiobooks

Skilled voice professionals, subject experts, and authors narrate the content in our human-read audiobooks. Many narrators are volunteers passionate about helping students learn. As students hear and see text spoken with authenticity, they improve skills in prosody, deepen their comprehension, and enlarge their vocabulary.

The audiobook experience can be adapted to work effectively in any learning environment -- class, distance, or hybrid, and adapted to accommodate the individual needs of a child or teen.

In the mobile app, features like highlighted text, bookmarking, and notes facilitate homework assignments on time and in one place. Access to audiobooks that students need to read for class and want to read for enjoyment, enables more students with reading deficits to be part of classroom discussions, work to their full potential and build up their learning confidence.

Equitable Access

One in five students in America's classrooms have a reading deficit. For struggling readers, decoding words is often too slow to process what they are reading with automaticity. When a word or passage gets too tough in a printed book, many students give up. This learning obstacle can be avoided using Learning Ally's human-read audiobooks to access the curriculum.

Schools employing our effective reading accommodation (built for learning) and access to a comprehensive digital library, enables more learners to receive required curriculum on their intellectual level. This access is a much better solution than just providing leveled books.

Reading a high quality audiobook by a passionate narrator makes reading an informative and pleasurable experience. As students receive direct instruction, teachers open new opportunities for students to read books that match their personal interests. They are more engaged and read independently. This is imperative for students in remote learning settings.

Distance and Hybrid Learning

The Pandemic has unearthed deep inequities in our education system and has been a turning point for students in disadvantaged populations. A staggering 65% of students read below proficient levels and that number grows into the 80% range for at-risk students. Listening to a great audiobook can be done anywhere and getting more kids reading helps ALL students become better learners.

Learning Ally's digital library includes anytime, anywhere access to textbooks and popular titles. This is an ideal solution to help struggling readers get equitable access to class material, be able to work independently and stay in study and learning mode. It also helps teachers build more capacity for individualized learning.

Using Learning Ally's reading app on a smartphone, tablet or computer, students can self-select books and build a digital bookshelf. Additionally, teachers, parents and students can tap into

Learning Ally's [Distance Learning Resource Site](#), a collection of literacy-based activities, professional learning webinars, and content to assist parents schooling children from home.

To facilitate engagement and keep students reading, educators can also enroll students in educational reading challenges throughout the year to stimulate good reading habits and encourage reading frequency. A highlight of these activities is Learning Ally's annual Great Reading Games where renowned authors, like Kwame Alexander and Dan Gutman, host a live streaming event to talk with students about the importance of reading.

Early Literacy

Research tells us that we must catch children before they fail and early literacy has shown to dramatically increase academic achievement, reduce grade retention, and improve higher graduation rates. By age three, there could be a significant word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families. About 34% of children who enter kindergarten lack basic language skills necessary to learn how to read. A poor reader at the end of third grade has a 90% chance of being a poor reader at the end of fourth grade.

Our partnership with [Square Panda](#), gives us the ability to provide early childhood educators with a multisensory phonics based adaptive literacy system to develop core fundamental skills in emergent readers. The Square Panda system, leveraging learning games grounded in neurological research, helps to build essential reading skills in children Pre-K -2nd grade, by engaging multiple senses - sight, touch, and sound. When you combine Square Panda, which is heavily focused on decoding with the Learning Ally Audiobook Solution that builds strong comprehension, we can build a strong foundation for reading. This combination solution can be a game changer to help educators meet the needs of students with a wide range of reading readiness and sets students up to thrive academically in all education settings.

Professional Learning for Teachers

Our professional learning approach is evidence-based informed by studies with educators and incorporates application with real-life scenarios. We employ an "Engaged Learning Model" to best serve the needs of educators and the students they support, recognizing goals for the immediate, as well as longer term positive student outcomes.

All professional learning courses are designed to give educators the opportunity to explore three basic tenets - learn, apply, and reflect. This methodology allows us to tailor an education plan to the educator's learning needs, and help them immediately apply this new learning to get results.

Learning Ally also hosts two of the nation's leading virtual conferences for educators and parents, "Spotlight on Dyslexia, and Spotlight on Early Literacy." The one-day events focus on

understanding the science of reading, and the importance of learning engagement. Experts share knowledge and practical advice. In 2020, we had more than 9,000 educators participate.

Partnerships

Studies suggest that incorporating the current science of reading into class instruction will dramatically reduce the number of children who are on track to become functionally illiterate adults. A contributing factor to addressing this issue is teacher training. Working directly with schools and partners, including Square Panda, neuroscientists, like Dr. MaryAnn Wolf and Dr. Anita Archer, and researchers at UCSF and MIT, Learning Ally shares information and effective applications in all of our professional development outreach. The Spotlight Learning Series brings together resources, literacy experts, and thought leaders to provide an enriching learning experience for educators, plus accreditation.

What's Next for Learning Ally?

You cannot underestimate the power of reading to further lifelong success. It is our continued goal to provide equitable access to help schools reduce the achievement gap and support educators, students, and families regardless of race, background or learning difference.

In 2020, 18,500 schools subscribed to Learning Ally. We worked with over 200,000 educators and 1.5M students in grades K-12 nationwide. We also work with students who are blind and visually impaired in K-12 and higher education.

Through an investment in ongoing research with partners like UCSF and MIT and strategic partnerships with organizations and schools in early literacy and professional learning, Learning Ally is meeting the needs of new and struggling readers and championing the mission of “reading for all.”