



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | Catherine Truitt, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Directors, Exceptional Children Programs
Exceptional Children Coordinators, Charter Schools

FROM: Sherry H. Thomas *SA7*

DATE: April 7, 2021

GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERSHIP IN NC DPI LEARNING ALLY STATE CONTRACT

A limited number of Learning Ally memberships are available for qualified students in North Carolina public schools through the NC Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) state contract. The state contract is provided to fulfill LEA and charter schools' obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and to meet the requirements of "providing instructional materials to blind persons or other persons with print disabilities, in a timely manner" (NC 1501-14.3a).

The Learning Ally contract provided by the NC Department of Public Instruction is limited to students for whom other free, low-cost alternatives to audiobooks, as determined by the IEP or 504 team, are unable to meet the identified needs of the student. [Free and low-cost audiobooks and digital text-to-speech books should always be considered prior to accessing the NCDPI Learning Ally Department of Public Instruction state contract.](#) Sources for free and low-cost audiobooks and digital text-to-speech books can be found on the next page.

To qualify for a Learning Ally membership, under the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction state contract, a student **must** have a [print disability](#)¹ that severely inhibits or prevents the student from gaining information from print material in the standard way and requires the student to utilize alternative methods to access that information.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 team is responsible for determining if a student requires audiobooks to have access to, participate in, and progress in the general education curriculum. This need must be documented within the student's IEP or 504 plan.

Having an IEP or 504 plan does not automatically qualify a student for Learning Ally. The student must be identified as having a learning disability, be blind or visually impaired or have a physical impairment that prohibits the use of standard print.

Each LEA is responsible for identifying educational professional(s) who will have the authority to certify students as having a print disability and enroll the student in Learning Ally. When the

¹ Print Disabilities include visual impairments, learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, or physical disabilities that impede the ability to manipulate a book in some way.

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

qualified professional certifies the student for Learning Ally, the professional is indicating they have reviewed the IEP or 504 plan documenting the student meets the eligibility criteria for a print disability and requires accessible instructional materials in the form of audiobooks.

Note that students who are enrolled in Learning Ally utilize one of the limited available seats in the NC state contract for a full year. Non-active students prevent others from participating in this program.

For information on enrollment in Learning Ally, see the [Learning Ally/North Carolina funded membership flyer](#).

Sources for free audiobooks (this list is not exhaustive)

Bookshare https://www.bookshare.org/	Bookshare is free to US students with a documented print disability	Books are available in audio, braille, large font, and more.
NC Kids Digital Library https://nckids.overdrive.com	Free with library card	
Accessible Book Collection http://www.accessiblebookcollection.org/Default.htm	Low cost	Provides books for young children with pictures, and books in switch accessible formats.
Tar Heel Reader https://tarheelreader.org/	Free	Collection of free, easy-to-read, accessible books. Each book can be speech enabled and accessed using multiple interfaces, including touch screens, IntelliKeys with custom overlays, and 1 to 3 switches

The decision tree on the following page describes the decision process for IEP and 504 teams to determine eligibility for enrollment in Learning Ally under the NCDPI funded Learning Ally contract. This sequence of decision points should be utilized by IEP and 504 teams prior to utilizing the NCDPI Learning Ally contract.

