VHS Learning

The Virtual High School uses ReadSpeaker to make text-heavy course material accessible to students with IEPS

 "Ensuring that our courses are both multimedia-rich and suitable for all learners is something that is central to our mission. ReadSpeaker was a natural fit because it gives all of our students an audio option. Due to improvements in the technology, it was easy to add the service to each class, taking just 15 seconds"

Storie Walsh, VP Technology.
Virtual High SchooL

About Virtual High School

- **Number of Employees:** 1064

- **Year Founded:** 1949

- **Industry:** Higher Education

- **Website:** Visit Website

VHS Learning (VHS, Inc.) is a nonprofit organization providing supplemental online classes to high schools and students. It was developed as part of a technology grant from the Department of Education. Developed to partner directly with schools and districts to create programs VHS works directly with parents and students that want to enroll in classes. . VHS Learning prepares students for college, careers, and life through supportive, instructor-led online and blended classroom experiences.

Challenges	How TTS Helped
Virtual High School is an entirely online school tasked with driving learning outcomes in an entirely online setting. **The dense nature of classes like biotechnology or environmental science posed a challenge: These subjects had significant amounts of text-heavy course material that was posing accessibility challenges to students with IEPs.**	The Virtual High School joined a pilot program to enable TTS technology in 6 courses chosen due to the density of material and the number of students requiring accommodations enrolled in each class. **A Quick Success** VHS was able to quickly embed the ReadSpeaker player into their course offerings "it was easy to add the service to each class, taking just 15 seconds". With a simple BrightSpace integration it was easy to select courses and immediately speech enable content and benefit from an entire suite of learning tools. **Accessibility & Inclusion** Students with documented learning challenges such as IEPs were able to immediately and intuitively adopt tools like dyslexic font, change and enlarge text, download course content to mp3 and use highlighting tools in concert with audio narration to sharpen focus and engagement **Bimodal Learning** Students reported that they preferred the dual modality of consuming audio content while reading along themselves helping them to better recall key lessons from the material.

Accessible Design Is Just Good Design

During the pilot Virtual High School stumbled on some unexpected results: All students benefited from the TTS technology and many students without documented challenges were using the service as a way to supplement their learning.

"An awesome opportunity to leverage existing assets in new ways"

VHS didn't provide any training or even make an announcement based on the new service. Students and teachers noticed it on their own and after only one semester many students use it regularly. This phenomenon dubbed "the curb cut effect" is when disability-friendly features find appreciation and adoption by a larger group than those they were specifically designed for. Students mentioned that reading along with the text as it was narrated to them allowed them to better retain material.