



# TX Sense Abilities

Spring 2014  
FAMILY WISDOM

## **A Parent Talks About “Learning Portability” For a Child Who Missed School Due to Illness**

By Valerie Cherneck and Ann Bopp

*Abstract: A parent shares her experience using Bookshare’s online library through support by the Accessible Books for Texas program for her daughter who is blind and has chronic healthcare needs. Learning to use accessible education materials makes it possible for her daughter to keep up with her school work and make academic progress.*

*Keywords: Family Wisdom, literacy, blind, accessible materials, audio books*

Each year, thousands of students miss school due to chronic illness, extended stays in the hospital, or the need for daily home health care. This is the case for ten-year-old Hailey Bopp, who is blind and has cognitive delays. These challenges often make it impossible for Hailey to attend school regularly. Her mom, Ann, says that whenever Hailey misses school, “she gets sad and depressed because she doesn’t get to read the books her teacher and classmates are reading.”

To mitigate Hailey’s frustration, Ann signed her daughter up for a Bookshare individual membership. “School life is better because she can keep up with reading assignments,” says Ann. As she observed how Hailey reacted to reading accessible books, Ann knew she was on the right track. “I want more families to know about this educational resource,” she said. “So, I pass it on to parents with children who have qualifying print disabilities in the hope that they might have a quality reading experience, like Hailey.”

Ann attended the Parent to Parent Conference in San Marcos, TX, to learn about special education legislation and technologies that help children with special needs succeed. There, she met a Bookshare trainer through the Accessible Books for Texas (ABT) program. ABT provides free and local training and outreach for educators and parents.

Hailey participates in mainstream general education classes. Ann says she wouldn’t have been able to keep up with her reading assignments without books in accessible formats. “I had to nudge Hailey to read, but not anymore. She is completely independent, loves her iPad, and can easily download books from the Bookshare library. And she is a pro at navigating accessible books with her iPad to enlarge fonts, change voices, and adjust the rate of speech to hear the text read aloud.”

“Some people say that listening to audio books is cheating, but I disagree. My daughter’s cognitive ability and eye condition make fatigue come on fast. She cannot recall what she’s reading. With digital books, her comprehension skills are fine-tuned without lugging heavy volumes to and from the hospital. When we equip sick children with learning portability and resources like Bookshare, they can keep up with schoolwork and have a fighting chance toward academic progress.”

Last year, Hailey made the honor roll, but missed it by one point this year. “My daughter is very smart, but her health issues make it nearly impossible to attend school regularly. The iPad and accessible books gave her mobile learning options, long overdue for families whose children are ill.”

Hailey just returned to her Texas school and is already ahead of the curve. She and Ann met with the vision teacher and downloaded the first book she needs for class. Ann has also been talking with other parents about Bookshare and showing them how to use the library.

“I encourage them to meet with a principal, librarian, or teacher and do a quick search of the library for a K–12 textbook or novel,” says Ann. “If the school has a Bookshare organizational membership, they can download textbooks and use Bookshare’s new reading tool—Reading List (tutorial on youtube.com). This tool helps students, parents, and teachers to organize books and makes it easier for us to ensure our children have timely access to their assignments. Reading Lists allow us to store book titles in one location, so no more hunting for titles and missing homework for Hailey.”

When asked about reading outside of school, Ann says, “Hailey is into the new James Patterson series for young children. “She has read the series through Bookshare and loves the plots. This is a pastime that any child should enjoy, especially those who are faced with daily health challenges that make it difficult to attend school or do a variety of physical activities. Learning portability ensures that children can keep pace with school work and have a chance to make academic progress.”

For more information about Bookshare in Texas, please visit <http://www.accessiblebooks4tx.org/> .

---