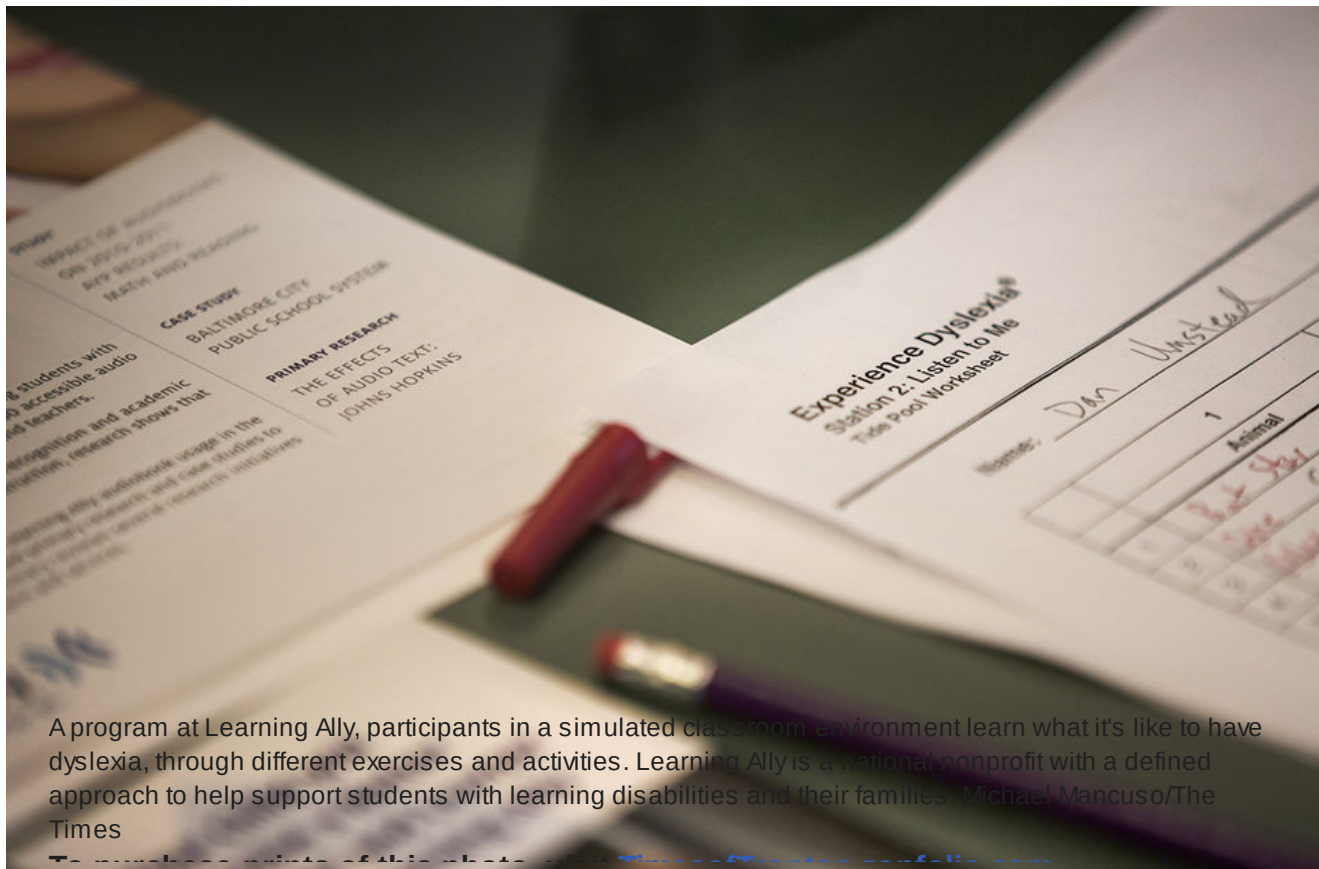


Princeton nonprofit group shows unique challenges facing students with dyslexia



A program at Learning Ally, participants in a simulated classroom environment learn what it's like to have dyslexia, through different exercises and activities. Learning Ally is a national nonprofit with a defined approach to help support students with learning disabilities and their families. Michael Mancuso/The Times



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PRINCETON — Imagine trying to write something by hand but only being able to see the tip of your pencil in a mirror.

For a person with dyslexia, trying to write a word or a number can be much like that, said Susan Lippman, professional outreach coordinator for the local site of Learning Ally, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping those with learning disabilities.

Lippman was among a group of parents, teachers and school administrators who sat in a classroom Thursday and took part in “Dyslexia: Making it Personal,” a hands-on simulated classroom experience that shows what it is like to have dyslexia.

Lippman said one exercise, which involved writing numbers while only seeing the pencil tip in a mirror, was particularly troublesome.

“It became really frustrating that you couldn’t do it fluidly,” she said.

Learning Ally is a nationwide organization that works with educators, parents, and students with learning disabilities, including dyslexia, that prevent them from easily reading text.

The nonprofit, which has the largest audiobook library in the world for these students, says that 1 in 5 students are faced with a learning disability affecting their reading skills, with dyslexia being the most prevalent one.

“We feel that this issue needs attention,” said Mark Brugger, the senior program manager at the Princeton location.

“There’s an emotional aspect,” Brugger said. Some of the participants got frustrated at the tasks, while others got angry at Brugger, who was acting as the “teacher,” asking students to complete tasks in what seemed to be an impossibly small amount of time.

“A few people said, ‘I just gave up,’” Brugger said. Some participants in the program who had dyslexia described that this

is how they felt while in school.

Learning Ally works with thousands of schools with the goal of helping others understand what it's like to have a learning disability like dyslexia, while also helping the students themselves through their CARE — champion, audiobooks, accommodation and remediation equal success — method to help students succeed. Touching on each of the four components, Brugger said, “We really need all of them.”

After the hands-on portion of the event, the participants sat in on a 30-minute lecture where they learned about the learning disability and what accommodations and programs were locally available to those affected by dyslexia.

While last week's program was filled with parents of children with dyslexia, educators, and Learning Ally staff, Lippman said she believes everyone who knows someone with dyslexia should participate in such an event.

The Princeton center is planning another one in October.

“I learned a lot of what they really go through,” Lippman said. “What was a struggle for me they have to do every day.

“You really need to do it to understand,” she said.

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