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Leveling Up

Earn CE certificates via many of these free and low-cost webinars, courses, and seminars. See edWeb.net, [Kent County ISDs PD Hub. CECatalog](http://KentCountyISDsPD.Hub.CECatalog), and ADDitudemag.com for additional instruction.

- **Standing Desks: How and Why Educators Are Using Them**, Mon., March 6 at 4 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **Why Audiobooks Don't Work and ALL of the Reasons They Do**, Wed., March 8 at

Cont. on [page 2](#)

Free resources for differentiated reading

by *Becky Palmer-Scott*
Editor, *SpecialEdTech.net*

Matching reading level with student is an important task that all teachers must perform, especially in classrooms where special education students are mixed in with the general student population. At a recent MCEC (Michigan Council for Exceptional Children) conference, Dr. Michelle Baker-Herring, principal at Southgate Anderson High School in Michigan, named several helpful websites.

ReadWorks.org is a good place to start if you would like to find reading material



Please see [Leveled reading on page 6](#)

Closed Captioning: it's a good idea, it's the law, and it's easy

by *Becky Palmer-Scott*
Editor, *SpecialEdTech.net*

Most special education teachers know why closed captions (CC) is important. "CC benefits students who are hard of hearing and those who are learning English. It clarifies technical and quickly-spoken dialogue, and helps maintain concentration in students with learning disabilities, attention deficits, and autism" said Ron Houtman, Kent ISD educational technology consultant.



"It is also the law," said Houtman in a MCEC

Please see [Captions on page 7](#)

Leveling Up, continued from [page 1](#)

3 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.

- **Multi-sensory Math Methodologies for Students with Learning Difficulties**, Wed., March 8, at 4 p.m. EST on cec.sped.org.
- **Navigating the Shift: Accessible Education Materials for All Students**, Thurs., March 9, at 3 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **Michigan Arts Education Instruction and Assessment**, Wed., March 22 at 4 p.m. on kentisd.org.
- **Integrating Robotics in Content Areas**, Mon., March 13 at 4 p.m. on edWeb.net.
- **Engaging Students Through High-Impact Learning Environments**, Mon., March 13 at 5 p.m. on edWeb.net.
- **It's About Time: Understanding the Science of Time Management with ADHD**, Wed., March 15 at 1 p.m. EST on ADDitudemag.com.
- **Let's Work It Out: Stopping Bullying Before It Starts**, Wed., March 15 at 3 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **Innovative Technology for Individuals with Autism**, Thurs., March 16 at 3 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **You Know Better: Bridging the Gap between "Knowing" and "Doing"**, Fri., March 17 at 2 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **Strategies to Improve Behavior and Instruction in the Classroom**, Tues., March 21 at 3 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **Teaching Digital Literacy**, Wed., March 22 at 5 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **Feel That Rhythm! Music and Emerging Math Skills**, Thurs., March 23 at 3 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **News and Media Literacy: Building Critical Consumers and Creators**, Wed., March 29 at 4 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.
- **Improving the Writing of Students with Learning Disabilities: An Explicit Instruction**

About Special Ed Tech / Subscriptions

Special Ed Tech, specialedtech.net, is published monthly from September through May by the director of Aspiring Games Foundation, aspiringgames.org.

To subscribe, go to specialedtech.net, scroll to the subscription box on the bottom of the page, insert your e-mail address, and click the "Subscribe" button.

We welcome your questions and article suggestions. Direct all queries and subscription issues to editor Becky Palmer-Scott at SpecialEdTechEditor@gmail.com.

Framework, Wed., March 29 at 4 p.m. EST on cec.sped.org.

- **Building Blocks for the Success of English Language Learners**, Thurs., March 30 at 3 p.m. EST on edWeb.net.

Upcoming special ed and ed tech conferences in Michigan

[MACUL Conference](#), March 15-17, 2017 - Cobo Hall, Detroit. One of the Midwest's largest educational technology conferences with 5000+ educators from across Michigan, the region, and Canada.

[3rd Annual Navigating Autism Conference](#), March 9, 2017 - VisTaTech Center at Schoolcraft College,, Livonia.

[Michigan Transition Services Conference](#), March 15-17, 2017 - Frankenmuth.

[START Conference \(Statewide Autism Resources & Training\)](#), May 1, 2017 - Kellogg Center, Lansing. Annual conference for the support of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

[Alt+Shift Summer Institute: Rethink Possibilities](#), June 20-22, 2017 - Hagerty Center, Traverse City. Highlights ways educators can integrate assistive technology in social and academic spheres, provide high-quality math and literacy instruction for every learner, increase engagement for every learner, and more.

Finding and creating audio books

by Becky Palmer-Scott
Editor, *SpecialEdTech.net*

There's nothing like the joy of being read to, to strengthen reading skills and enjoyment of books. Providing audio books for your classroom benefits nonreaders, ESL students, and students who are visually impaired. Thankfully, there are many resources available to teachers, including ways to allow immobile students to turn pages with switches. These were highlighted at a recent MCEC (Michigan Council for Exceptional Children) conference. The solutions include online books with built-in audio, resources which you can combine with a text-to-speech tool, and methods for adding speech to a paper book.

Online books and lessons with audio built in

TarHeelReader.org has books for beginning readers of all ages. Most of the books are nonfiction, and all are in slide format. Many of the books are created by the community using the website, and user contributions are welcome. The audio voice is computerized, but you can change it to be child, male, female, or the voice built into your computer. Each book can be accessed using multiple interfaces, including touch screens, IntelliKeys with custom overlays, and 1 to 3 switches. In addition to English, the site is available in German, Spanish, French, Italian, Norse, Turkish, and Portuguese.

kizclub.com offers audio books, printables, and other interactive activities for grades K-8. Go to the [Stories & Props](#) tab to see audio books in Levels 1 through 3. The audio voice is more pleasant than most audio playback since it does not sound computer-like. In addition, the clickable area for slide progression is large, which makes it easier to use with a switch, or by students with less motor control.

StorylineOnline.net shows Screen Actors Guild actors reading books. Captions are included, and the presentation switches between views of the actor and of the book pictures. As of this writing, there were 38 books, all for early elementary levels.

UniteForLiteracy.com has a wide variety of high quality audio books in 31 languages. The audio is a real person's voice, not a computer. Most of the books are nonfiction and are levels K-3. You can filter the books based on topic.

LittleBirdTales.com offers a collection of student-created books, most of which have narration by the author. The site welcomes additions by students and offers easy-to-follow instructions for creating books.

[Crick Software Clicker](#) books and tools work on Windows and Mac devices. You can download the Clicker software onto your computer from the Crick website and/or add the Clicker Docs and Clicker Sentence extensions through the Chrome Web Store. All offer a free 28-day trial. Crick Software costs \$495. There are a variety of Clicker student and classroom resources on the [SET>BC website \(w3.setbc.org\)](http://SET>BC website (w3.setbc.org)). These include many lessons designed specifically for students with special needs, and some are on higher-level topics. The audio voice is childlike but computer-like. Of note -- the 'play audio' button changes

Providing audio books for your classroom benefits nonreaders, ESL students, and students who are visually impaired.



*Please see **Audio books** on next page*

Learning more about how students' brains work, how that affects their learning, and what that means for your teaching will complete your journey towards deeper empathy and greater action on behalf of your students.

Audio books, continued from previous page

position frequently, which may make it harder for a student with mobility impairments to use.

Online books & sites with audio from a speech-to-text tool

You can make websites speak using speech-to-text tools. [SpeakIt!](#) and [Read&Write](#), are free Chrome extensions, which you install through the Google Web Store. To reach the Google Web Store, click the App icon in the top left of the Chrome menu bar. Once you find the extension, simply click its **Add to Chrome** button. It's good to install both tools, because they have different strengths. SpeakIt! works well on websites and Read&Write works well on Google Slides.

[Google Slides](#) is a great tool for creating audio books. Layout templates are available for book creation, and you can insert images, shapes, videos, charts, hyperlinks, and more into your slides. The Read&Write extension works best to generate speech from slide text.

[CK12.org](#) contains online lessons and videos for grades K-12, and allows teachers to create lesson plans, organize classes, and assign due dates. SpeakIt! works best with browser-based material like this.

[Storybird.com](#) is a website where visitors can find, and are encouraged to write, browser-based books. The site offers beautiful artwork and a wide variety of categories and reading levels, although most of the books are fiction. SpeakIt! works best with browser-based material like this.

Adding audio to paper books

When adding audio to paper books, you must provide the audio. Having parents make recordings can provide emotional comfort to students..

One way to do this is to tie the recording to a QR code, then print out the QR code and paste it on the book. [Vocaroo.com](#) enables you to make a recording and tie it to a QR code. If you right-click on the QR code displayed by Vocaroo, you can save it as an image, which you can then name and print. The student would use an app such as [QR Reader](#) to scan the QR code and listen to the recording. If you use this method, you will want to have the recording say when to turn each page, or put a QR code on each page.

[Anybook Reader](#), which costs between \$35 and \$75, allows you to associate your audio recordings with stickers. You put the stickers on book pages, and enable playback with a large stylus. Each stylus comes with 200 to 520 reusable stickers. The stylus can only play the stickers it came with, so it's important to identify which stylus goes with which book(s).

[BookWorm](#), created by AbleNet Inc., can transform paper books into switch-adapted audio books. The unit costs about \$220.

Do you know of other audio book solutions? Send them to specialteditor@gmail.com!



Vocaroo recording



AnyBook Reader



Bookworm

TidBits

Remind Visuwords

When teachers use text messaging to communicate with parents and guardians, student achievement improves dramatically, especially in high school.

TidBits is a new monthly column offering quick ideas and resources!

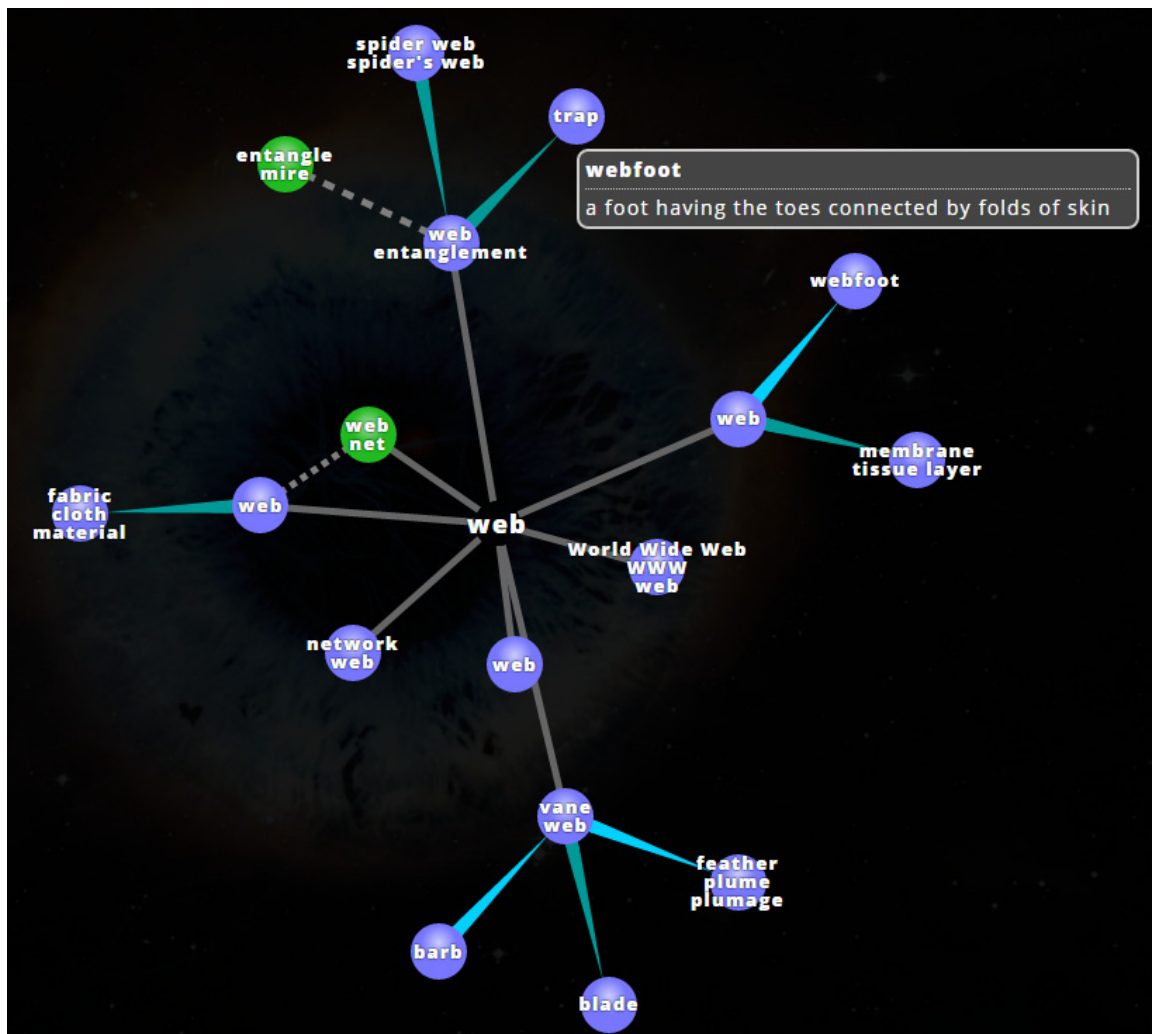
Remind (for text messaging)

Is there a disconnect between information you send home with students, and what parents are aware of? A recent [NPR article](#) reported that when teachers use text messaging to communicate with parents and guardians, student achievement improves dramatically, especially in high school.

[Remind](#) (formerly Remind101) is a free service that lets teachers send out group text messages to parents, without having to gather everyone's cell phone number. But when a parent replies, it goes only to the teacher. Remind could be used for assignments, notices of field trips, and anything you want to let parents know about.

Visuwords

The English language is complex, and one word can mean a variety of things. [Visuwords.com](#) is a fun and engaging website for exploring English vocabulary. Type in a word and see all its meanings assemble themselves!



Leveled reading continued from [page 1](#)



based on reading level (K-6), unit type, and skill/strategy. It's free and is designed to help you build lesson plans.

CommonLit.org has a free collection of news articles, poems, short stories, and historical documents for grades 5-12. You can assign text-dependent questions to students, and analyze student performance on key reading and writing skills.

NEWSLA

Newsela.com performs literary magic by changing the reading level of the articles it publishes, depending upon the Lexile level you select. Every Newsela article is written at 5 different Lexile reading levels: 540L, 810L, 1060L, 1220L, and Max (college level). This enables all the students in your class to read the same content and discuss as a class. Content is nonfiction and includes current events, history, book reviews, and more. Each level comes with writing prompts and quizzes. When you assign an article to your class, each student will see the article in his or her own level. It's free.

NEWSEUM
THERE'S MORE TO EVERY STORY.

Newseum.org is a free website sponsored by the Newseum Institute in Washington, D.C.. Check out the [EDTools page](#) for hundreds of standards-aligned lesson plans, artifacts, case studies, and more. You can filter material by type of tool (EDCollection, unit, lesson, activity, freedom question (a type of quiz), case study, artifact, timeline, map, or quiz) as well as by topic, theme, century, state, grade/reading level, and format (online, in the classroom, and at the Newseum). Newseum.org offers some terrific interactive and thought-provoking discussion starters regarding freedom of speech and media literacy.



Lexile.com is another tool to find books based on Lexile level and topic of interest. Once a book is selected, a report is displayed which includes a plot summary and up to 10 challenging vocabulary words that are important for the reader to know. You can also enter a reader's Lexile level to see a tailored vocabulary list. To get copies of books, the site includes links to WorldCat, showing where the books can be found in nearby libraries, as well as links to stores where you can buy the book online. ↗



If someone complains that your district does not caption its videos, the OCR will give you a limited amount of time to comply. Captioning is not hard to do, but it takes time, so it's best to start now.

Captioning, continued from [page 1](#)

conference presentation entitled "Captioning Made Easy". He explained that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that people with disabilities must have an equal opportunity to participate in programs, services, and activities, and Title II of the ADA says that communication with persons with disabilities must be "as effective as communications with others." This means that a printout of the video transcription is not enough. In addition, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 says that (among other guidelines) videos and live audio presented by the government must have captions. For schools, this means any website facing the public and materials used in the classroom.

If your school district is not in compliance, it only takes one complaint for the U.S. Office of Civil Rights to open an investigation, said Houtman. You might not know when your school district is being investigated, but if it hasn't been investigated yet, trust that it's coming. A July 4, 2016 *Detroit Free Press* article entitled "[Michigan woman fights for accessible websites in U.S. school districts](#)" put schools on notice that someone was noticing them. So far in Michigan there have been about 700 cases opened, said Houtman.

If someone complains about your district, you will be given a limited amount of time to comply. But correcting the problem can be time-consuming, and most schools don't have anyone assigned to take care of it. The good news is that creating CC is easy, so it's wise to be proactive and get started on it now.

There are two needs for CC during school: 1) in pre-made videos, and 2) during classroom lectures. Houtman's presentation gave solutions for both scenarios.

First steps

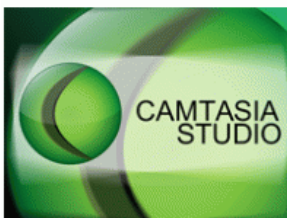
Most educational videos already include CC, so when using them, all you have to do is make sure the CC is on. This includes [PBS Learning Media](#) and [Discovery Videos](#). If you are playing a show on a VHS tape, you might be able to find the same or equivalent show from either of these sources.

Second, reach out to the educational technology staff available to help you. Most school districts have them, and in Michigan, the Regional Educational Media Center ([REMC.org](#)) is another source of help, and has representatives in all parts of the state. If you draw a blank on getting help, google "educational media center" or "educational technology center" along with your district or state name. Whomever you find might not have enough time to CC all your materials, but they can show how to do it.

Putting captions on videos

There are two easy-to-use tools to put captions on videos. One is [TechSmith Camtasia](#). Camtasia costs about \$300 but offers a 30-day free trial which is fully functional.

To create captions, open Camtasia and select **File > Import > Media** to import your video. Camtasia can generate captions for you, but they tend to be inaccurate, though you can edit them. To manually add captions, select **More > CC Captions** from the left sidebar, then in the Captions window, click **+Add**



*Please see **Captioning** on next page*

Captioning, continued from previous page



Caption. This will add a caption track to your video, in which you can type.

Another tool for video captioning is YouTube. Go to [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and sign in with your school e-mail address (click the **Sign In** button in the upper right corner). This creates your own channel, if you don't already have one. Google owns YouTube, so it prompts you to use a Google e-mail address, but if you use your school e-mail, ads will not play on your channel. (TIP: Another way to remove ads from YouTube videos is to install the "Magic Options for YouTube" Google extension.)

Once you have logged in, click the Upload button in the upper right corner of YouTube to add your video. Automatic generation of captions on YouTube seems to come and go, but it works relatively well when it's available. To try it, read YouTube's "[Use automatic captioning](#)" instructions. If the service isn't working, you will at least have an easy way to manually add captions to your videos.

Real-time speech-to-text in the classroom

For deaf or hard-of-hearing students, a solution exists that transcribes the teacher's speech in real time, if the student can access [Google Docs](https://docs.google.com), which has an excellent speech-to-text tool. The solution involves the teacher wearing a microphone that comes with a wireless USB receiver. The USB receiver plugs into the student's laptop. A Google Docs document on the student's laptop can then type the teacher's speech when **Tools > Voice Typing** is activated in Google Docs.

One hardware tool for this is the Samson Stage XPD1 Presentation USB Digital Wireless Microphone System, which costs about \$95. The drawback to this solution is that only one laptop can be used per microphone.

For more information on closed captioning, see Ron Houtman's "Captioning Made Easy" notes at bit.ly/17closed.



*Samson Stage XPD1 Presentation
USB Wireless Microphone
System*