**Panelist Answers**

# Ben Cooper

## Tell us a little bit about yourself:

### What is your name?

* Ben Cooper

### Where do you go to school?

* Stephen F. Austin High School – Junior Year

### What are you interested in pursuing as a career in the future?

* Business and Technology

### What assistive technology do you use?

* Text to Speech applications, speech to text

### What supports do you need to be successful in school?

* Access to technology, Text to Speech applications, speech to text, spell check and access to other people’s notes.

## What is the most important message you would like for people in K-12 to hear about accessibility and why it’s important to you?

### The purpose of education is enable students to learn skills to help us in our daily lives once we are out of school. AT will help me be more productive in my career and allow me to do things to the best of my ability. K-12 is the time for students to build proficient skills.

## Describe a time when you got access to your curriculum materials and supports in an equal and timely manner so that you were included in what was happening in the classroom or broader school activities. Please explain how this experience made you feel.

* Currently at my high school I have good support for my AT use, and more importantly it is accepted by my teachers. This environment allows me to do my best and show my true understanding of the subject.

## Describe a time when you were not able to get access to your curriculum materials or supports in an equal and timely manner, resulting in you being excluded from what was happening in the classroom or broader school activities.

* During my elementary and middle school years my AT was not always encouraged outside of the people who supported me in Special Education. Many teachers, not all, felt as if AT was a crutch and limited or restricted its use.

### Please explain the following:

### How this experience made you feel.

* It made me feel that I could not do my best or show my full understanding of the subject.

### What the consequence was of you being excluded.

* HS has been much more aligned with my technology use. Middle School was very problematic and thus difficult. I was restricted from using many AT accommodations and failed a class, which I retook over the summer. I pressed on, but this stress affected my performance, yet made me even more determined.

### Whether or not you were able to work around it. If you worked around it, what did you have to do?

* I used it at home. All available resources at home I would use if I was not allowed in school.

### Did you have to change your goals or aspirations because of this barrier?

* I did not give up, I knew that barrier would just last a few years and in high school I would have a more understanding, supportive AT environment. I used my disappointment in the system to get me through. I refused to give up. In some ways, I think it made me more determined to excel.

## Are you able to effectively participate in group activities and collaborative assignments in school? Please describe any barriers you experience with these types of activities and assignments and what you do to overcome those barriers.

* Group work is done on google docs, or email, other information sharing sites. It’s easy to collaborate this way. So yes, now I am able to effectively participate.

## What was it like for you before you had assistive technology to help you work more efficiently?

### What doors opened up after you got your assistive technology?

* The world of literature opened up. I enjoy reading. Learning in all of my courses is better. Once I gained access to the content, from there I excelled.

### What doors are still closed and why do you think they are still closed?

* None, except for tests that are not allowed to be read aloud. But there are no doors that are closed to me. There is always a way. I can advocate and take charge of my life.

## As AT is now being adopted by mainstream users, how do you think this should be incorporated in school?

* Teachers should realize that as technology becomes more mainstream and interwoven into our daily lives, students should be encouraged and supported in using it. We will be using technology in our future. I wish teachers would embrace new tools for students to use to achieve their goals. It doesn't matter whether a student can correctly spell, you can use spell check. If they have a print disability, there is Text-to-Speech. We should support learning in whatever form works best for each individual.

# Adelyn Granger

## Tell us a little bit about yourself:

### What is your name?

* Adelyn Granger

### Where do you go to school?

* Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

### What are you interested in pursuing as a career in the future?

* I would like to be a cosmetologist and barber with my own salon.

### What assistive technology do you use?

* I use screen magnification on my phone and laptop. I also use a CCTV when needed.

### What supports do you need to be successful in school?

* It always helps to have an understanding teacher who is willing to hear me out and work with me so that I can participate to the best of my ability.

## What is the most important message you would like for people in K-12 to hear about accessibility and why it’s important to you?

* Accessibility is important to me because it’s what helps me be on the same level as any other student. The most important thing that I would like people in K-12 to hear is to work with your student. Sometimes students dealing with a disability are not dealing with the disability that well. That means that not all students who are struggling will speak up about it. So, pay attention to your students and if someone is struggling speak to them about it alone and try to figure out a plan so that the student can participate effectively. Always work with your student.

## Describe a time when you got access to your curriculum materials and supports in an equal and timely manner so that you were included in what was happening in the classroom or broader school activities. Please explain how this experience made you feel.

* When I was in public school my math teacher would let me sit in the front of the classroom and would hand me my enlarged 11x17 paperwork at the same time she handed out the regular print to the other students. I appreciated that she would do that - always hand me my accessible paperwork at the same time the other students would get their work. It helped me not feel so embarrassed that I needed huge papers and it helped me keep up with everyone else. It made the playing field even so to speak.

## Describe a time when you were not able to get access to your curriculum materials or supports in an equal and timely manner, resulting in you being excluded from what was happening in the classroom or broader school activities.

* There was a time in choir class at my public school where everyone got their sheet music except for me and I had to remind my teacher I needed a large print version. She said she forgot and would do it but she didn’t. Eventually I had to get my VI teacher involved to solve the problem because my teacher kept “forgetting.”

### Please explain the following:

#### How this experience made you feel.

* It made me feel disappointed because this specific teacher had already taught my sister who also has eye problems but she still couldn’t get my accommodations in a timely manner.

#### What the consequence was of you being excluded.

* I got behind in the songs we were working on and that set me back so much that I had to fake knowing the song. In school you shouldn’t have to fake learning something.

#### Whether or not you were able to work around it. If you worked around it, what did you have to do?

* I was eventually able to work around it and the big thing I did was not give up. I didn’t let her slack in her job. I kept reminding her of what I needed and when I was not being heard I got backup – my VI teacher.

#### Did you have to change your goals or aspirations because of this barrier?

* I haven’t changed my goals, if anything, because of what I’ve been through, I’ve pushed myself to make new goals and keep going towards those goals.

## Are you able to effectively participate in group activities and collaborative assignments in school? Please describe any barriers you experience with these types of activities and assignments and what you do to overcome those barriers.

* Due to going to the school for the blind here in Austin, I am able to participate in everything there is to do because the staff knows about my eye condition and they give me the resources I need to participate effectively.
* I take a couple classes at a local public school and sometimes I do experience difficulties, but because I speak up when I’m having troubles seeing something, I am able to work with my teachers to find ways to make my work accessible.

## What was it like for you before you had assistive technology to help you work more efficiently?

* When I didn’t have the assistive technology I needed, I would get behind in class and have to go to the nurse’s office a couple of times a week from eye pain.

### What doors opened up after you got your assistive technology?

* I was able to be more successful and keep up in class. On top of that it made me realize that I would benefit from going to the blind school for a couple of years so that I could expand my knowledge of blind skills in a more balanced schedule.

### What doors are still closed and why do you think they are still closed?

* Fortunately, at this time no doors are closed or at least the doors that I am wanting to walk through are not closed.

# Archer Hadley

## Tell us a little bit about yourself:

### What is your name?

* Archer Hadley

### Where do you go to school?

* The University of Texas, finishing up my third year.

### What are you interested in pursuing as a career in the future?

* I am interested in pursuing a career in politics.

### What assistive technology do you use?

* I use my phone and the voice dictation on my phone, but other than that, as far as education tools go, I use Dragon Naturally Speaking and Google Voice Typing and that’s about it.

### What supports do you need to be successful in school?

* One thing I definitely need is 1-on-1 support or assistance in class to take notes and get information. I have note takers that go with me to every class.
* Also, I have registered with the disabilities office. I have accommodations with them for testing in a quiet room with a scribe and access to AT if I have to write an essay. I also get extra time on assignments.
* Other than that, the main support is myself. A lot of college is self-advocacy – it’s working with the professors on getting them to understand me and what I need from them and usually I do pretty well with that.
* I have run into several professors who haven’t been the most helpful. Once I had to go into the office and sit with a professor with my computer & use Dragon Naturally Speaking so that he could see how I write. Even after doing that, he said I had to turn my work in off line, so I ended up having to drop the class and take something else. He was just so inflexible.

## What is the most important message you would like for people in K-12 to hear about accessibility and why it’s important to you?

### For students, my answer assumes that they have the ability to advocate for themselves:

* My message to them is that it’s really likely that when they enter the school system, it will not be ready and prepared for what their needs are.
* Students need to be ready to guide people in the school system about how to meet their needs. Students need to be patient and flexible with school personnel. I am just speaking from experience.
* This is what my AT person did – she asked me what my broad challenges were in school and the biggest challenge that she tried to tackle and still does for me, even though I’m in college, is writing. She would bring in several different solutions and dictating software and we would just work it out.
* Ultimately, it never worked very well and still doesn’t, but this is the process you have to go through. You’ve got to be willing to go through this process and you have to be patient with the people assisting you so that they can assist you in the best way they know how.

### For teachers advocating for students who can’t advocate for themselves:

* My message is that nothing that you learn in the process of becoming a teacher, teaches you how to be ready for the special education world – even if you have a degree in special education, you will only realize the reality of what it is when you go and experience it.
* You have to be open and welcoming and willing to think outside of the box and maybe even throw away conventional things you knew and try something new.
* Sometimes you have to be bold and willing not to be liked by other people. You have to be a big problem solver.

## Describe a time when you got access to your curriculum materials and supports in an equal and timely manner so that you were included in what was happening in the classroom or broader school activities. Please explain how this experience made you feel.

* I have never had this happen.

## Describe a time when you were not able to get access to your curriculum materials or supports in an equal and timely manner, resulting in you being excluded from what was happening in the classroom or broader school activities.

* I am just going to speak in terms of assistive technology. Let me give you an example. I felt like the teachers never did a good job of telling me about the assignments that were coming up so that I could tell my AT person what I needed to succeed on those assignments.
* As an example, I was in Algebra II in high school and there was a big project where we had to write a lot of really long and complicated equations. As I was doing this, I got really frustrated because I was painstakingly writing out the equations. It was taking me literally hours and I was not doing a good job with it. I reached out to my AT person and told her that she had to rescue me, but by the time she was able to find a solution, the project was already over. This was not her fault, it was just that I couldn’t get ahead of the curve because I never knew what the assignments were going to be in advance so that I could figure out what the challenges were going to be for me physically. I think this falls on the teachers.

### Please explain the following:

#### How this experience made you feel.

* It made me feel like I have a disability and I don’t like feeling that way. I like feeling like I’m just like a normal person. Not being able to access something really accented my life challenges, which was really frustrating. It also set up challenges with the teacher who didn’t understand my situation and he gave me a lower grade on the project. Because I couldn’t access math well, it gave me bad experiences in math.

#### What the consequence was of you being excluded.

* I received a lower grade and the teacher never really cared or understood what I was having to do to get the assignment done, even though I met with him afterwards.

#### Whether or not you were able to work around it. If you worked around it, what did you have to do?

* I was not able to work around it. I just had to get it done the best I could. The project took me about 5-6 hours over several days, but it probably took most everyone else about 2-3 hours.

#### Did you have to change your goals or aspirations because of this barrier?

* No, it did not affect my career desires.

## Are you able to effectively participate in group activities and collaborative assignments in school? Please describe any barriers you experience with these types of activities and assignments and what you do to overcome those barriers.

* Adamantly and vehemently, no. I am not able to participate in group activities and collaborative assignments.
* At the beginning of this semester, I dropped a class because the major project for the semester, was a group project.
* There are multiple reasons:
  + Someone has to take me wherever the group is, which is challenging. I have to have someone drive me.
  + Where the group chooses to meet may not be accessible to wheelchairs
  + Others in the group don’t understand how I get things done, so they expect me to do something that I can’t do.
  + I hate group projects.

## What was it like for you before you had assistive technology to help you work more efficiently?

### What doors opened up after you got your assistive technology?

* Maybe reading comprehension might have opened up a little bit because sometimes I use a Google extension to read documents on my computer, so I can just listen to them.

### What doors are still closed and why do you think they are still closed?

* Writing is still a major challenge for me, mainly because I don’t speak absolutely fluently without inflections in my voice. I have a lot of inflections in my voice, which affects the accuracy of the software, so that is a door that is still closed.

# Diego Rodriguez Suarez

## Tell us a little bit about yourself:

### What is your name?

* Diego Rodriguez Suarez

### Where do you go to school?

* Akins High School – I am a freshman in all Pre-AP Classes (Algebra, Biology, Business Information Management, Costume Design, PE, Theater, and AVID, a class that helps middle school and high school kids get ready for college)

### What are you interested in pursuing as a career in the future?

* I want to be an actor and go into Broadway Plays and Movies

### What assistive technology do you use?

* I use a joy stick mouse on a computer and I use word prediction software to get my writing done.
* One of the bad things about being a disabled teenager is that you can’t go where you want to go very easily. I have a power wheelchair, but it hurts if I am in it for too long. When you’re a high school student, you have to go from one place to another really quickly, so Mr. Avery, my aide, pushes me in my chair from class-to-class.

### What supports do you need to be successful in school?

* A one-on-one teaching assistant
* Extended time on assignments
* Someone to take notes for me in class – Mr. Avery takes notes for me now
* Extra time to get to class
* Quiet environment to take tests
* Scribe on my tests
* Scribe to write essays and long assignments

## What is the most important message you would like for people in K-12 to hear about accessibility and why it’s important to you?

* Accessibility is important to me because it helps me with my assignments and things I want to do. For example, if there’s something I have to do for ELA, I need to have all of my tools at my disposal so that I can work on the assignment. I need a computer, my joystick mouse, and word prediction software.

## Describe a time when you got access to your curriculum materials and supports in an equal and timely manner so that you were included in what was happening in the classroom or broader school activities. Please explain how this experience made you feel.

* I pretty much get the same things the other kids get at the same time, all the time. I am pretty much a regular kid. I don’t think I’ve been denied access to anything or been denied anything I’ve needed for school or life in general.

## Describe a time when you were not able to get access to your curriculum materials or supports in an equal and timely manner, resulting in you being excluded from what was happening in the classroom or broader school activities.

* This has never happened – I am in all pre-AP courses this year. I’ve had good luck every day of this year. I am a pretty lucky guy.
* I have not always been in Austin ISD, I was in Bastrop ISD before. It was kind of hard the first couple of weeks, but I got used to it; I had to adapt, but I think it’s for the best that I came back to Austin ISD. Even in Bastrop, I always felt like I was given what I needed.

## Are you able to effectively participate in group activities and collaborative assignments in school? Please describe any barriers you experience with these types of activities and assignments and what you do to overcome those barriers.

* Yes, fortunately I am. I don’t actually think that I’ve had any barriers to anything. I enjoy collaborative assignments – getting to talk to other kids, is my thing.

## What was it like for you before you had assistive technology to help you work more efficiently?

* It was tough. It was really hard for me to get my assignments done on time, and that was really frustrating for me because I knew I could do my assignments, but I couldn’t get any kind of work done on time, especially during STAAR tests.
* I started taking STAAR when everyone else did – in the third grade. I didn’t have enough time in the school day back then, so I had to get extended time on tests and that meant going back to school the next day and having to stay awake to finish the test. It was really hard to stay awake. When you’re really frustrated about not finishing a test, you don’t get enough sleep the next night because you’re so stressed about having to go back to school to finish it.

### What doors opened up after you got your assistive technology?

* I was able to look things up things online that I didn’t understand. I was able to look up videos about things I didn’t understand online. It was very enlightening for me.
* I am a hunt and peck typist, so it’s frustrating to do my own typing. Getting word prediction was an upgrade. When I use it, it takes less time, which I am very happy to say. If I didn’t have word prediction software, I couldn’t type as fast as I do. Word prediction helps me with short assignments, but for longer essays and tests, it’s still better for me to dictate those to Mr. Avery.
* For math, I try to do it in my head and not use a calculator; I try really hard not to use a calculator because you should only use that when you really don’t know the answer to a math problem.
* I tell Mr. Avery what to write for my math and he writes out my math problems for me.
* Mr. Avery and I have been working together for about a year. Any time you have to work with a person all day, it can get complicated. You have to be really careful about how you treat them and not take your frustrations out on them.

### What doors are still closed and why do you think they are still closed?

* There isn’t really anything that I would still want to do per se. There’s nothing else that I would want to do in life or school.
* I am in theater at Akins and it’s really the easiest class ever – you get to do monologs and stuff, I get to act and do skits and have improve sessions; the theater teacher is really nice to me; I am surrounded by nice people wherever I go.

# Robbi Cooper (Parent)

## What is the most important message you would like for people in K-12 to hear about accessibility and why it’s important for your child?

* Like every parent we want to support our children's aspirations and goals. My child had a deep desire to learn and because of his Dyslexia and Dysgraphia, he needed information presented to him in ways that allowed him access to content. He could not effectively read or print and this cut him off from learning. It is vital that students who need different access to materials get them and that they are supported and valued and encouraged to learn and grow as students.

## As you have navigated through the individualized education program (IEP) process for your child, have you encountered barriers to your child’s education that the IEP team was not able to remediate?

* Definitely. The IEP process itself is a good model, but barriers that make it difficult come from peoples’ preconceived notions of what they feel is appropriate or “the right way.” Many times, these outside influences end up tying the hands of the IEP team. For instance, testing rules which limit accessibility and thus limit the IEP team’s true ability to make decisions that are best for each child.

### If so, what are the services you believe your child needs that you have not been able to get approved?

* My son reads with Text to Speech. This is not allowed on the reading passages and on the revising and editing portions on some tests. This turns the test into a measure of his disability instead of his ability.

### Describe what it has been like for you to find the information and resources you need to effectively advocate for your child.

* It is one thing to seek information to help advocate, but it is an entirely different thing to battle misinformation and misinterpretation of policy. I find that is my biggest barrier, people interpreting rules as they see fit with no regard to whether this is benefiting or supporting student success.

## If there are other questions you would have liked to be asked, please feel free to add those questions, along with your answers.

* I would rather see my son resist and challenge policies that limit his full participation, than comply and get by. He does his best work when he is challenged intellectually, rather than challenged by barriers. AT has changed his options, opened doors to learning and personal growth and has given him opportunities to do his best. That is what every child deserves and what our society should expect.

# Evelyn Granger (Parent)

## What is the most important message you would like for people in K-12 to hear about accessibility and why it’s important for your child?

* As a mom of two daughters with varying degrees of vision, one very important meaning of accessibility is entrance or portal to communication, a building block for initiating and maintaining healthy relationships whether in school, family, or community.

## As you have navigated through the individualized education program (IEP) process for your child, have you encountered barriers to your child’s education that the IEP team was not able to remediate? If so, what are the services you believe your child needs that you have not been able to get approved?

* Certain IEPs at our local school district were limited or unavailable because of time. However, at TSBVI in Austin, IEPs were discussed in ARDs and implemented in the classroom, dorm, as well as in O& M.

## Describe what it has been like for you to find the information and resources you need to effectively advocate for your child.

* At first, finding the information and resources to advocate for my daughters was overwhelming and confusing. Even when locating a potential resource, knowing the right question to ask was difficult.

## As a parent, what is a question you have for your child that you have not been able to have answered?

* In order for my daughters to be independent, empowered, and equipped to be successful in business, where and how do they begin to learn about the legalities and techniques of web design?

# Desiree Sturdevant (Parent)

## What is the most important message you would like for people in K-12 to hear about accessibility and why it’s important for you as an involved parent?

* When I had children, I told myself I would always be a hands-on mom. I would go to school activities, help them with homework, volunteer in their school/classroom. When they started school, I informed the teachers of my needs; they needed to e-mail or call me rather than sending handwritten notes home as well as provide me with an electronic copy, if possible, to homework packets.
* Very few teachers actually followed through with promises to do these things, whether it was time or they just couldn’t provide them, I was prevented from really being involved in my children’s education. Unfortunately, there are no laws in place that give rights to parents with disabilities relating to school accommodations. But, by not providing me as a parent, with the info I need to support my child, she is then at a disadvantage.
* The most important message: As a parent who happens to be blind, I deserve the right to be part of my child’s education.

## Describe what it has been like for you to find the information and resources you need to effectively advocate for your child?

* If the teacher refuses to communicate with me in an accessible format, (e.g. phone call, e-mail, etc.), I feel left out of my childrens’ schooling. For instance, the website for the schools are virtually inaccessible and they always refer parents there for more info. The PTA site is even worse.
* Also, when they send documents via e-mail to parents, they are typically scanned in PDF files, with tables and content that is unreadable for my screen reader. As a result, my middle school daughter almost missed an important audition for band because I was not able to read the schedule. Of course, I could get my child to read it to me, but depending on her to do it, makes me feel and seem incapable as a parent. She starts to think she has control and that I can’t do things without her. That is not a place I want any of my children to be in.