For Immediate Release
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Virginia Special Needs Students Receive Digital Access to Required Education Curriculum through AIM-VA Initiative

Don Johnston’s Read:OutLoud® Accessible Text Reader Chosen

October 16, 2008—Volo, IL—The Virginia Accessible Instructional Materials Center (AIM-VA), part of the Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities (KIHd) at George Mason University (GMU) has entered into a two-year statewide license agreement with Don Johnston Incorporated to use its Read:OutLoud® accessible text reader in support of students with special needs. The Read:OutLoud software will enable eligible students with IEPs to access new electronic textbooks and other instructional materials as required by federal law.

The AIM-VA program will ensure that students who are eligible will receive timely access to digital textbook formats and educational materials as required by the IDEA 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Through the AIM-VA website, http://kihd.gmu.edu/aim, Superintendents and Digital Rights Managers can sign up to receive the Read:OutLoud text reader and training at no cost. Students can use the text reader at school and at home to take advantage of several reading comprehension strategies and support tools.

John Eisenberg, M. Ed at the Virginia Department of Education Office of Special Education Instructional Services Severe Disabilities/Assistive Technology Specialist, said, "AIM-VA will be the Department of Education's response to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure that students with print disabilities receive high quality accessible formats of instructional materials in a timely manner. In partnership with GMU, we are excited about improving access to accessible materials through the use of Don Johnston's Read:OutLoud text reader. Accessible instructional materials used in conjunction with assistive technology will help students with disabilities make significant progress toward improving their educational outcomes."

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), more than 90% of students with individualized education programs (IEPs) read below proficient levels, yet only an estimated 1-3% has access to technologies that will help them overcome reading barriers. Read:OutLoud is known for its supportive reading guide templates designed to leverage strategies recommended by the National Reading Panel and Reading Next. In this initiative it will serve an estimated 170,000 students in more than 1,900 Virginia public schools.
Read:OutLoud will open and read all common accessible file formats, including the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS), PDF, DAISY, Text Files (txt), Rich Text Format (rtf), HTML, XML, and Bookshare.org. The program includes a web browser to access the Internet with speech-enabled audio, an eHighlighter to improve study skills, the Franklin Talking Dictionary with over 32,000 word definitions to build vocabulary and a bibliographer to help students accurately cite research.

Michael Behrmann, GMU Professor of Special Education and Director of KIHd, is an advocate for assistive technologies and the visionary behind the project. His team specializes in working with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to design innovative programs in support of persons with disabilities in K-12 and higher education. He said, "AIM-VA was designed to be a 'central library model' where materials and services are provided at no cost to support the needs of its citizens. The VDOE has put us in charge to be a one-stop solution to provide schools with accessible and appropriate reading materials in a timely fashion. We want to ensure that they can comply with this law and are relieved of the burden of coordinating the logistics to access the digital materials, convert the files, purchase the technology and then support our students who need access to become successful learners."

## About George Mason University, Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities
The Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities is an interdisciplinary campus based organization that focuses on improving the lives and productivity of persons with disabilities. As one of the oldest assistive technology training programs in the country, KIHd combines the resources of George Mason University with local, state, regional, national, public and private sector agencies and organizations to develop products, services and programs for person with disabilities. [http://kihd.gmu.edu/aim](http://kihd.gmu.edu/aim)

## About Don Johnston Incorporated
Don Johnston empowers educators with specialized accessible technologies and supported reading and writing tools for students with cognitive, physical, and learning differences. Since 1980, the company has partnered with literacy experts, assistive technology specialists, speech language pathologists, psychologists, teachers, researchers, and scientists to develop over a dozen accessible technology products. The company also publishes Start-to-Finish®, a collection of paperback, audio and computer books for students reading below grade level.

Watch a product demonstration to learn more about Read:OutLoud 'Whole School' License Options - [http://www.donjohnston.com/readoutloud](http://www.donjohnston.com/readoutloud)