**BRG – CAST\_0001 – Mod 03\_Student Panel \_Transcript**

**Amanda:**

We met with the students and educators in that last segment individually, but the messages they were sharing were so similar and moving and powerful that our team couldn't help but wonder: “What would happen if we got all of those students together in the same room, at least virtually?” And so we did. And the result was a two hour long conversation covering topics ranging from accessibility struggles on standardized tests to how fast each of them was using a screen reader. One of the most inspiring moments in that interview for me was when Fletcher Maggs shared how filming this project opened his eyes to how critical accessibility is. As you watch this segment, I know you're going to agree with me. These students are themselves, game changers.

**Ella:**

I wish everyone knew that accessibility isn't a choice. And if I don't have all my materials in an accessible format, then I just cannot do, like, the work or activity that I'm trying to.

**Fletcher:**

Through the process, I've learned a lot about accessibility and speech to text technology. And I've also improved my filmmaking and journalism game.

**Madison:**

One day my teacher just, he suddenly emailed me and was like, "Hey, Madison, listen, I have a great opportunity for you and it deals with making technology and gaming more accessible." And I of course, immediately agreed anyway, because I love gaming and I would love to see video games and everything become more accessible. Especially like the harder, like, graphic difficulty ones. And I just thought I might help people with it because there are so many gamers that can't play games because of their visual impairments, and I want to be able to help.

**Iliana:**

I thought that would be very exciting to work alongside someone who I knew to make sure our voices as the visually impaired community could be heard. I am always advocating for this community. And what better way to do this than by participating in a project that is geared towards advocating and speaking about the struggles and how we can improve these struggles for the visually impaired community.

**Liam:**

I spoke alongside Iliana about the struggles and just generally about being visually impaired. I thought it was really interesting and I haven't heard of people wanting to make gaming more accessible for people with disabilities, people who are visually impaired. So I wanted to be a part of it, because I thought this project was something very unique. One of the things that I wish people knew about accessibility was that it isn't easy to learn how to use. Coming from the person who actually needs the accessibility. They also think that some of these things, you just turn it on and you can use it. But come to realize that using stuff like screen readers, we don't just wake up learning how to use those things. It took Iliana years to learn how to use her Voiceover at 100%, even though she was born legally blind. And I think it's important that people have patience and when they have patience and understand that it's a learning process, they can better accommodate those who need accessibility. And I also like to agree with my peers. I think a lot of their points are very important. Accessibility is definitely not a choice. Like Ella said, without accessibility, the people who need accessibility options wouldn't be able to do very simple things like read a textbook or even find a street sign. So I think it's important that people understand it's not a choice. It's a necessity.

**Iliana:**

So I wish people knew that I'd like just how important it is for things to be accessible, to have a more deeper understanding of it. I also think it's important that they should take more input about accessibility from people who need the accessibility. It affects everyone very differently. So what they think might work for a certain group of people might not work for every group of people in this community. Everyone is different, and they should take some more input from the people who they are trying to help.

**Fletcher:**

I wanted to be a part of this project because I think it isn't very noticed, and I realize that a lot when I talk to people about that I'm doing it. And they really when I tell them about just speech to text technology, not all people know what that is. As a filmmaker, sort of something different that I've never done before and something more important in the role of society than I've ever done before.

**Liam:**

Gaming is a social thing, and I feel like if a lot of people can be involved in gaming, you can bring a lot of people together and just get more people to be exposed to your stuff.

**Madison:**

It will be very useful to have people on the team that are visually impaired or need accessibility, because then it can help one like not just the spectrum of what they assume because maybe they might be like, "they need larger text". Well, how large of a text? Maybe someone might need huge, huge text. And they don't, they don't make it that accessible for that. Or they might not put as much effort into the app to make it… They might make it accessible, but it might be a little bit wonky, because they didn't really think it through hard enough. So it will be way more convenient to have someone who has a visual impairment or has like a situation where they need accessibility. On video games though, I always find a way around everything. I will play it regardless! Even if I run into a tree, I will still play it. But I still have a lot of trouble with the graphics. Games like ARC and all those, too small of a text, and you can't make it any bigger and I have to strain my eyes just to read it, so I just it's too difficult to do that. Because it would be so much easier if like they can make everything a little slightly bigger. It's just really frustrating to have those situations and not be able to play a game because you might be really interested in it. Like Doom, I want to play Doom so badly. But I can't play it because it's too pretty and too fast paced. And I wish I could play it, but I wouldn't be able to because I probably wouldn't even be able to finish it because it would be too difficult. I love whenever I find a game that is accessible because then I can be like, “Oh, they got like color blindness settings and everything in one game.” They actually have voice acting most of the whole game, so I don't strain my eyes. And it also has a different color background kind of situation for the text so I can see better.

**Ella:**

All throughout both middle and high school so far, every semester I've had to go to all my new teachers and make it very clear to them that I need everything to be in an accessible format from day one. You can't like just not have it there for me already. Because, you know, I don't want to get behind and I want to be able to be like everyone else in the class and do all the activities and everything. And yet I've had to do a lot of teaching my teachers how they can, like, give me accessible materials. When it comes to accessibility, especially in like video games or any kind of like leisure activity, it's to me almost more important, you know, because that's where someone doesn't want to, like, be thinking about, like, I don't know, any problems outside of that, like, world that you're creating.

**Madison:**

For me in particular, that makes games more accessible will be like graphics can be like... For me in particular, if it's too realistic, it can be really difficult and I might run into a tree or something in the game. Or it might just be so difficult to navigate and you don't know where you're going. But if it's just normal drawing, maybe make the colors less dramatic and more smooth.

**Iliana:**

It's very discouraging when I find like a game or an app that I can use to read my books on and it's not as accessible as I’d wish it to be. Or sometimes I'll get apps that are based on like a website, and then those apps are not always accessible. But I think it's worse, when I found an app that was accessible and then it stopped being accessible for whatever reason. I think that's very discouraging because you know, it was a great thing. It was a tool that I used, and then I have to figure out a whole new way of doing whatever that task was. And I had to figure out a whole new way of doing things. Very discouraging to either not find them at all or find them, and then they become unusable.

**Ella:**

Last year I took the Macroeconomics AP test and it was just a whole ordeal and it would have been easily avoided if I just had like accessibility on that test. Luckily, I got a pretty good score still. It was just really stressful taking the test like that.

**Liam:**

Yeah, I just find it very ironic because I'm currently having some problems with the College Board because of my AP exam and the accessibility of that now that everything is online. And just that a lot of the people running those exams tend to not understand just the difficulty and what it means to actually use accessibility.

**Fletcher:**

And I hear Ella mentioned like AP U.S. History, which is a class that ironically I'm also taking right now. It's hard to get through that class myself. It's crazy how much reading and writing there is. But I don't think there should be it should be frowned upon, for if you need to have access to accessibility, that you shouldn't be able to take those classes.

**Iliana:**

So I actually just recently took the SATs last week, and we've been talking a lot about just technology on phones and iPads and electronic, but we also forget about the technology that is put on our papers like the braille or the tactile graphics, because those are very hard to do. Like the braille is easy enough if you've learned it, until they change the braille code, which was very frustrating. But even just the tactile graphics on charts and graphs or linear equations or a diagram. When I took the Living Environment Regents, I got really confused on a question because the diagram looked so odd to me. I didn't really understand what it was supposed to mean, and I had to get a description from the proctor. But we shouldn't need to rely on other people's descriptions for things. They should have more a better detailed description of the graph or find a way to make those tactile graphics look better because they're very important. That could be a make or break test grade for someone, and it's not accessible.

**Liam:**

So now basically I have to take my exam tomorrow without a screen reader because I have no idea how to use those screen readers that they're providing. And they don't really understand, or honestly, in my personal opinion, I don't think they really care that much. Because it's not easy to just turn on a screen reader you've never used before and then take a three and a half hour exam. That's just not easy to expect a kid to do that and tell them that they have to do that a week before the exam. They also expected my family to get our own reader for the exam, which during COVID, first of all, I don't know why they would do that. But also they don't take into consideration in the family situation. My mom is also visually impaired, so there's no way she can read to me my exam what she also cannot see well. And there are countless other people and families with children who have disabilities, who maybe don't speak English, who also have disabilities, or may not even be anyone in the house, or to be able to read to the child. So I think they don't take any of that into consideration.

**Madison:**

Whenever I was taking the test, it was just so difficult. I couldn't even like I would scroll down, go up. It was okay, I could still do it. But they only gave me like I think it was an hour for one test in particular, just to finish it. And I'm like, I did not have enough time at all. And they're like, well, we can't give you any more time. So I didn't even get the score I needed for my college that I wanted to go to. And I was only one point away and I was really upset because I could have gotten that point, but the timing didn't allow it.

**Iliana:**

But for the SATs, they would only allow you to use braille writers. So the difference is for those who don't know between a BrailleNote and a braille writer is a BrailleNote is more is a more tech... Like it's more Internet based sometimes. So it's a it's a slimmer kind of design and it has a lot more features. It's a smaller device than a braille writer. It does not require paper. Everything is just kind of a braille display. A braille writer is a very big chunky device. It's like one of those old fashioned typewriters, but probably a bit smaller. And instead of like typing with ink, it just types out dots. Imagine you have to like just have this giant machine that only takes in a paper that does about 25 lines, give or take a few lines. So for me to be able to write and take notes down would require a lot of paper switching and also a lot of lines, which I don't have. And that requires a lot of time to make sure I have the paper make sure that it's not getting jammed in the Braille writer. Make sure that I'm typing without any errors so that I don't make a mistake. That would just cause a lot of just stress.

**Fletcher:**

I think every person I interviewed said without me even bringing it up, that they wished the S.A.T. had more accessibility. One of the people that I interviewed reading every day for her AP literature class and wanted to switch to a more speech to text style thing. And she had experience using apps like Audible, which I found a lot of people find super helpful to them. And if they were just able to download that or even permitted to download that, to use it for their class, it would have made it way easier. But they weren't.

**END**