

## K-12 BRIEF DISTRICT PILOT

# DOTHON CITY SCHOOLS

Dothan City Schools is well on the way to achieving an ambitious five-year mission to meet or exceed Alabama 2020 Learning Goals. Even with year-over-year improvements in reading, the district continues to look for opportunities to do more to equip all students for academic and career challenges ahead.

### THE CHALLENGE

While Dothan City Schools scores among the top districts for reading proficiency in the state, the leadership team wanted to move the needle on low-performing students who struggle with reading. Teresa Davis, Director of Curriculum for Dothan City Schools, was searching for reading intervention tools for English Learners and Tier II students who scored below level for reading on the ACT-Aspire state tests for Alabama. "We wanted to challenge our students in a positive way," says Davis. "We were hoping to see them push ahead and improve their comprehension skills."

*"The way the program scaffolds from easier to more challenging activities is really effective. Students couldn't wait to get their iPads to work in BrightFish."*

Teresa Davis, Director of Curriculum  
Dothan City Schools

### THE STRATEGY

In their third year of a successful 1:1 device strategy, Dothan City Schools was ready to expand their use of digital tools for reading intervention. In BrightFish Reading, Davis saw a clear fit for their reading initiatives in elementary and middle schools. "Based on the way that BrightFish Reading builds understanding of how words are used – from word recognition to vocabulary usage and meaning – I could see immediately how it would help our students," says Davis.

"I struggled with reading as a child, so I really responded to the scaffolded approach to learning how to comprehend text and get knowledge from other content areas as I'm reading."

To establish local best practices for BrightFish Reading in the district, Davis decided to start relatively small with selected classes in eight elementary and two middle schools. The pilot would run from December 2016 to May 2017.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Here are a few quick facts about Dothan City Schools:

- Approximately 9,336 students
- 17 campuses: 11 elementary schools, four middle schools and two high schools
- Student demographics: 60% African American, 35% White, 3% Hispanic, and 2% other
- Strategy: Implementing five-year plan to meet or exceed Alabama 2020 Learning Goals
- Schools participating in 2016-17 pilot of BrightFish Reading: 8 elementary, 2 middle schools



BrightFishLearning

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## THE SETTING

The BrightFish Reading pilot kicked off in early December 2016. Lead teachers for each campus attended a half-day training session to learn the program's instructional design and get hands-on experience with the Teacher Dashboard tools for class management.

During the five-month pilot, 324 students in grades 2 to 8 used the program in weekly sessions. The largest grouping was in 3rd grade, comprising 38 percent of students using the program in the district.

Students accessed BrightFish Reading on iPads or laptops in classroom and lab settings and were encouraged to continue their work whenever they had downtime. Many students logged in from home. The goal was for students to get between 30 and 60 minutes per week in the program.

## THE RESULTS

Almost immediately, teachers started seeing growth in their students' excitement levels about reading and in their understanding of how to approach text. Fiction and nonfiction passages are assigned to grade bands based on Lexile® measures and broken down to word level. Students then "build" the passage up while they master word recognition, vocabulary and comprehension activities. "The way the program scaffolds from easier to more challenging activities is really effective," says Davis. "Students couldn't wait to get their iPads to work in BrightFish Reading."

In a year-end survey about BrightFish Reading, teachers in Dothan City Schools cited student engagement and excitement for reading as areas of significant impact for their students, along with improved fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills. Teachers felt that the program was a great motivator for their students and increased their desire to spend time reading.

Says Nikki Burns, reading specialist at Morris Slingluff Elementary, "Kids were eager to come to my class to work on their BrightFish stories. My office walls are full of their certificates."

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Based on the positive results from the 2016-17 pilot, Dothan City Schools is expanding the program into more elementary and middle schools, and adding Chromebooks for older students. In addition, the district will partner with BrightFish Learning on a year-long research study to measure the effectiveness of BrightFish Reading on improving ACT-Aspire reading scores for 3rd and 4th grade students.

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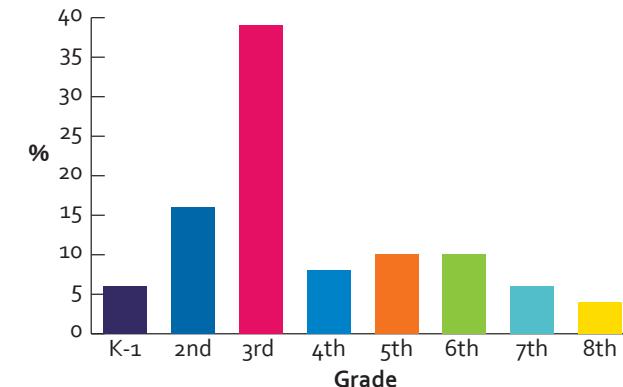
Nikki Burns, reading specialist at Morris Slingluff Elementary



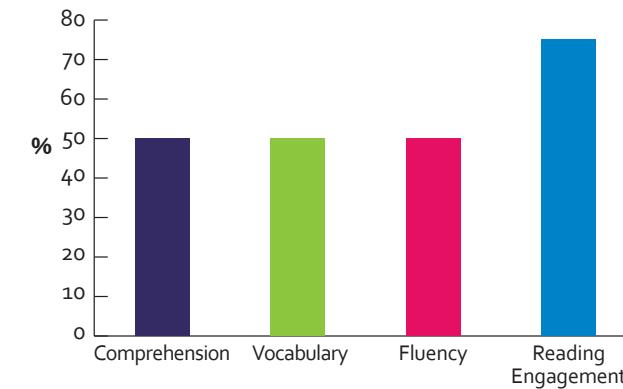
## BRIGHTFISH READING PILOT: 2016-17 SCHOOL YEAR

During the pilot, 324 students in grades 2-8 used BrightFish Reading, with almost 40% of pilot participants in 3rd grade. Teachers reported seeing improvements in comprehension, vocabulary, fluency and reading engagement.

### Grade-level Usage



### Areas of Improvement – Teacher Survey



Try BrightFish Reading for 14 days!  
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