

▶ BrightArrow® Digital Voice Dialer

Interview with Cocke County Schools, 2011

In 2009, many schools in the Cocke County School System of eastern Tennessee started using Digital Voice Dialer. By 2010, Cocke County Schools acquired the BrightArrow system-wide for its eleven schools.

The schools in Cocke County use the BrightArrow system for communications to parents and staff. As Gary Holt says: *"Our parents are very, very pleased with the system. I had a family say that they think this is the best thing we have done in parent involvement in a long time."* He adds, *"BrightArrow has really helped our school system this year. The price is very good compared to other companies."*

According to Nathan Bugg, Assistant Principal of Parrottsville Elementary: *"It's so easy to use; I love it!"*

Wilbur West, Instructional Supervisor, goes on to say: *"I am a firm believer in it and I think it certainly has been a great asset to our school system this year."*

For a full transcript of the interviews and Cocke County Schools contact information, reach us at 800-649-9660 or Sales@BrightArrow.com.



Manney Moore, Director Cocke County School System, Newport, TN

"It has worked really well. I've used the BrightArrow system to welcome our students back to school. We called every student that we had in the system to welcome them back and wish them a successful school year. I've used it to wish all of our employees Christmas greetings. We've used it quite a bit throughout this winter; I am looking out the window right now and it is snowing. This winter we've used it to communicate when we are going to be closing school, or starting late, or when the office would be opened or closed, or things of that nature.

"It's been easy to use. I'll do my recording and it calls everybody quickly. It's pretty simple.

"Another way we use it is like today — we are dismissing at 1 o'clock. The schools normally call their parents, but we will sometimes make a call system-wide to all of our students' parents. This is not a snow dismissal, this is a regular scheduled early dismissal, so we'll often-times make a call to make people aware so they do not leave their children here.

"The BrightArrow system has been easy to work with and beneficial to us. It's been good to work with. We will probably find many more uses when it is all said and done."

Gary Holt, Parent Involvement Coordinator

"One of the things that was important is that the cost was better than anything we encountered before. In fact, when the other companies called, I just didn't get back to them because I knew their price was too expensive.

"We use it in so many ways. We have used it to call students about their school shots and immunization records. The central office uses it religiously whenever we have weather issues. Every day, our high schools use it to make calls about their children being absent that

▶ MANNEY MOORE, SCHOOL SYSTEM DIRECTOR

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OVERVIEW

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Gary Holt, Parent Involvement Coordinator (continued from Page 1)

day. They call also when report cards go home just to let parents know they're coming. We make calls about parent programs that may be taking place at the school. Just any communication that we need to get out there we have found that BrightArrow is just what the doctor ordered.

"I haven't heard anything but positive comments about the BrightArrow system. I believe that good communications are essential to increase parent involvement and the BrightArrow system plays a major part in our parent involvement strategy. This has been the single best thing that I have recommended for our school system to do to improve communications with our parents. It has been a great success, and parents absolutely appreciate it. In particular, it demonstrates what good communications can do for schools. Our principals and teachers are also very appreciative of the automated calling system.

"And for the parents... One of the secretaries at one of our schools told me a few days ago that one of the parents came in and said "I didn't get a call" and another parent said "I got my call, and I loved it." Well, the first parent didn't get the call because their phone number was not correct. That parent basically said, "Let me give you my new phone number right now!"

"We've used it for goodwill measures. Our director had used it before Christmas to send a message to all the employees - everybody from the principals down to the cafeteria workers, the bus drivers, everybody. Encompassing every employee in the county got a message from our director wishing them a Merry Christmas. The employees really, really appreciated him doing that because it let them know that he really cared about them, and they had a good vacation.

"Some schools use it for substitutes. I know one school in particular who uses it for substitutes every day.

"No matter where I'm at, if I have access to the Internet, I can send a message. That is so important. I've sent messages from my daughter's house and she lives the next county over. Being Internet-based is huge for us.

"If I go to a school to show a teacher or a principal how to use the system, 30 minutes is probably more than enough time. Before we started using it county-wide, our high school band was buying a different product. Upon

using the BrightArrow system, they dropped their prior product. I found that their prior system would repeat messages three or four times. I asked, 'why are you doing that?' They said, 'well, it doesn't always recognize the answering machine so I am saying it three or four times so it had time to wait through the greeting.' I said 'You don't have to do that. With BrightArrow, it recognizes the answering machine and it will wait until it is ready to go and leave the message.' He didn't believe that. He was used to that technology in the phone system he was using. So he got a better system and it he no longer has to pay for it.

"As for BrightArrow customer service, Ohhh!! I was just telling one of our supervisors this morning that you always do everything that you can to make sure we are well taken care of, quickly. The response time is excellent. Couldn't ask for better. Really. I don't know how it could be any better. I'll just be honest - when we first started and I didn't know you, I was apprehensive about whether if I had a problem, would you get back to me in a day or two or a week, or would you be customer-service friendly. I found all those fears to be unjustified, and that you have more than satisfied and kept us happy as customers.

"It really interfaces with (the Tennessee SIS) STAR Student very, very well. That has really saved us.

"BrightArrow has really helped our school system this year. The price is very good compared to companies I spoke to before we chose BrightArrow. Their system does not offer anything better for the higher price. The next year or two, the purse strings at most school systems are getting tighter. The pool of money is shrinking, and states are financially strapped. I think as we go down the road, the value of your system will be greater because you are competitive with the price.

"Our parents are very, very pleased with the system. It's a great addition. I had a family say that this is the best thing we have done in parent involvement in a long time.

"This is a great tool, not only for parents, but also for the employees. We look at it as parent involvement, and it is, and that's the primary function for it, but also by the same reasoning, the cafeteria workers, our bus drivers, all of the staff, of course the teachers, they all see benefit from the system.

"To reach out to people, using the system is very fast. I mean, it's amazing how quickly you can contact a large number of people."



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Nathan Bugg, Asst Principal Parrottsville Elementary

"Before using BrightArrow, we left it up to the parents to hear announcements on the radio and TV. We still had a lot of kids showing up whenever we would had a snow day. Now everybody knows all at once.

"We first were just wanting to have people know whenever we were out of school. And it kind of snowballed from there. Our first grade teachers wanted me to send home, just the other day, announcements about 'Read Across America,' and how it was Dr. Seuss's birthday, and they could dress up for whacky Wednesday. The teachers really like it.

"Another thing that we have really enjoyed is to let some of our kids be really creative with it. Our 5th and 8th grade students have to do the writing assessment for the state of Tennessee, and our teachers are always coming up with different things they can write about. So I went to the 5th and 8th grade teachers and said, 'Hey, if you all would let them get creative for this, have your students write something for me to read. If we are having no school, or if we are going to be let out early, ask them to write a message about that.' We had one that was a rap, and I had to sing it. The parents really loved that, and the kids really liked it as well to be able to hear their creative message. It was something different – it was a nice change from the 'This is Mr. Bugg calling to cancel school' messages. Now the parents enjoy wondering 'what is he going to do next?' because we've missed quite a few days this winter.

"As far as BrightArrow customer service, from the time I call you all, everything has been straight to the point and you have been very helpful. It's not like I've been down for 48 hours trying to get in touch with you all to get things dealt with.

"If another school system asked me about the system I would say 'Do it.' The cost is very worthy. It is worth what it cost. It is concise, to the point. You get in, get out, and everybody gets the call.

"I can sum it up: It is easy to use and user-friendly. I am very satisfied."

Eddie Surber, Title I Director

"When we purchased your system, what we basically wanted to do was to make parents aware of things that were happening in our school system. For instance, each year we have parent involvement nights that start usually in the springtime. That is a federal regulation that we have to have annual parents meetings. Our schools are using the BrightArrow system to notify parents of the meetings. We just call out and leave them a message that the meeting is taking place.

"In the past, we always did flyers or a letter to parents but sometimes that depended on whether or not the kids carried them home. Now with the dialing system, we just call and make parents aware of the meeting. That is one thing we wanted to do, increase our parent involvement. This year that we have had more people turning out to meetings than in the past.

"Well, of course, we also have the parent involvement committee to our council, as well as other committees, and again they can be notified this way for meetings and announcements. It is a good communication tool.

"Most of the principals and parents are pleased that they are getting the calls, and being told about events and activities. It gives them the ability to actually make plans for things because some of them, if they work, have to make plans for their kids to go somewhere or stay with someone.

"For our school system, BrightArrow is a good value, really good. It cost us around \$1/student. Most of the things we have to deal with, like tests, it's a big per student expenditure, so this is pretty reasonable. I've heard several principals comments that they appreciate it as something that was very beneficial to them.

"The BrightArrow system is a very good system, and if you really are intent on getting information out to parents, or anybody as far as that is concerned, but parents particularly, that it would be money well spent. It's been extremely helpful to us."

NATHAN BUGG, PARROTTSVILLE ELEMENTARY

EDDIE SURBER, TITLE I DIRECTOR



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Betty Jo Miller, Parent

BETTY JO MILLER, PARENT

"Before the BrightArrow system, you either had to call the school yourself and ask what is happening, or go to the school Web-site if they posted on the Web-site. Or we'd hear it on the radio. If the school's closing early due to weather or other reasons, we'd listen to the radio, or call other parents, or something like that. It was usually word of mouth.

"BrightArrow makes things much better as far as that goes. If the school closes early due to weather, or if there is an upcoming break, some parents probably don't look at the school calendar when there's spring break or short days or things like that. Getting the calls are great!! It actually calls your home, you get the recording on your answering machine, and you are up-to-date – up to the minute.

"Our son is a car rider – he doesn't ride a bus. It is very helpful for me as a car riding parent to know when school will be out so I can plan accordingly. It just makes things a lot easier. I know when I need to be there and so forth. It makes things a lot easier to plan."

Wilbur West, Instructional Supervisor

"Before BrightArrow, we used telephone primarily. Of course we got out notices to TV stations and local radio stations. We're talking in terms of inclement weather; that is where I am coming from right now.

"The speed of the BrightArrow system is just amazing—how rapidly we can get notices out to all the employees. I am speaking of teachers, cooks, aides, custodians, etc. If we are not going to have to have school because of inclement weather, then about 5:45am we receive an automated call to inform us that there is no school in the

WILBUR WEST, INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISOR

Cocke County school system. And, of course, that message goes out almost instantaneously to every employee, and it saves an enormous amount of time. The speed of it is just uncanny, really.

"I think the speed of it is of primary essence because we have buses that are on the road maybe a little before 6 o'clock. We have parents who leave early to go to their jobs, so maybe they have to be there at 7 o'clock. From that standpoint they know early on, much more rapidly than what we able to do before we got the BrightArrow system, that school was not in session. That has certainly been well received by the community and the parents and the school personnel as well.

"We use it to get notices to our various personnel, for example, textbook committee meetings, if we have a parent advisory board committee meeting, maybe there are curriculum meetings where we are discussing making changes in pacing guides or things like that. It's a rapid way of communicating to our folks and letting them know when the meetings have been scheduled, rather than trying to reach them on the telephone or send something to them on the fax machine, it's much faster.

"I have not heard any criticisms. As a matter of fact, everybody is very complimentary that word gets out early in the morning with regards to school being in session or not, and also if we have meetings scheduled. It is a very rapid way of communicating. In this day and age, everybody is very pleased that we have the speed we do to get the messages out.

"When talking to other school systems, my recommendation is that, by all means, if their budget would allow, go for it. I don't think they can go wrong. I'm totally sold on it myself."

I am a firm believer in it and I think it certainly has been a great asset to our school system this year.



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