

▶ BrightArrow® Digital Voice Dialer

Interview with Franklin County Schools, 2011

In 2009, Franklin County Schools in north-central North Carolina started using BrightArrow's Digital Voice Dialer for its 15 schools.

Its schools use the BrightArrow system daily for attendance calls, announcements, report cards, weather delays/cancellations, and a wide variety of other notifications.

As Joy Mylin of the transportation department points out, *"BrightArrow is extremely easy and very flexible. It's a great system."*

Linda Girton of Bunn High School adds, *"On a scale of 1 to 10? BrightArrow's customer service is a 10."*

CTO Christopher Shearer concludes: *"It works, and it's priced right. If you're looking for a program that is going to provide reliable calling to parents and staff members ...that has a clean, easy-to-learn interface ...and if you are looking for something that is definitely budget-friendly, then BrightArrow is an easy choice for you compared to everything else out there."*

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



Christopher Shearer, Chief Technology Officer

"When selecting a new notification system, we needed a better way to contact the homes of students because our parent participation in so many areas was really, really low. We would have a PTA meeting and we would have zero parents show up. We'd have a family reading night or a picnic day with the parents being invited to come to the school and participate, and we'd get only a handful of around twenty parents.

"We wanted a system for attendance, but also as a mass notifier to send out PTA meeting reminders, back to school night announcements, report card pickups, and similar types of things. Our prior system was too unreliable for all of these purposes. When we started looking for an alternative, cost was the most important factor, but we looked at what kind of functionality it had, and that it was reliable. BrightArrow was the clear choice.

"One thing that the school principals really like is the ability to call in from a mobile phone or a home phone to record a message in case of any type of inclement weather; when they cannot make it into the school, they can call in to send a call out. We wanted to increase our communication, and BrightArrow gave us all that.

"We like the consistency of using it every day reliably for attendance, and also being able to use it for PTA, board meetings and those kinds of events, as well as carnivals, report card pickups, and a variety of different things. In these days of Twitters and microblogs, our Public Information Officer, Joe, has a texting signup sheet on his web page for inclement notices or any of these other notices so people can add their phone number to receive the text. That is a huge benefit for us.

OVERVIEW

CHRISTOPHER SHEARER, CTO



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Christopher Shearer, CTO (cont.)

"Regarding reliability, there is no comparison to prior products we have used. BrightArrow always works. The reliability is something that our people cannot believe. The schools know that they really can rely on BrightArrow getting those calls through. They had no confidence in the previous product – even through it said calls were made, sometimes those calls really did not go out. With BrightArrow, they are confident that the calls go out and the parents get them. They are really pleased with it.

"The reliability is second to none. I've talked to other districts who have used other products, and BrightArrow's reliability is as good as the products that cost them 2x to 4x more. Getting the same reliability at a much lower price is definitely great in these times.

"When I talked to the parent involvement group, one of the biggest things they told me they liked is that when divorced parents are both active in the child's life, they both get the message at the same time. It's not like when you send a letter home in a kid's backpack, because then only one parent sees it. They get the same information at the same time, whether it be for inclement weather, any kind of conference, or events for the school. They also like BrightArrow because the audio quality is better than what we were used to – they can hear all of the message. With our prior system, sometimes the messages were garbled or would be missing the first ten seconds. With BrightArrow, all of the messages play in their entirety and they are very clear. Our parents definitely appreciate that.

"Our staff really likes the ease of use. The schools have their attendance messages set up to go fast each day. And they do the other messages quickly too. It's only a few button clicks – the fewer button the better for them. The interface is clean, intuitive; they are very happy.

"As an example of how easy it is to use, I just gave some training recently to a new principal. I easily showed him the basics in 4 or 5 steps, and had him send a test message. He was able to go back to his school and send out a real message. It's very powerful, but the interface is very simple, and we have shown a variety of folks how to use it. We have secretaries using it; we have directors and non-technical folks who can easily sign in, look at reports, set up messages, without training. We ask them if they need training, and they say 'Nope. We got everything. Everything's good.' That's a great thing, when you can have a powerful tool that is simple to use.

"Something I want to go on record about is that you and your staff listen to suggestions for improvements. You all implement things quickly. Those few times we have needed to call you, we were taken care of right away. A company can have a great product, but if they don't have folks there to support you, it often doesn't go well. We have had great support with BrightArrow.

"It works, and it's priced right. I would say that if you're looking for a program that is going to provide reliable calling to parents and staff members, for personnel issues, for event issues, or attendance, if you are looking for something that has a clean, easy-to-learn interface, you are looking to be supported by technical staff who can really troubleshoot problems, and if you are looking for something that is definitely budget-friendly, then the BrightArrow is an easy choice for you compared to everything else out there."

Joe Baisley, Public Information Officer

"I probably use the texting feature the most. I use it for inclement weather if we have a school cancellation or delay, I send a text message out, and what I do is, beforehand I have people go on our Web site and register their phone number to load into BrightArrow. They really love that feature.

"It is very simple and we haven't had any issues at all. We haven't had any complaints at all. I have used the phone message too, for example, where the water wasn't working and I let the parents know. I really like that a lot.

"Parents really like it. They like the personal touch.

"I came from a school district that used another system and we didn't have the texting feature, and that was one of the major things that people wanted, and I find that since I've been here at Franklin County the BrightArrow system has really been a lifesaver for that. I appreciate the ease-of-use, and when we need help, you guys are really quick if we have questions. We are very satisfied. I definitely recommend it. That's for sure. Especially that personal feel.

"We are really pleased. I've only been here since September, but I am really pleased with you guys."



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Linda Girton, Bunn High School

"We absolutely love it. We really, really do. The principals are impressed and really like using the computer-generated voice because it is so specific. If you are recording your voice, sometimes it is not as detailed and specific. When you type it, the principal doesn't need multiple tries to do recordings to get it to sound like she wants. She just types what she wants and the BrightArrow system speaks it to the parents.

"We really like it when we set up parent meetings or do a mass calling for report cards or anything like that. I go to the last page on the reports, to the diagram that shows the number of calls successful and the retries. As a matter of fact my counselor, a few minutes ago, asked if I sent a particular message out this past weekend. I said, sure thing and I just printed it out for her. She said 'oh - and that's nice' - I like that because it relays to the administrators that had set it up that it went out and gives them the results. We love that feature too.

"We do the attendance call every day. We send out a mass message every 15 days about the progress reports issued to let the parents know that their child received a progress report. And we notify them that report cards have gone home. If we have, like, an Open House, we use it to call the parents to let them know. It's so quick. For attendance calls, I get it set up and going out in less than three minutes. It's that quick for me.

"The front office really likes it. When I showed my Assistant Principal what to do from home for calling the bus drivers during bad weather, he found it to be very easy. I said, 'This is your login; the only thing you need to do is hit the pre-schedule or call now' - he typed the message in, pressed call now, and it called. I spent 5 minutes with him to show him what he needed to do from home, it was that easy and quick.

"It's much more reliable than any prior system we have used. It's very reliable. The prior one I had - we never knew, after we set something to go out, if it was ever going to go out. I've got to say the reliability of BrightArrow is 100%. Much better than what we were using.

"On a scale of 1 to 10? BrightArrow's customer service is a 10. I run a lot of different components, and I wish I could get that kind of service from other companies. I don't have anything negative to say about the system. I really like it. And it's really, really fast."



Joy Mylin, Transportation

"In transportation, we love the program. We use it to notify bus drivers of inclement weather, delays or closings. Our Director prefers to do it by phone because he's out on the road checking road conditions. He can call in, and of course I keep the list updated in the computer, which only takes just a couple of minutes. It is wonderful; we love the program.

"Before BrightArrow, we had a phone tree. We would divide the list between 3 people, but when you are calling somebody at 3 o'clock in the morning to tell them that school's closed, they may not answer their phone. You need to try all of the numbers they have. Just having a system that will dial all the numbers so quickly is wonderful. When I used to wake up in the middle of the night to make all those calls and say the same thing over and over, I could not get back to sleep when I was finished. With BrightArrow, it's just one call - it's a very practical tool, and we enjoy it.

"It's very, very easy. I don't have to refer to my instructions except to remember my password. It's very easy once a list is set up - even setting up a list is very easy. Training another user takes probably 5 minutes. It's very simple. I just appreciate you have a great system, it's easy to use. We're very happy.

"I would highly recommend BrightArrow. With our prior system, we were extremely disappointed. For several months we had to go back to the old fashioned way of using our phone tree and we were very happy when BrightArrow was available. I think the district is too large and has too many people to call to ever do it the old way again, particularly now that people have home numbers, cell phones, other numbers, and texting."

LINDA GIRTON, BUNN HIGH SCHOOL

JOY MYLIN, TRANSPORTATION



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