

▶ BrightArrow® Digital Voice Dialer

Interview with Beardsley School District, 2011

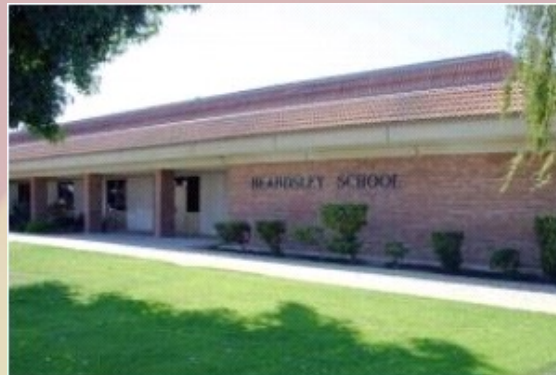
In 2010, the Beardsley School District in Bakersfield, California selected and started using BrightArrow's Digital Voice Dialer for all of its schools.

The schools use the BrightArrow system for automated attendance calls, for fog delays that are common in that part of California, and for a large variety of other meeting reminders and announcements.

As Aimee Williamson, Principal of North Beardsley Elementary says, "I absolutely love our BrightArrow system. In all honesty, I don't know how I lived without it before." She goes on to say, "The attendance part has greatly reduced my gals' work in the office." She also emphasizes, "It is soooo easy, and I am not a techy person."

Kevin Williams, Principal at Beardsley Elementary School adds: "I've been extremely happy with BrightArrow... It is easy; I know what works for us, and BrightArrow was the way to go."

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



Kevin Williams, Principal, Beardsley Elementary School

"When selecting a notification system, my objective was that I needed a way to contact the homes of students because our parent participation in so many areas of the school was really, really low. We would have a PTC meeting and we would have zero parents show up. We would send out notes, send out newsletters, and we'd have a school marquee out in the front, and we'd get zero parents attending. 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.

"That was my goal, so I really had not thought about attendance advantages until I spoke with you first time on that conference call from the district office. The light bulb just went on when I realized how much time it will save the secretaries.

"The BrightArrow system saves a lot of time. We have about 350 students, and on average we have about 20 kids per day who are absent. The secretaries now, instead of making 20 calls, they might make two for special situations.

"But of course the participation rate of the parents was my goal to start with. Since we have started using the system, I would say in certain areas it is probably tripled. The nicest things is the comments that we hear from the parents thanking us that we really care about communicating with them.

The BrightArrow system is just really been slick. It's worked out well; every district has its little quirks, and our superintendent is cautious to embrace new technologies. That being said, he thinks BrightArrow is a great addition. If the system can make him feel like that, then it's has been very successful here."

OVERVIEW

KEVIN WILLIAMS, PRINCIPAL



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Kevin Williams (continued)

"We have used it several times for a fog delay. In the central valley in California we get fog all the time, and some places a lot more than others. The ability to be able to do an all-inclusive district call, as opposed to the separate schools, is really nice.

"The technology know-how of the users in our district is very, very low. When I was training one of our low-tech principals, it took me probably less than 10 minutes to show him how to work the system for his school. He left my office after 10-15 minutes – he was confident he could do it. My mouth just dropped, 'Really, you're going to go back and use it?' He said 'Oh, yeah!' For a guy who could hardly use e-mail, that's a big compliment. He uses it all the time now.

"BrightArrow's customer service is very good. In contrast, back when we had a computer lab of Macintoshes, when a computer would go down we would stay on the phone waiting to talk to a person for over two hours. That was as frustrating as ever. But when we call BrightArrow, I never got a message or wait – someone always answers the phone. Whoever answers either talks me through the issue immediately, or if it was something that was not immediately rectifiable, will say, "let me look into it, let me call you right back," and I get that phone call. I really appreciate the ability to talk to a live person immediately. It's really nice.

"We started looking for a dialing system almost a year and a half ago. I looked online, which is where I found your system. I had basically shot e-mails off and made telephone calls, and tried to get prices. The BrightArrow system is very competitive; once we made the phone call with you, our search stopped. We found the right solution, so we stayed right there. I saw the others, and it seemed like with some of the other dialing systems I was talking more to a salesperson than someone where it was really their system. When I talked to you, it's like "it's mine"; you knew the system inside-out. With the other groups, it wasn't like that.

"Our tech person, Jill, hasn't had any issues at all. She's not afraid to say if something isn't working right for her, and I have not heard anything about BrightArrow. The integration with PowerSchool, which is what we are using, went surprisingly well because for some reason PowerSchool is not a friendly match to a lot of other programs. But it seems to be blending right in with your system.

"I've been extremely happy with BrightArrow. I would definitely tell anybody who asks to check it out and give you a phone call because you are not high pressure – it's almost a common sense approach. You explain that this is what our system does; this is what it costs. And that one day you walked us right through an online demo on a conference, and you showed how to use the system. It is easy; I know what works for us, and BrightArrow was the way to go.

"I know when we started using it, it did create a lot of excitement. The principals and staff members are just on Cloud 9 about the system. We use it for every single meeting they have. Our attendance secretary has told me that 'this is the greatest.' I guess the excitement level is a nice thing too."

Terri Chamberlin, Principal, San Lauren Elementary School

"We use the BrightArrow system for our attendance as one of its main purposes. When students are marked absent, then it takes the list and does an all call to the parents telling them to call back with a reason for the absence. This truly has saved a lot of time for our secretaries.

"It saves us a bunch of time because we no longer have to call each of the individual parents. The BrightArrow system calls the parents automatically, and then they call back to our office with the reason for the absence. Our secretary then prints out the calling report, which gives her verification that the parent has been called.

"The other way we have used it is that we have had some fog delays. As soon as I find out there's a fog delay, I will record a message and it goes out to all of the parents. That's been helpful because then we don't have a bazillion calls in the morning asking 'is there a fog delay?'

"And then we have the new whooping cough immunization that is required by law, so we are sending that notification out to the 6th grade students. We have also used it for reminding parents of minimum days when we have a minimum, or shortened, day the next day. We have used it as reminders for vacations too.

"When we use it for fog delays, parents really like getting those calls because then they didn't have to listen to TV news or radio for fog delays. "



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▶ Interview with Beardsley School District, Page 3

Aimee Williamson, Principal, North Beardsley Elementary School

"I absolutely love our BrightArrow system. In all honesty, I don't know how I lived without it before. The attendance part has greatly reduced my gals' work in the office. We have so many kids out every day, and our parents tended not to call in. It has cut down the initial calls we have to make ten-fold. We got a lot of 'we never got that notice' complaints, so the feature of being able to print out the report that the message was left has come in, oh, so handy for me.

"I use it for the School Site Council, and our ELAC (English Language Advisory Committee) meetings – I have created separate lists for all the members of the parent-teacher club, and for all of the individual meetings for which we send our numerous reminders.

"Our meeting attendances are a lot higher. With some meetings, like our ELAC, I do the message in English and have my secretary do the message in Spanish. We now have proof when we are asked 'are you preparing the parents,' or 'are you letting the parents know?' I love it, and our turn out has been so much better for meetings.

"I use it a lot, too, for just little things. For example, we've had some parents dropping students off early. They aren't supposed to be on campus until 7:15, but we had some students arriving at 6:45 in the morning. I sent out a mass message to the whole school reminding them of the times that there is supervision and the times that they are allowed to be here. For announcements like this, the cost and labor involved in creating a letter and mailing it home makes no sense. It's fast and easy to send out a brief reminder by telephone to everybody. We've been using it for a lot of things like that too.

"We save about an hour and a half per day on the attendance calls we do not have to make anymore. Sometimes we have seven pages of people absent. Our secretaries are really thrilled with the system. I mean, it's gone down to where they maybe have to make six phone calls a day, rather than 70.

"The staff members love it for getting reminders. When

there is fog, everybody likes to get calls to announce the fog delays because I do it from my house first thing in the morning. The calls save parents from getting up to watch the news, look on the Internet, call the school, or arrive to a closed school. Yeah, our parents really enjoy it. Especially our parents who are sitting on the School Site council and my parents-teacher club. They often say 'Oh that thing is so great' because for meetings we usually send it out a week in advance and then send it out the night before. The first is to plan, and the second to remind them.

"It's a great way to communicate with the parents, and the other thing that I like about it, is that sometimes parents will tend to see the school phone number and not pick up, and it leaves the message so at least they end up listening to the message. They'll always get that message."

"It is soooo easy, and I am not a techy person. Kevin is the techy in our district. As an example, my automated sign that we have out front took me forever to figure out how to use. When we were starting BrightArrow, Kevin said, 'You can do this fine. Aimee, I promise you can do this.' And it was so easy, so easy.

"I like the ability to print those reports. To me, it's just that extra little way to have the accountability that schools need nowadays. Especially when we are going through program reviews and things like that, and they're wanting to know about parent participation and say 'what are you doing to making sure that parents are getting notification?' I love it because it's a tangible proof report that we are making that effort.

"As far as integration with our PowerSchool student data, I haven't had any problems with the attendance or the phone numbers that the school calls. I created the list myself for the school council and ELAC. It's been really easy to use.

"It does exactly what I need, so I do not have any recommendations for changes to the system, and I have never had to call your customer service.

"I would recommend to any other school that is considering a dialing system to get BrightArrow system immediately because it saves not only time, but it saves money. I mean, seriously, I don't really know how I did these things without it before."



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