

# CASE STUDY

## After Efforts to Improve Fluency and Comprehension Prove Unsuccessful, Iowa District Tests New Approach

### A Study at Prairie Point Middle School and Ninth Grade Academy Helps Identify Students Struggling with Literacy Skills and Illustrates Promising Improvement

With a graduation rate of 95%, the College Community School District in Iowa—home of Prairie Point Middle School and Ninth Grade Academy—has much to be proud of. Many of their educators hold master’s degrees, and the district is committed to personalized learning.

Even with the high graduation rate, the district still had obstacles they were determined to overcome. Despite the use of a variety of interventions, some students continued to struggle to reach reading proficiency. District principals and teachers set out to identify the ‘missing link’ for these students who continued to have difficulty and decided to try a new approach.



During the 2019 – 2020 school year, the district implemented *WordFlight* to evaluate and address the needs of students in sixth through ninth grade whose reading fluency and comprehension were not at grade level. While the district’s overall success rate was high, administration knew there were still students who could benefit from additional intervention before high school.

Prairie Point Middle School administrators committed to test the hypothesis that significant improvement in foundational skills – decoding and automatic word recognition using *WordFlight* – would help their students become more fluent readers.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF WORDFLIGHT

The goal of the implementation was to identify which students had deficits in foundational skills and help these students reach proficiency in fluency by addressing these precursory skills.

*WordFlight* (formerly the Foundations Learning System), is an online literacy solution designed to attack gaps in literacy knowledge and skills in a way that directly targets the development of automatic word recognition – a key precursor to fluency. *WordFlight* includes a powerful diagnostic to help identify exactly where problems lie. The *WordFlight Instructional Program* provides personalized, adaptive instruction that prepares each student to automatically use foundational skills resulting in fluency, and ultimately, reading comprehension. *WordFlight's* combination of screening, assessment, and instruction uniquely addresses development of decoding knowledge, automatic word recognition, and the generalization of skills. *WordFlight* has been proven effective for persistently struggling readers, special needs students, English language learners, and students who learn differently.

The project included selected students based on their needs as struggling readers and whose performance on the *WordFlight Screener* suggested they likely had gaps in foundational reading skills. The group included:

- English learners (EL)
- Special education students
- Students with 504 plans

The selected students were to be tested three times for decoding and automatic word recognition skills using the *WordFlight Diagnostic*:

1. Before initiation of the *WordFlight Instructional Program*
2. At the mid-point of the curriculum; and
3. At the end of the curriculum or the school year, whichever occurred first.



# WORDFLIGHT: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR FLUENCY



*WordFlight* does not stop at mastery of foundational skills. It is designed to enhance the ability to automatically apply those skills to new words and in new contexts. The power of *WordFlight's Diagnostic* allows districts to understand the 'missing link' between phonics and fluency – automatic word recognition. *WordFlight* is specifically designed to help students become more automatic so they can quickly generalize and flexibly apply what they have learned to new words and contexts.

## THE POWER OF THE DIAGNOSTIC - THE ONLY VALIDATED MEASURE OF AUTOMATIC WORD RECOGNITION

The patented *WordFlight Diagnostic* reveals important information the district would not otherwise know. *WordFlight* uniquely identifies and illuminates why students struggle to achieve fluency. Educators have immediate insight when they view student profiles showing gaps in decoding and automatic word recognition skills. The Diagnostic for middle schoolers is validated against the Woodcock Johnson and Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment, providing scaled scores for decoding and automatic word recognition on a 600-point scale.

***WordFlight* is the only patented and operational measurement of Automatic Word Recognition available today, which helps districts determine if students can apply their knowledge of foundational skills. The diagnostic tools and ongoing assessment within *WordFlight* illuminate what struggling students need to move to fluency and beyond.**

## IMPRESSIVE IMPROVEMENT WITH WORDFLIGHT

At College Community School District, the study revealed significant, positive change with their students who used *WordFlight*, which impressed administrators. Significant gains were made by at-risk students, and all students made substantial improvement in both decoding and word recognition.

The project was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March 2020. When school was dismissed and remote learning was the norm for the rest of the school year, students were permitted to continue the instruction and assessment at home; however, there was limited student use from home during that period. Fortunately, many students reached at least the mid-point of the curriculum and completed the second administration of the *WordFlight Diagnostic*. Despite the issues and limitations created by COVID-19, the gains in proficiency in a hard-to-reach age group were impressive.

**74% of the At-Risk students and 100% of the Borderline students achieved proficiency in both decoding and automatic word recognition after the *WordFlight* intervention.**

## Proficiency Achieved by At-Risk and Borderline Students

74% of the At-Risk students and 100% of the Borderline students achieved proficiency in both decoding and automatic word recognition after the *WordFlight* intervention. Scores above 300 put students in the proficient range. The mean mid-diagnostic scores in decoding and automatic word recognition for the At-Risk students were 386 and 334, respectively. The Borderline students achieved mean scores in decoding and automatic word recognition of 474 and 398, respectively. The At-Risk students gained more in decoding than automatic word recognition (148 points vs 130), whereas the Borderline students gained more in automatic word recognition than decoding (125 points vs 90).

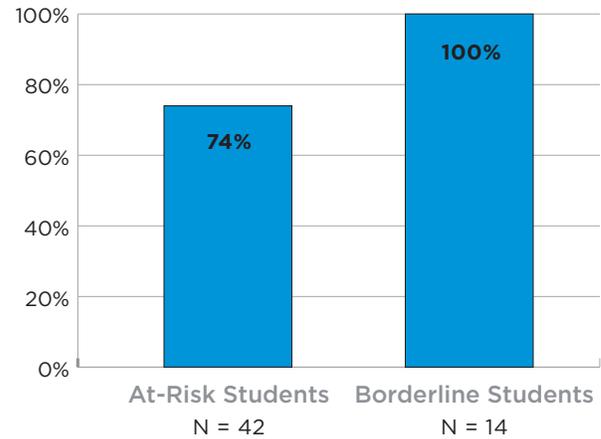
## WordFlight students made substantial gains in both decoding and automatic word recognition

Students averaged an increase of 143 scale score points in decoding and 99 points in automatic word recognition on the *WordFlight Diagnostic*. 98% of students increased their automatic word recognition score and 96% increased their decoding score. The amount of time between the first and second administrations of the *WordFlight Diagnostic* was approximately 15 weeks.

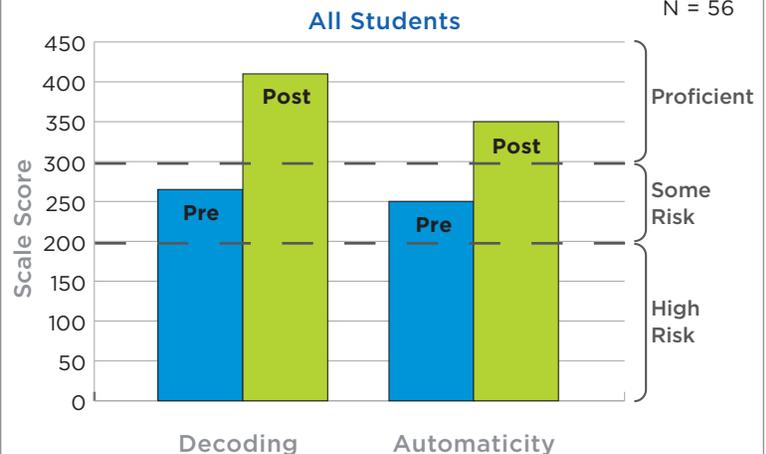
## Impressive Progress Made by At-Risk Students

Students were identified as At-Risk who pre-tested below Proficiency in both decoding and automatic word recognition. On the second administration of the *WordFlight Diagnostic*, the average scores of the At-Risk students in decoding and automatic word recognition were 386 and 334, respectively, which illustrates how *WordFlight* was able to fill in the gaps in decoding knowledge and unlock the use of knowledge students already had. Both groups are in the proficient range on the Diagnostic, as illustrated here.

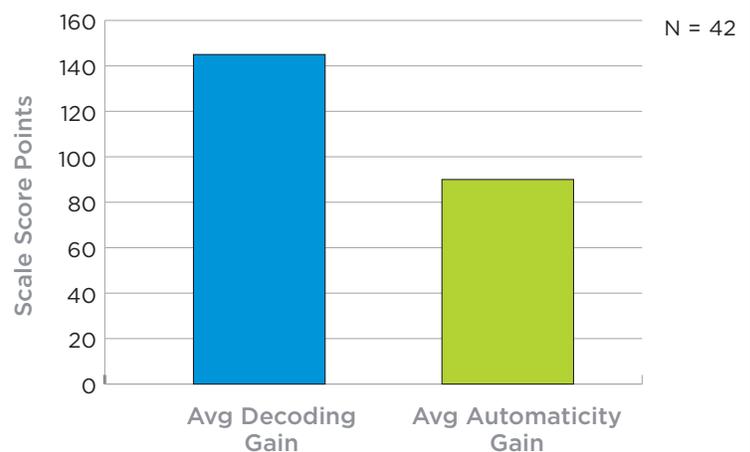
Percent of Students Who Achieved Proficiency in Both Decoding and Automaticity



Average Performance on WordFlight Diagnostic



Average Gains Achieved by At-Risk Students\*



\*Students not proficient in both Decoding and Automaticity on Pre-Diagnostic

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