

CASE STUDY



Alief ISD in Houston Tests New Approach to Fluency and Comprehension, with Impressive Results

Study shows considerable and promising literacy gains made by at-risk students at Elsik Ninth Grade Center — most students improved significantly after previous interventions showed little improvement

In the southwestern corner of Houston, Texas, lies the Alief Independent School District (AISD) which holds great pride in its academic rating. Twenty five percent of the student population are English Learners and almost 80% are from economically disadvantaged households. Since 2009, the district's accountability ratings from the Texas Education Agency have consistently risen, and in 2016 and 2017, the district received the "Exemplary" label - the highest possible rating.

The district still had challenges they were determined to solve to help students overcome literacy challenges. At Alief's Elsik Ninth Grade Center, the principal and her team worked diligently to identify those students who struggle with reading and to provide the right intervention at the right time. However, some students continued to fail to reach reading proficiency. Undeterred, the educators at Elsik were committed to identifying and addressing the causes of their students' difficulties and decided to try a new approach.



PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

At the beginning of the 2019-20 school year, Elsik Ninth Grade Center participated in a study to evaluate their struggling readers and determine the effectiveness of a new intervention. School leadership was open to the possibility that there could be underlying, foundational skills deficits. The study was designed to (1) identify students whose reading fluency and comprehension are adversely impacted by deficits in foundational skills and (2) to test a groundbreaking approach to develop the precursory skills for fluency with these students.

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.



CONDUCTING THE STUDY

To determine whether *WordFlight* could positively impact reading proficiency for struggling readers, the study divided the students into a treatment group and a control group. In both conditions, there were:

- Struggling readers
- English learners (EL)
- Students receiving free and reduced lunch
- Students with IEPs
- Students with some proficiency in foundational skills

As a first step, all the students were screened using the *WordFlight Screener*, which revealed that many of these students were likely to be at moderate-to-high risk for proficiency in foundational reading skills. The treatment students then began the *WordFlight*

Diagnostic and the *WordFlight Instructional Program*. For a deeper understanding of student needs and progress, testing of decoding and automatic word recognition skills using *WordFlight's Diagnostic* was scheduled to occur three times for the treatment students:

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.

The control group was to be assessed twice using the *WordFlight Diagnostic*: at the beginning of the project and at the end of the school year. External district tests were to be administered near the end of the school year.

The project was interrupted by COVID-19 in mid-March, although students were permitted to continue the instruction and assessment at home. There, however, was limited student use from home during that period and unfortunately no control students completed the second (end-of-year) *WordFlight Diagnostic*.



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 functional 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 with *WordFlight* illuminate what struggling students need to move to fluency and beyond.**

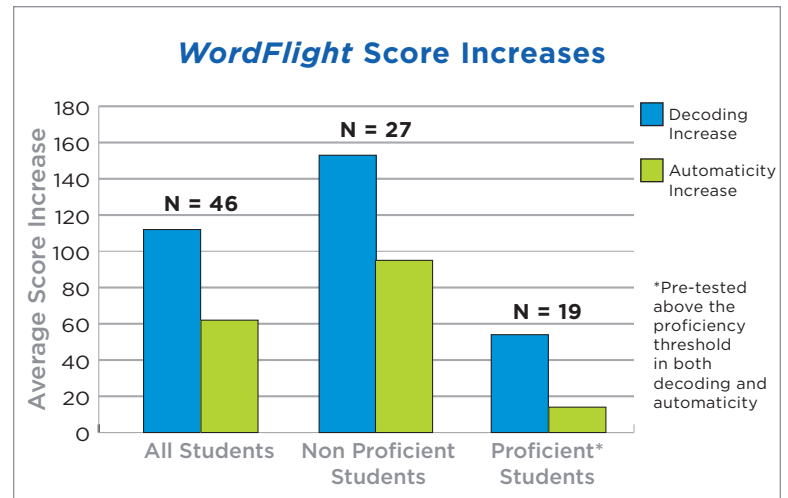
IMPRESSIVE IMPROVEMENT WITH WORDFLIGHT

For the treatment group, the second administration of the *WordFlight Diagnostic* occurred at either the midpoint of the curriculum or at the end of the school year (for those students who had not reached the midpoint by the time school ended).

At Elsik Ninth Grade Center, the results were impressive! Many students who had not responded to previous interventions made significant gains towards proficiency.

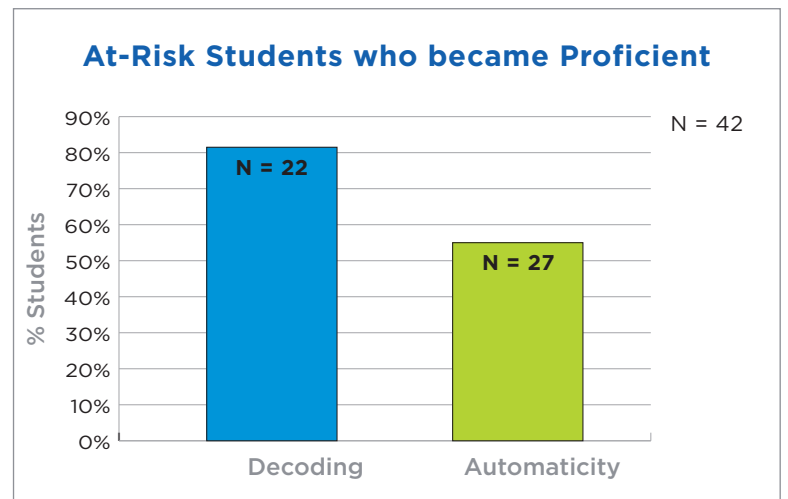
WordFlight students made substantial gains in both decoding and automatic word recognition

Students averaged an increase of 112 scale score points in decoding and 62 points in automaticity on the *WordFlight* diagnostic. The gains were even more pronounced (153 points in decoding and 96 points in automaticity) for those students who pre-tested below the diagnostic's proficiency threshold, compared with those students who pre-tested as minimally proficient. in both of those areas (54 points in decoding and 15 points in automaticity).



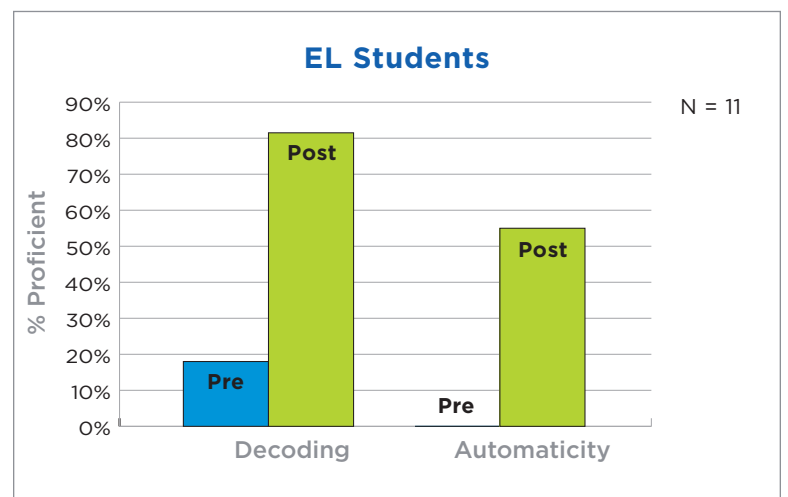
The majority of at-risk students reached proficiency

82% of the students who initially tested as being At Risk on the *WordFlight* diagnostic for decoding became Proficient in decoding after approximately 3 to 5 months using *WordFlight*. 56% of the students who were At Risk for automatic word recognition became proficient during the project.



EL students moved to Proficiency at similar rates

The *WordFlight* intervention included 11 EL students. Of these students, two pre-tested as Proficient in decoding and none were initially Proficient in automatic word recognition. By the second administration of the *WordFlight* diagnostic, 82% (9 of 11) of these students were Proficient in decoding and 55% (6 of 11) were Proficient in automatic word recognition.



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 quick Screener to identify students likely struggling with basic reading skills, a powerful Diagnostic to help identify exactly where problems lie, and the *WordFlight Instructional Program* that provides personalized, adaptive instruction — preparing 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.



For more information, please visit
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