WordFlight™ | Foundations in Learning

ELEMENTARY CASE STUDY

# Albert City-Truesdale Elementary School Helps Struggling Readers Gain Confidence and Accelerate Growth

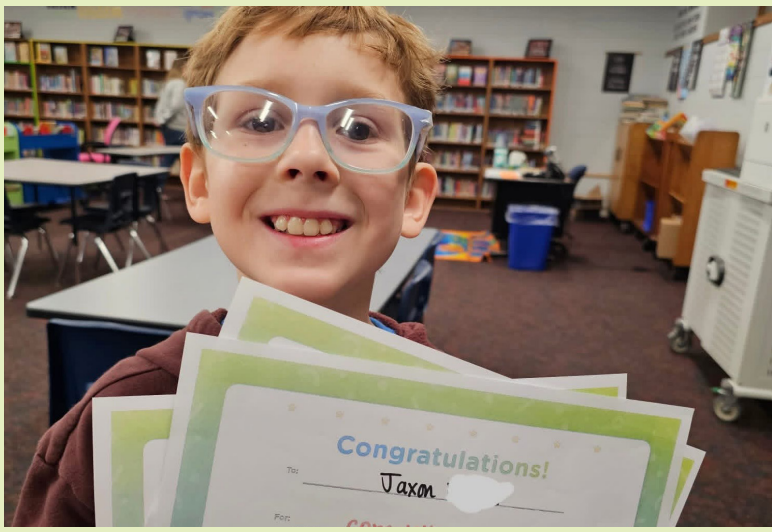
At Albert City-Truesdale Elementary School, Principal Ashley Dirks and her teachers believe helping students become confident readers is just as important as helping them become fluent readers.

Although the small, rural Iowa school has been recognized as a high performing elementary school on the Iowa School Performance Profile in 2025, Dirks and her staff knew there was an opportunity to better support struggling readers by strengthening foundational skills to become fluent, confident readers.

As Dirks and her staff reviewed FastBridge® assessment data, they realized their struggling readers had skill gaps that prevented them from becoming fluent readers.

"We wanted to become more intentional with our approach to support and intervention," Dirks said. "Instead of saying they aren't fluent and putting them into a fluency intervention, we asked why. Is it decoding? Is it accuracy? Is it automatic word recognition? What do our students really need?"

> "We want our students to truly enjoy reading. We want them to want to pick up a book. We always want to do everything possible to help our students make progress and **grow their confidence as readers."**
>
> **— ASHLEY DIRKS, PRINCIPAL**



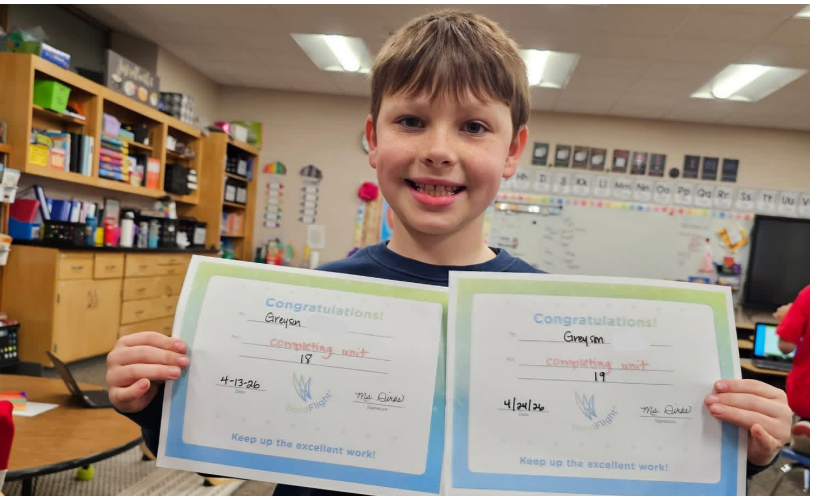

This led them to apply for a Fluency Innovator Grant from WordFlight™ and implement it as part of its literacy intervention program for students in grades 3 through 6.

## Implementing WordFlight with Fidelity

After using the FastBridge assessment data to identify students who would benefit from additional support, the school incorporated WordFlight into its existing Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) intervention block. Because dedicated intervention time was already built into the daily schedule, teachers were able to implement the program without taking time away from their core literacy instruction.

"Having that intervention block built into our schedule made implementation of WordFlight seamless," Dirks said. "Teachers were on board from the start and didn't have to figure out where to find the time to use the program."

Throughout the school year, students used WordFlight for 20 minutes three to four times a week to strengthen their foundational skills through the program's personalized, structured, and varied practice. Students were eager to participate, too, saying it was "challenging, but great." Some students who weren't receiving reading intervention even asked, "Why can't we be on WordFlight?"




## Supporting Teachers with Actionable Data

For Dirks, one of WordFlight's greatest benefits is how it helps teachers respond to students' ongoing needs.

Each month, teachers, interventionists, the instructional coach, special education staff, and Dirks met to review student progress during "data days." They analyzed WordFlight reports alongside FastBridge assessments to identify what's working, determine where students needed additional support, and adjust their instruction accordingly.

Students develop and integrate knowledge and skills across diverse and increasingly difficult words and texts in the WordFlight game-based learning environment. They learn to apply skills automatically as they develop fluency—and gain confidence along the way.

**Teachers regularly used WordFlight data, including the mid-diagnostic reports, to pinpoint specific skill gaps. They reinforce these concepts during small-group instruction or incorporated them into whole-class lessons if needed.**

"If students were struggling with syllables or decoding, for example, teachers would pull them into small groups and work on that skill," Dirks said. "If several students were struggling with the same thing, teachers would focus on that during core instruction."

"The WordFlight data helps us have a more individualized approach to intervention. We're better able to figure out what our students need and give it to them," Dirks added.

## Helping Students Make Accelerated Growth

During its first year using WordFlight, the school's thoughtful approach to literacy has translated into meaningful results.

Among students in Grades 3 to 6 using WordFlight, **proficiency in accuracy increased from 82% in the fall to 95% in the spring, a 13-percentage point improvement** that brought the cohort to the national proficiency target of 95%.

Students using the program also outpaced national norms for fluency growth across every participating grade level.

"If students don't make accelerated growth, the gap is just going to stay the same," she said. "When we looked at the data at the end of the year, we could see students making the kind of progress that helps close those gaps."

Beyond assessment scores, Dirks highlighted how one third grader who once lacked the confidence to read aloud was volunteering to read in front of the whole class by the end of the year. For Dirks and her teachers, students' continued progress and moments like this were both rewarding and deserved to be celebrated.

> "**Students need to see that we see their progress. Some students may have never previously felt success in reading.** We want them to know we're paying attention and we're proud of the work they're doing."
>
> **— ASHLEY DIRKS, PRINCIPAL**

Every Friday during the past year, Dirks visited classrooms to present certificates to students recognizing completed WordFlight units. Students celebrated milestones with classroom rewards, added their names to a hallway bulletin board highlighting accomplishments, and were recognized on the school's social media channels so families could celebrate their successes as well.

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| GRADE 3 | **38% more than expected growth** | Students **averaged 40 words correct per minute** (WCPM) of growth, exceeding the national median expected growth of 29 WCPM by 11 words, or 38%. |
| GRADE 4 | **18% more than expected growth** | Students **averaged 46 WCPM of growth**, outperforming the expected 39 WCPM by 7 words, or 18%. |
| GRADE 5 | **16% more than expected growth** | Students **averaged 29 WCPM of growth**, exceeding the expected 25 WCPM by 4 words, or 16%. |
| GRADE 6 | **86% more than expected growth** | Students **averaged 26 WCPM of growth**, surpassing the expected 14 WCPM by 12 words, or 86%. |

## A Schoolwide Commitment to Reading Success

Dirks believes their success with WordFlight is tied to the collaborative environment at Albert City-Truesdale Elementary. Although the school has one classroom per grade level, the staff shares responsibility for each student's success. Teachers communicate openly, review student progress together, adjust interventions when needed, and collaborate closely with the WordFlight team for professional development to maximize their use of the program as they work toward their students' reading goals.

"Our teachers consider all of our students their students," she said. "We're responsible for helping every child."

Looking ahead, Dirks and her team plan to expand the use of WordFlight to second grade students while continuing to use the program to support struggling readers in grades 3 through 6.

Dirks believes the continued use of WordFlight, coupled with ongoing personalized instruction from teachers, will help even more students become fluent, confident readers.

"When students see that they're making progress, they start believing they can be successful readers," she said. "That's what we're really trying to build here."

## About WordFlight

WordFlight takes a new approach to helping students achieve reading fluency and build their confidence in reading. WordFlight bridges the gap between phonics and fluency using evidence from the Science of Reading and the Science of Learning.

**Watch a demo to learn more**

For more information, please visit **WordFlight.com** or call **(888) 701-3009**

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WordFlight was developed with support from the U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences (IES) grant funds and with research support from the University of Iowa. Students in grades 3+ who are one or more years behind in reading comprehension and/or fluency.