



CASE STUDY

# Broken Arrow Public Schools, Oklahoma



## How Broken Arrow Public Schools are Transforming Early Learning

Nestled in the northeast corner of Oklahoma, Broken Arrow Public Schools sits at the heart of the state's largest suburb of Tulsa. With nearly 115,000 residents and just under 20,000 PreK–12 students, the district is one of the most diverse in Oklahoma. Across 16 elementary schools and 3 early childhood centers, including 10 Title I campuses, Broken Arrow educators work each day to meet learners where they are and help them thrive.

“...If they’re going to use technology at home, I’d prefer they’re on a program that grows their brains—where they’re learning to read, calculate, and engage in science. That’s the least we can do in a tech-driven world.”

**Kristin Hennes, Executive Director of Teaching & Learning**  
Broken Arrow Public Schools

### The district consists of:

**Broken Arrow students represent a rich blend of backgrounds:**

50% White/Caucasian

18% Hispanic/Latino

14% Multiracial

7% American Indian

6% Black/African American

**53%**

Economically disadvantaged

**13%**

English language learners

**16%**

Students with disabilities



## The Challenge

### A Virtual Learning Crisis for the Youngest Learners

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020–2021 school year began with a daunting reality for Broken Arrow: its kindergarten students were struggling with online learning. The district was relying on a program that simply was not built for young minds. The lessons were not developmentally appropriate, engagement was low, and many students stopped using the tool altogether.

The district knew they needed something different. Something that provided strong, age-appropriate early reading instruction and could support both in-person and virtual learners. And with PreK enrollment growing, leaders realized those students needed a solution.



## The Opportunity

### A Home or School Program Built for Young Learners

The district reviewed options, and one program quickly stood out. Waterford Early Learning was built specifically for young children, not adapted from other grades. Broken Arrow appreciated the blend of explicit, age-appropriate instruction, and the committee quickly noticed the high-engagement design that would capture the minds and hearts of their youngest learners.

Bridget Powell, who was Aspen Creek Elementary’s Principal at that time, shares, *“Waterford fills those holes and meets the needs of your students right where they are. So it’s adaptive. It lets them work at their own pace, and it continues to lead them down that path of success, wherever that may be on their level. So that’s really where we started.”*

The district invested not only in the program, but also in ensuring teachers and families could use it effectively.



Kristin Hennes, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, explains, “We had an expectation of usage. So we provided professional learning for our teachers, including job-embedded coaching. Our Waterford consultant was in classrooms working directly with teachers. She came in and trained our families as well. We wanted everyone working together to support our kids.”

## That was in 2021, and they haven’t looked back.

Today, Waterford Early Learning is used:

- **In all PreK-1st grade classrooms**
- **As a Tier 2 intervention in 2nd grade**
- **By families nightly, during illness, and throughout the summer**

## The Results

### Transforming Student Learning and Teacher Practice

After several years with Broken Arrow, district leaders point to two major, and unexpectedly powerful, results.

**More students are performing above the 40th percentile.** Under Oklahoma’s Strong Readers Act, districts must report the number of K–3 students scoring BELOW the 40th percentile. Given the long-term impacts of COVID, Broken Arrow expected these numbers to rise. Instead, they saw the opposite: a steady increase in the number of students scoring ABOVE the 40th percentile.

**Teachers’ instructional skills are strengthened.** Like many districts nationwide, Broken Arrow has faced a significant teacher shortage, leading to an increase in emergency-certified teachers who may lack formal training in early literacy instruction. Instructional coaches have worked diligently with new teachers to provide instructional strategies and resources. Ms. Hennes adds, “*Teachers with emergency licenses are seeing high-quality instruction modeled for them by our instructional coaches and by Waterford’s digital activities.*”



## A Program for Students Wherever They Are, Wherever They Learn

Ms. Powell notes, *“We see that our students who have been on Waterford consistently during those summer months are scoring at or above grade level in their fall benchmarks.”*

For Broken Arrow, the goal is balance: protecting play-based early learning while ensuring every child receives essential, research-based instruction. As Ms. Henness reflects:

*“We understand the need for play and the need to keep technology at a minimum with young learners. But if we can provide at least one tool guaranteed to deliver good instruction, we owe that to them. If they’re going to use technology at home, I’d prefer they’re on a program that grows their brains—where they’re learning to read, calculate, and engage in science. That’s the least we can do in a tech-driven world.”*



## Conclusion Reshaping Early Learning

Broken Arrow Public Schools didn’t simply adopt a new program. They reshaped what early learning could look like during one of the most challenging periods in education. By choosing a solution designed specifically for young learners, supporting teachers with coaching, and partnering with families, the district turned a pandemic-era challenge into long-term, systemwide improvement.

### Bring These Results to Your District

Visit → [Waterford.org](https://www.waterford.org) to learn how to bring Waterford early learning solutions to your community.

