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October 23, 2018

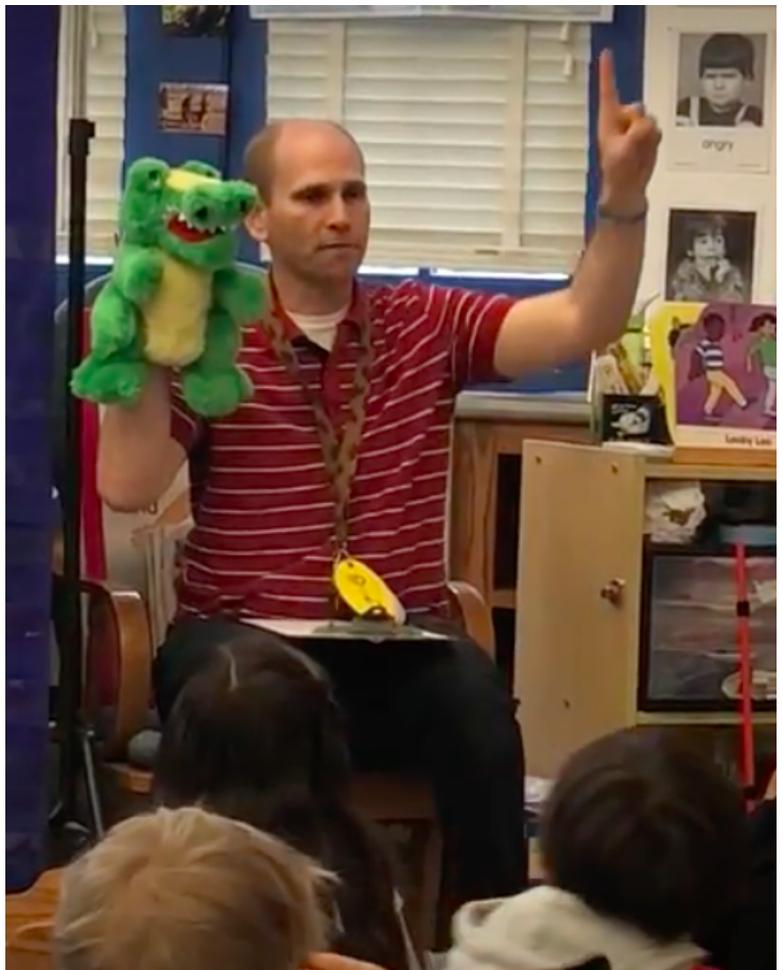
New BUSD Program to Help Young Readers (With Assistance from a Little Green Friend)

There's a new member of the BUSD family who really stands out – which is quite a feat when you're only a foot tall.

He's bright green and furry, and his name is "Alphie." As you might guess from his name, he works with the alphabet.

Alphie – an alligator puppet – is helping strengthen the way we teach phonic and phonemic awareness so that children understand the relationship between letters and sounds as they learn to read.

Our curriculum has included phonics in the past, but this school year we're introducing a more explicit and systematic approach, using the *FastTrack Phonics* program. We're also devoting more time to this crucial building block for reading – 20 minutes or more daily for students in all K-3 classrooms, the most formative school years for literacy.



Alphie helps Bill Briggs conduct a FastTrack Phonics lesson in his kindergarten class at Thousand Oaks.

"For many years BUSD has struggled with a pronounced achievement/opportunity gap," says Maggie Riddle, the BUSD Director of Schools. In a report on FastTrack Phonics presented to the School Board in

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June, Ms. Riddle noted, “Too many of our African American and English Language Learner students are not at grade level reading proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.

Research shows that students who do not read proficiently by the end of third grade continue to struggle with reading throughout the rest of their education. Phonics instruction is an essential component of a balanced literacy program to address the needs of our diverse learners and close the reading gap.”

Riddle added that all students benefit from phonics instruction because in addition to helping students learn to read, phonics and phonemic awareness instruction helps students become excellent spellers, improving their writing overall.



Left: BUSD Literacy Coach TSA Rose James conducts a FastTrack Phonics lesson in Lisa Rossi’s 2nd grade class at Jefferson. Right: Students engage in FastTrack partner practice.

Alphie belongs to a *FastTrack* family of classroom materials – including videos, phonics picture cards, letter-blending cards and alphabet letter strips – used to engage active young minds in whole-class interaction.

The teacher-friendly and kid-friendly materials helped sway the District’s decision to adopt *FastTrack Phonics* over other options in a field of nine candidate programs offering explicit phonics instruction. FastTrack was further reviewed in a pilot test alongside

two other programs conducted in selected K-3 classrooms this past January-May.

More information about our new phonics program can be found in Ms. Riddle’s presentation to the

School Board on June 13. The agenda memo and two attachments are listed in item #16 in the [online](#)



agenda packet, and the oral presentation

Left: K-3 teachers and administrators participate in FastTrack Phonics training before classes start in August. Right: A display of some FastTrack classroom materials.

can be seen in the [YouTube recording of the Board meeting](#), beginning at 3:11:23. The School Board approved the adoption at the Board's June 27 meeting.

Article by [Charles Burress](#) / [Elementary Schools](#), [News](#)

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