



Several very good questions were recently posted in the Berryhill Community Group. I have attempted to ensure that all of my answers are based on solid facts and research and not opinions, speculation or personal grievances. As you can see from my responses below, I love to talk about Berryhill! I believe we have amazing students, teachers and administrators. Our district, like every district in Oklahoma, is facing significant challenges. I've been able to witness first-hand the dedication, hard work and creativity of everyone in our school and community as we have faced these challenges head-on. We still have challenges ahead and we will continue to make changes and improvements along the way, but I have no doubt that the strength and character of our community will see us through these challenging times and we will emerge stronger, closer and better than before.

Question 1: Other than this pandemic, that just WILL NOT go away and leave us alone, what do you see as the biggest challenge for Berryhill Schools, and what are your thoughts on how we can address/meet this challenge?

I share your hope and desire that the pandemic will subside in the coming months. Navigating these unprecedented times has clearly been Berryhill's biggest challenge over the last year. The post-pandemic period will present a variety of challenges and opportunities. It will require a very individualized approach. Every student will have a unique set of educational and emotional needs when things return to "normal." Transitioning multiple times between in-person and distance learning has been necessary to protect the health and well-being of our community but it has been far from ideal.

As a district we must ensure that our staff has all the tools and training they need to meet the post-pandemic needs of every student. We must also encourage families who chose homeschooling or online Charter schools during the pandemic to return to the classroom. We must provide options for students who may have fallen behind during the pandemic and recognize that Charter schools such as Epic have a graduation rate of only 40%, while Berryhill has a graduation rate of 98%, which is among the highest in the state of Oklahoma. Some of the students who return to the classroom will require remediation.

The district is currently exploring a variety of options that could include offering academic remediation before or after school, in the evening, and possibly weekends. Our teachers and staff are 100% committed to ensuring that every student emerges from this pandemic fully prepared for a successful future. These are challenges facing every Oklahoma school district, not just Berryhill.

Budget cuts are one of the biggest challenges facing Berryhill Schools. Our state funding was cut by \$450,293 during 2020. This creates significant challenges in all areas: Improving curriculum and adding courses, providing additional counseling services, and having an adequate number of personnel to achieve all of our objectives. We have utilized online platforms

such as Edgenuity to offer a wider array of courses and class options. However, our preference is always to have adequate funding to provide an in-person option for all course offerings. These challenges will persist until the state of Oklahoma prioritizes education funding better than they have over the last 10 years.

I would encourage every parent to get to know their local, state, and federal representatives. Encourage them to fully fund public education. As we all know, social media can be a place where “keyboard warriors” spread negativity and divisiveness. I hope everyone will use social media in a positive way, including reaching out to elected representatives and encouraging them to increase education funding. If everyone in Berryhill does this, I believe it will make a real and lasting positive impact on our students and on our community.

Some have commented and speculated about the small decrease in Berryhill’s student population over the last few years. Our student population has ranged from 1120 to 1265 for the last 10 years. The recent fluctuations can be attributed to a number of factors, including:

- The Pandemic - Schools across the country have experienced a decrease in student populations ranging from 5% to 17% over the last 12 months.
- Homeschool and Online Charter Schools - Some families have chosen these options because they believed it would be safer for their children during the pandemic. Others have been enticed by multi-million dollar taxpayer funded ad campaigns into online Charter Schools like Epic and others. Berryhill has seen multiple students go to Epic only to return to our district further behind their peers and in need of academic remediation and/or increased social interaction with their peers.
- Increased Standards for Transfers - Berryhill receives hundreds of transfer requests every year. We deny dozens of those requests. If we wanted to artificially inflate our student numbers we could accept more transfers from outside the district. However, every transfer request is thoroughly evaluated based on the potential student’s academic record, conduct, and attendance.

The good news is that the Berryhill Superintendent, School Board, and Administrators have managed these challenging times very well. While some schools have been forced to pay their bills with “non payable warrants,” Berryhill’s fund balance has averaged more than \$830,000 over the last five years.

Our administrative costs are also very low. Currently our administrative costs are only 3.88% which is much lower than the 7% allowed by the state. Every dollar possible is being invested in our students.

Question 2: I think it’s fair to say that there are very few schools in Oklahoma who were fully prepared for the technology and tech training needed to navigate a “quick-switch” back and forth to and from distance learning models we’ve had to adopt throughout this pandemic, and I personally think that Berryhill teachers and administrators did a fantastic job in leveraging the resources they had. However, I also feel that it exposed some holes in our current educational program. Do you feel the same? Why or why not?

I agree that Berryhill teachers and administrators did a fantastic job in adapting to an entirely new educational landscape virtually overnight. The work they did to ensure our students were

able to continue to learn during a once-in-a-generation pandemic has been nothing short of heroic.

Berryhill continues to be an “in-person first” school district. We believe the best place for students to learn is in the classroom. This is supported by an endless body of research. In order to keep our students in the classroom we must keep students and staff healthy. We encourage everyone to wear a mask, wash their hands and watch their distance. Clearly, the pandemic forced every district to quickly develop Distance Learning as well as Virtual Education options and protocols. All of the implementation and training took place over a very short period of time. The staff has embraced the challenge and continues to improve every time we are forced to “flip the switch” to Distance Learning.

When it comes to Distance Learning, I know every student, parent, teacher and administrator would love to have a seamless integrated educational technology platform with a single logon that meets every student’s unique needs and works perfectly every time. Unfortunately, that system apparently does not exist. Districts across the country - and the world - have had to utilize a variety of platforms to meet the needs of their students during the pandemic. This is a challenge. But our students, parents, and teachers have done a wonderful job adapting to this new reality. We are working closely with all of our vendors to improve the connections between these systems and will continue working to improve the student and parent experience.

There was a learning curve for everyone when we started Distance Learning. The district provided Google Classroom training to teachers during the summer and at the beginning of the school year. Teachers have been paid a stipend to complete Google Certification. The school also provides a variety of on-demand Professional Development tools and courses to teachers for Distance Learning and other topics.

Every student who has requested an internet Wi-Fi Hotspot for home use has received one. Principals in the district have worked diligently to identify students who may not have internet access at home. The information has been communicated in a variety of ways including personal phone calls and home visits. Additionally, the district has multiple hotspots still available for student use.

The district has dedicated \$1,100,000 from the recent bond issue that will be used to expand and improve technology throughout the district. We also have 600 Chromebooks that have been back-ordered since July. These will be used to replace outdated Chromebooks. Another \$700,000 of bond funds will be dedicated to new textbooks.

Like most districts our size, we do not have a large IT staff. However, we have implemented a two-tiered IT support system that meets all of the needs of our teachers and students and saves the district thousands of dollars every year. First, we have a full-time contract employee who handles all daily support and IT requests. We also have an IT contract with a firm called Two Trees that has multiple employees with a wide variety of Information Technology skills. To hire full-time employees with the same skills would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars per year. Two Trees is on-site weekly and is available by phone or email 24/7. This two-tiered plan is serving our needs well at this time.

We are constantly evaluating and improving our systems. However, public schools will need additional resources from the state and federal government to continue improving student

experience and outcomes between now and the end of the pandemic. We are hopeful that the Oklahoma State Legislature and US Congress will prioritize providing adequate funding for public schools in their upcoming sessions.

Question 3: As one of my kiddos is a freshman, and the other is 7th, I'm particularly interested in your vision for the high school. Do you feel Berryhill currently offers an adequate career-focused (whether college or technical track) learning program for it's students? Do you see any room for improvement, and if so, where?

I believe Berryhill does a great job of preparing students for success after they graduate from high school. On average, approximately three-quarters of Berryhill graduates attend college or a technical/trade school. Many of the remaining 25% immediately enter the workforce by choice.

Many of our students also participate in concurrent enrollment to get a headstart on their Freshman year of college. We offer ICAP (Individual Career Academic Plan) which guides students toward graduation through college preparedness and career exploration. We have expanded and improved our STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) offerings at all grade levels.

We offer a variety of AP (Advanced Placement) courses. We have had multiple Academic All-State recipients over the last 10 years. Students can also participate in multiple Internship opportunities.

Berryhill's ACT scores have been above the state average for the last 7 years. At the same time OSU, OU, and other colleges and universities are moving to a test-optional admission process that focuses on academic rigor and performance, activities and engagement, a personal essay, and letters of recommendation.

Preparing students for success after high school is a team effort. I believe every student has the opportunity to receive an excellent education at Berryhill. With the commitment and dedication of the students, their families, teachers and the community, our students will be fully prepared for success. This success can be seen in our Alumni who have gone on to have successful careers as doctors, lawyers, CPAs, musicians, professional athletes, teachers, professors, architects, engineers, and many other professions.

I believe every school district, including Berryhill, always has room for improvement. Having said that, I believe Berryhill does an excellent job preparing students for success in their post-high school lives.

Question 4: The State of Oklahoma allows school systems to self-designate their Programs of Excellence. I noticed that Berryhill hasn't self-designated any. Why is this? And if we did, what is your opinion on where we excel?

Only 20% of high schools in Tulsa County chose to participate in this program which was sponsored by the Oklahoma Department of Education. While the program allowed schools to "self identify" their Programs of Excellence it was a multi-year program that required each high school to go through an extensive state-mandated process. Many high schools made the decision that their resources should be allocated to initiatives that directly benefit students.

Berryhill evaluated this program and determined that the potential of positive PR was outweighed by the cost of diverting essential time and effort of counselors and administrators away from other critical needs across the district.

We have many academic, athletic, music, and fine art programs that qualify as “Programs of Excellence.”

The most important thing a school district can do to prepare students for success in life is to ensure they graduate from high school. According to the National Education Association, a high school graduate can expect to earn in excess of \$250,000 more in their lifetime than someone who drops out of high school. Students who do not graduate from high school are also 72% more likely to be unemployed. Berryhill’s graduation rate is 98% which is among the highest in Oklahoma.

If you’ve read this far, thank you! When you take all of this information into consideration I think several things are clear:

- Berryhill is a great place to raise a family.
- Berryhill offers an excellent, well-rounded education to every student.
- Students at Berryhill are prepared for college, trade or technical schools, the military, or the workforce - whichever they choose.
- The pandemic has created multiple challenges that we are overcoming together.
- We should get to know our elected leaders and insist they fully fund public education.
- There is a dedication to continuous improvement throughout the district.
- The teachers, administrators and staff at Berryhill are 100% committed to their students.

I’ve been honored to serve as one of your Board Members. I would be honored to have your vote on April 6 so I can continue to serve the community I love. To receive additional updates from me, please like and follow my Facebook page: <https://facebook.com/jackforberryhill>. If you have any questions, you can always reach me at jackforberryhill@gmail.com