

These are exciting times for Bartlesville Public Schools. A computer science module is being offered to every student from kindergarten through fifth grade. We have put into service almost 1,500 Chromebooks for staff and students in the past 18 months. In August we will deploy another 1,500 as we equip every Bartlesville High School student with a Chromebook to use at school and at home.

These strategic initiatives could not happen without our community's support for the 2016 bond issue along with organizations like the Bartlesville Public Schools Foundation, ConocoPhillips, Phillips 66, Truity Credit Union, Arvest Bank, Bartlesville Education Promise, and the Barry and Karen Lowe Foundation.



In late February the 66th annual Bartlesville District Science Fair will be conducted at the Phillips 66 Research Center for the benefit of our student scientists of all ages. Our district's teachers help their students earn prizes at the local, state, and international levels each year, and we are proud to have teachers like Betty Henderson, Gary Layman, Cheryl Fentress, and Theresa Miller whose students do well at state and international competitions each year.

Our cross-country, pom, and swim teams have been the most dominant programs in the state of Oklahoma, thanks to hard working students and talented coaches like David Ayres, Bon Bennett, Stephanie Stewart, and Chad Englehart. Our varsity girls basketball team, led by Krista Binam, is undefeated this season and now ranked second in the state.

These opportunities and successes are directly tied to our community's Phillips 66 Research Center, the Pathfinder Parkway, the Phillips 66 Splash Club, and the facilities and programs funded by voters who supported past bond issues. Our outstanding music programs benefit greatly from their collaborations with the Bartlesville Symphony Orchestra and other organizations who call the Bartlesville Community Center their home.

Bartlesville is doing its part for our schools, but the time is overdue for the state of Oklahoma to do its part to support education. When we think of our Chromebook initiatives, we remind ourselves of what Bill Gates has said: "Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is most important." The shortage of qualified teachers is the biggest threat to the quality of our local schools.

- Oklahoma teachers continue to leave the state and the profession for higher-paying jobs.
- Bartlesville lost five teachers to Kansas this year.
- The number of college students pursuing an education degree is shrinking.
- The Oklahoma State Department of Education has issued 1,917 emergency teaching certificates this school year compared to only 32 in 2011-12. Bartlesville alone has 12 teachers requiring emergency certification.
- Class sizes are growing, and many districts have been forced to cut courses because they cannot find qualified teachers.
- While we have retained our own advanced foreign language courses, nearly one-third of Oklahoma high schools do not offer any foreign language classes.
- Surrounding states reached Oklahoma's current level of per-student education investment a decade ago.

As our legislators convene on Monday, it is our hope that they truly prioritize teacher pay raises over partisanship or ideology and stop shortchanging our students. It is time for our legislators to heed the call from CEOs and civic leaders across our state who expect them to step up.

Go Bruins!

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This column is online at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xm9PZ00p4qb_624XYX107E6hiA_X-bVXju-w5Zct2o0/edit?usp=sharing