

Ryan Oxenford
Director of Curriculum and Educational Programs
Pottstown School District

My name is Ryan Oxenford, and I am the Director of Curriculum and Educational Programs for the Pottstown School District. This is my 23rd year with the Pottstown. I taught math and language arts/reading at the middle school, was the principal of Barth Elementary School (a PreK - 4th grade school) for 10.5 years, and have been in my current position for 4 years. The School District has over 3,200 students, PreK through 12th grade, with a comprehensive in-house career and technical center that has 9 programs. We consider the school district to be urban or quasi-urban with an average overall poverty rate of about 69%. Our breakdown by race is about 1% Asian, 35% Black, 23% Hispanic, 29% White, and 12% listed as 2 or more races. The district spans just under 5 square miles. We have a special education rate of 24%, about 5% English Language Learners, and about 6% identified as homeless. It is not a secret that our district has been underfunded by \$13 million dollars each year until recently when that gap was reduced through Equity and Adequacy Funds. Families and staff in Pottstown have had to be creative and resourceful to survive, as they are required to do more with less. Historically, the district has relied on community support for programming. As we received funding, we worked very hard to ensure the money is spent in vital areas that will have the most meaningful impact and can sustain continuation. Our middle school, like most middle schools, was in need of an overhaul. They have had to fundamentally change and correct course. We have seen a significant improvement in student behavior by focusing on MTSS, the implementation of PBIS, and structuring a house model with both administrators and counselors who loop with students. Consistency with our administrative team at the high school has increased the graduation and attendance rate by designing systems that support professional development, student accountability, student engagement, and improved overall school culture. The elementary schools have implemented a combination of curriculum resources that are essential and long overdue for teachers to have what they need to do their job. Our teachers are highly involved in the decision making process and have continually worked through the external pressures of education, helped students cope with generational trauma, and paid for student needs out of their own paycheck.

When I was the principal of Barth Elementary School, there were times when the poverty rate was in the 80s and it was not uncommon for the percentage of students proficient as the start of kindergarten to be as low as 16%. I was directly responsible for the reading programs and literacy effectiveness and quickly became an expert in the science of reading by working with our Title I Federal Programs Coordinator, the building level reading specialists, and running lead for the CORE Team.