

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Creativity set free

There are 3,200 students in the Pottstown School District, and it seemed like every one had a part in last weekend's production of *The Wiz* at Pottstown High School.

The performance showcased a cornucopia of colorful costumes, sets, lights, and special effects; a wonderful little orchestra; and a boatload of exuberant performers from fourth graders to adults.

One can only marvel at the energy and zeal needed to coordinate the diverse aspects of this truly prodigious enterprise.

The Wiz demonstrates the amazing things students and teachers can accomplish when freed from the mind-numbing bureaucracy that has enmeshed public education in recent decades.

Standardized testing, constant data collection, increased reporting requirements, ever-changing curriculums, and top-down classroom management have combined to drain the life out of teaching and learning.

The stifling "No Child Left Behind" law passed in 2002 has thankfully expired, but the authoritarian mentality remains.

As educator Ken Robinson has written, "...it promotes a catastrophically narrow idea of intelligence and ability. The result is a terrible waste of talent and motivation in countless students.

"... it confuses standards with standardizing. The result is, schools across the country are becoming dreary and homogenized.

"... and it assumes that education can be improved without the professional creativity and personal passion of teachers."

The result is a dramatic decline in the number of people going into teaching,

despite the job security and pensions that public education offers.

As I've often written, Pottstown has enormous financial problems. The money just isn't there to continue the rigid, protocol-laden structure demanded by specialists and bureaucrats, even if we wanted to.

As the Pottstown School Board interviews candidates for superintendent this week, I hope we can find someone who can cut as much red tape as possible to unleash the kind of talent, vitality — and joy — we experienced at *The Wiz*.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

