

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Avoiding the real problems

The Pottstown School District has serious financial problems.

We have the third highest real estate taxes in Pennsylvania and a steadily declining tax base.

Our biggest taxpayer, the Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, may soon be sold to a non-profit health system and go off the tax rolls.

Our expenses continue to increase above the rate of inflation.

We have a rookie superintendent and a rookie business manager, and we're looking to hire a new principal and assistant principal at the middle school, which enrolls nearly 1,000 students.

But none of these issues are topping the school board agenda.

Instead, we're rehashing the district's school uniform policy.

At 6 p.m. next Monday, the board's policy committee will seek public input at the high school auditorium.

Policy adopted in 2008

Ten years ago, after years of discussions, the board adopted a policy requiring K-8 students to wear uniforms. Samples were pictured on fliers and the district website. Basically, the district wanted solid color clothes in either white, blue, or khaki, mix and match tops and bottoms

The rationale was to instill pride in our students and our town, to keep kids focused on their studies rather than their clothes, and to reduce disparities between students of different incomes.

Prior to the adoption, a survey of more than 800 households showed

70 percent were in favor of the uniforms.

The policy was extended to the high school the following year, but was suspended in 2015 after student representatives to the board complained.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

The K-8 uniform implementation has gone smoothly. Nonetheless, after a lot more discussion, the board conducted a second survey of K-8 parents and teachers last year. More than 60 percent favored keeping the uniform policy, and that should have been it.

But now we're going to seek more public input.

Painting the door

This reminds me of an observation made by a veteran administrator: "A school board will spend two hours debating what color to paint the front door of the high school, because that's something they can all understand and offer an opinion about."

"But that same board will pass a \$100 million budget without comment, because they don't understand it and don't want to spend the time it takes to learn about it."

In June, the Pottstown School Board and Pottstown Council had a joint meeting to discuss important issues like our declining tax base and economic development efforts. Only three of the nine board members showed up.

Facing the real problems

Figuring out how to keep our school district viable in the face of ever-increasing costs and diminishing resources is going to take a lot of research, creative thinking, and doing things differently. But we're not talking about that. We're still debating what color to paint the high school door.

Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL UNIFORMS — This is one of many photos on the Pottstown School District website illustrating approved student uniforms.