

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Our unique public schools

After months of campaigning and controversy, the Upper Perkiomen School District is going ahead with a new \$60 million middle school.

The school may be necessary, but if it looks like other schools built in recent decades, it's unlikely to have much visual appeal.

We've made huge strides in technology in recent decades — safer and more comfortable cars, revolutionary appliances like the microwave, computers, the Internet, search engines, and smart phones.

But there are some things from the past so magnificent and inspiring and unique that we don't need to change them.

For example, the plays of Shakespeare, written 400 years ago, are so brilliant and glorious that we still perform them worldwide and study them in nearly every high school and college in America, even though the English language has evolved so much that we need footnotes to understand what a lot of the bard's words and expressions mean.

Or consider musical instruments.

For all the modern technology we've developed, nobody can make violins better than Stradivari did 300 years ago. These old violins aren't collecting dust in a display case, either. They are used everyday by our finest musicians in our great orchestras.

Our museums are full of paintings and sculpture that represent the best that people have ever produced.

Perhaps the most useful of all the arts are buildings. Buildings not only provide us with shelter — keeping us warm in the winter and cool in the summer — they can enrich our lives if they are beautiful and inspiring, just as painting and sculpture and poetry does.

If we have beautiful buildings in our communities, we don't have to make a special trip or pay admission to see them. We can enjoy them in the course of our daily lives. As people experience these same wonderful buildings, day after day, they give communities their sense of place and identity.

In older communities, the most important buildings are often public schools. Public schools were usually built as an expression of community pride, in prominent places, constructed to a level of detail and craftsmanship we couldn't afford today. Because most people attended public schools when they were growing up, they provide a shared experience for many people in the community.

Most of us associate our most formative years with school buildings. When we were in school, we were developing our most powerful memories.

Among Pottstown's greatest assets are its magnificent schools, which have been enjoyed by generations of Pottstonians. Thanks to recent work to preserve and maintain them, will be enjoyed for generations to come.

New is not always better. In fact, it's often worse.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



Rupert Elementary School, 1927