

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Schools take lion's share of taxes

On Tuesday, we discussed the grim financial forecast for Pottstown Borough, which faces increasing expenses and a declining tax base.

But most of Pottstown's real estate taxes — 73 percent — are levied by the Pottstown School District, which serves the same taxpayers as the borough.

For years, Pottstown has levied among the highest school taxes in Pennsylvania. We are currently ranked 7th of 500 districts.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

Sky-high taxes are the No. 1 impediment to attracting and keeping homeowners and businesses in Pottstown.

Why are taxes so high? Pottstown falls in the bottom fifth of Pennsylvania school districts in wealth but in the top third in spending.

And new spending is being considered.

Last week, Pottstown superintendent Stephen Rodriguez concluded a series of three public presentations about possibly creating a kindergarten center at the former Edgewood Elementary School (all of which are posted on the school district's Facebook page).

Edgewood was closed as an elementary school in 2014. The year before, district's fifth grades had been moved to the middle school, which had excess capacity. It now houses grades 5 through 8.

But many people believe the middle school is too crowded, causing discipline problems, even though the school is within its design capacity.

Creating a kindergarten center at Edgewood would free up room at the elementary schools to house the fifth grades once again.

Earlier this year, another option was discussed: using Edgewood as a fifth grade center.

Both options have drawbacks, and last week the idea of reopening Edgewood as a fifth elementary school was also discussed.

Whatever the option, it would cost about \$6 million to renovate Edgewood, and additional staff costs at Edgewood would add more than \$500,000 annually to the district's budget.

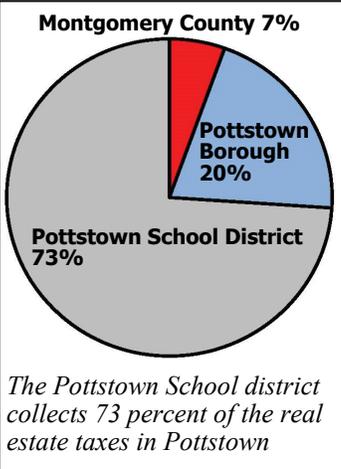
There are other ways to improve the middle school climate besides using Edgewood. For example, it would cost nothing to keep the fifth graders right where they are and make programmatic changes at the middle school to make it function like an elementary school, which many parents prefer.

There are more than 60 middle schools in Pennsylvania housing grades 5 through 8. This year, the Reading School District eliminated its intermediate high school and created five middle schools with grades 5-8. Pottstown's middle school grade configuration is not unique.

Given Pottstown's exorbitant taxes, we should give more thought to programmatic changes rather than a costly bricks and mortar "solution."

**Pottstown taxes are consistently in the top 2 to 3 percent of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts.**

Pottstown taxation rank of 500 school districts in Pennsylvania	
2007-2008	11
2008-2009	16
2009-2010	7
2010-2011	12
2011-2012	10
2012-2013	12
2013-2014	12
2014-2015	3
2015-2016	3
2016-2017	6
2017-2018	7



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