

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Of quarterbacks and teachers

Summer is hiring season for a school district, and because the Pottstown School Board doesn't have a voting meeting in July, we'll be appointing a lot of them Thursday night.

The application process is more complicated than ever, including police clearances and references and interviews with principals, central administrators, and sometimes groups of teachers.



Commentary by  
Thomas Hylton

But as best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell points out, teaching is a profession where it's almost impossible to predict how a novice will do until

he or she actually tries it.

Gladwell compares the process to picking professional football quarterbacks. Football teams spend millions of dollars scouting prospective players, especially quarterbacks. However, because professional football is much faster and more complicated than college play, no matter how good someone might be in college, a lot of top draft picks wash out of the National Football League within a few years.

"This is the quarterback problem," Gladwell writes. "There are certain jobs where almost nothing you can learn about the candidates before they start predicts how they'll do once they're hired...." Teaching is one of them, Gladwell says. "No one knows what a person with the potential to be

a great teacher looks like."

Gladwell quotes educational researchers who found that teaching certifications, which Pennsylvania requires for teachers in public schools, don't make a difference in the classroom. Likewise, master's degrees, test scores and grades in college don't matter, either.

I've talked to several Pottstown principals about hiring teachers, and they likewise feel that interviews are anything but surefire in predicting classroom success.

A candidate can have outstanding qualifications on paper, and give a great interview, and do an outstanding sample lesson, but still fail in the classroom. As many as a third of the candidates hired don't pan out, I've been told. And many who do well soon move on to other districts.

One thing we can do is to hire teachers who already live in Pottstown or commit to do so.

Only about 15 percent of our teachers and other professional staff live in the borough.

Teachers and administrators are far more likely to understand and appreciate our students and families if they live among us — and more likely to stay here for the long haul.

The school board has expressed to our administrators our preference for hiring Pottstown candidates—perhaps it should be a formal policy.

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



**IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT** how well a college football quarterback will perform in professional football. Ryan Leaf, above left, the second overall draft pick in 1998 (after Peyton Manning) by the San Diego Chargers, is considered one of the greatest duds in NFL history. He received an \$11 million signing bonus but washed out in three years. **LIKEWISE**, it's impossible to predict how well a novice teacher will do in the classroom.