

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Education won't be the same

Five years ago, as a school board member, I decided to visit all of Pottstown's classrooms.

With the blessings of the superintendent, I started in October, spending nearly 150 hours in our schools over a six-month period, visiting 179 classes in grades pre-K through 12.

My overall impression was highly positive, regarding both teachers and students.

But I was mildly surprised at how little things had changed since I was a student in the 1960s, especially at the middle school and high school.

For the most part, students sat at their desks while the teacher talked up front. There were smart boards and power points, to be sure, and upper grade level kids turned in their homework and communicated with teachers via internet apps and email, but the school structure was basically the same.

Bells ringing, students changing classes from math to science to social studies, and everyone eating in shifts in the cafeteria.

Now, the coronavirus pandemic has turned that world upside down.

Schools are closed until the end of the year, with no guarantee the status quo will return in the fall.

The district has been scrambling to buy and distribute Chromebooks to all our students. We've also had to ensure our families have internet connections.

Teachers, parents, and families are now learning how to use the district's educational platform, Google's G Suite, where everything is cloud-based. All classwork is now done on the Chromebooks and shared with teachers remotely.

Students receive their assignments in Google Classroom and store their work in Drive, which is accessible by their teachers. Some teachers will use Google Meet, conducting a real-time class with each student participating remotely on his Chromebook.

The district's Google expert, Carol Brightbill, has been conducting virtual meetings with teachers and parents, who are emailed a link to the sessions. She's also doing one-on-one sessions remotely.

None of this will replace our

conventional school programs. With just six weeks of school left, many parents and students will struggle just to figure out the new system.

But distance learning is a powerful example of how computer technology is revolutionizing learning everywhere.

Virtually all organized knowledge is now available to anyone on the internet.

Instructional videos on just about every topic imaginable are now available on websites like YouTube.

For example, Sal Kahn, known as "Bill Gates' favorite teacher," has created hundreds of short videos

teaching all the subjects that appear on SATs and other standardized tests, available free on his website. In just 10 years, what was a one-man operation has become a multi-million dollar non-profit covering the entire K-12 and basic college curriculum.

And unlike a real-life classroom, the student can keep playing a video lesson over and over again until it sinks in.

Thanks to the digital revolution, anyone who's acquired the basic skills of reading and listening can enjoy lifelong learning—learning that is easier to attain, higher in quality, and vastly less expensive than we could have imagined just 25 years ago.

Education and school systems are not the same thing. Education starts at birth and continues until we die.

School systems comprise a formal structure of teachers following a progressive curriculum that begins at age four or five and continues until the end of high school or college.

We have yet to capitalize on the potential that technology offers to make learning more accessible to everyone. The pandemic is forcing us to speed things up.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton



**DISTRIBUTING CHROMEBOOKS to families at Pottstown Middle School.**