

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Basic education

Last week, my wife, Frances, and I took a trip down Memory Lane, which led us to the former St. John the Baptist Parochial School in upper Bucks County, adjacent to Nockamixon State Park.

Frances attended St. John for grades 1 through 8. The school had just four classrooms, which meant grade levels were merged: 1-2; 3-4; 5-6; and 7-8.

My wife had the smallest class in the school, just 21 kids. All the others had at least 30 kids. That meant for all eight years, Frances had at least 50 classmates in her classroom, taught by one nun.

Of course, there were no such things as certifications or nun's unions, so the nuns were quite flexible. Frances had Sister Machtilde for five years; Sister Constanziana for two; and Sister Tabitha for one.

There was no gym and no cafeteria. The students brought their lunches and ate in the classroom. There was one recess for all grade levels, unsupervised, while the nuns ate their lunch in the convent across the road. The boys played on one side of the school and the girls on the other. If someone got hurt, an older kid would run across the road to the convent.

The eighth graders would sing at funerals in the church across the road and perform other duties.

There was no library. There were no music, art, or gym teachers. No guidance counselors, psychologists, or therapists. No special education teachers, no aides, no reading specialists.

The school was free for parishioners. Frances would have liked to continue at Notre Dame High School near Easton, but Notre Dame charged tuition, so that was out of the question.

Frances (and many of her classmates) therefore went to public school, Palisades High School, grades 9

through 12. Frances never had any academic problems, graduating ninth in a class of 120 students. Then it was on to Kutztown State College and Lehigh University for her bachelor's and master's degrees in education.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

She would not have traded her experience at St. John for any other.

Frances taught for 35 years in Pottstown elementary schools, but before she earned her elementary certification, she taught for three years in parochial schools. She enjoyed a degree of freedom and autonomy she never had afterwards.

Since my wife started in Pottstown in 1973, the cost of education has skyrocketed from \$1,600 per pupil in 1974 to \$19,000 in 2020 — triple the rate of inflation.

The district has cultivated a plethora of specialists and aides over the years and is always adding more. Last month, we added six teacher "coaches" for our "Multi-Tiered System of Support." It's supposed to be temporary.

What are the results of all this spending? Are our graduates doing better in life than they did 40 years ago? How many even stay in Pottstown? Is our town better or worse?

It's not easy to say.

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



**ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST SCHOOL had just four classrooms housing eight grade levels. It is now used by the state fish and boat commission, which converted the ground floor into a garage.**

