

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR  
**Responsible**  
 GOVERNMENT

## Let's promote open government

On Nov. 3, I was elected to the Pottstown School Board with my running mate, Valerie Harris. We will take office Dec. 3. We were elected on the same platform as five candidates who won at the polls two years ago. We all pledged to:

- Preserve Pottstown's neighborhood elementary schools.
- Practice fiscal responsibility.
- Promote open government.

As of December, therefore, a clear majority of our school board members will have publicly committed themselves to those goals. Now we need to make good on our promises.

The most salient fact about the Pottstown School District is high taxation. Our district has the eleventh highest tax rate of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts.

During the last 15 years, school district spending has increased at triple the rate of inflation. School property taxes have more than doubled.

The expansion of personnel has been even more dramatic. In 1978, the district employed 423 people serving 4,012 students. Thirty years later, in 2008, the district employed 591 people serving just 3,217 students. As of this year, we have 615 employees.

The school district is spending at unsustainable levels. We must start making much better use of our resources.

The first — and indispensable — step to intelligent decision-making is gathering information.

The Pottstown School District's three most informative public documents are:

- The budget.
- A list of district employees, together with each employee's job title and the building where the employee works.
- "Pottstown Demographics," a compilation of statistics the district publishes each year which includes total enrollment, enrollment by building, percentage of low income students, and other valuable information.



Commentary by  
 Thomas Hylton

The budget should be the school district's most informative document. Properly formatted, it can illuminate better than any other resource how and why our tax dollars are being spent.

For example, the school district operates five elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, and two administration buildings. A budget should be formulated that lists the actual cost of each employee, broken down by building. The budget should also break down the costs of maintaining each building, including the heating and cooling systems and electricity.

In addition, we need a listing of all classes in the district, so we can determine the teaching load of each instructor.

This year, the school district is spending \$53 million in public dollars, including \$30 million collected directly from Pottstown taxpayers. The school board cannot spend this money responsibly without adequate information.

*Tom Hylton, a 37-year resident of Pottstown, is Web site editor of Pottstown Citizens for Responsible Government.*

### Summary

- **A majority of Pottstown School Board members have now been elected on the following platform:**
  - \* **Preserve our neighborhood elementary schools**
  - \* **Practice fiscal responsibility**
  - \* **Promote open government**
- **The first step for the school board is to gather sufficient information to make intelligent decisions.**
- **A detailed budget showing where the money goes is indispensable.**