

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

## \$52 million for 8 schools, not 5

How much will it cost to renovate Pottstown's elementary schools? That depends on how much additional space you build.

Last April, the district's architects estimated it would cost \$35 million to renovate all five elementary schools and enlarge them sufficiently to eliminate 13 modular classrooms sitting outside the school buildings.

But the school district's top administrators said the plan did not provide enough space.

Five months later, the architects came back with a new plan. Now renovations and additions to the five schools were estimated at \$52 million.

How could costs escalate \$17 million in just five months?

Mostly, it was because the new plans called for adding an enormous amount of new construction — 88,500 square feet, about the same size as the Franklin, Edgewood and Rupert elementary schools combined. Yet enrollments are not increasing.

In fact, the district has a history of adding more space even as enrollments de-

cline. In the early 1980s, for example, Pottstown High School enrolled more than 1,000 students. When the high school was renovated in 2002, it was enlarged 26 percent, even though enrollments had dropped to fewer than 900 students.

Pottstown Middle School was enlarged by 73 percent in 2000, including the addition of a second auditorium and a large group instruction room with a cathedral ceiling. Meanwhile enrollments have declined from 730 students prior to renovations to 680 students today.

Likewise, the estimated cost of renovating Pottstown's five neighborhood elementary schools has been dramatically increased by adding space for new cafeterias, large group instruction rooms, lobbies, and other common space. Do we need all this extra space? Can we afford it?

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Commentary by  
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### Facts

- 1999 Pottstown Middle School enrolls about 730 students.
- 2000 Pottstown Middle School building is renovated and enlarged 73 percent at a cost of more than \$20 million.
- 2008 Pottstown Middle School enrolls about 680 students.
- 1996 Pottstown's five elementary schools enroll about 1,970 students. The schools have no modulars (outdoor classrooms in trailers).
- 1997 District begins adding modulars outside the elementary schools.
- 2008 Pottstown's five elementary schools enroll about 1,600 students. The schools now have 13 modular classrooms.
- 2008 April: District architects estimate it will cost \$35 million to renovate Pottstown's five elementary schools and add enough classroom space to eliminate the modulars — the equivalent space of adding another school the size of Barth Elementary School.  
District administrators direct architects to add more space.
- 2008 September: District architects estimate it will cost \$52 million to renovate and enlarge Pottstown's five elementary schools. They have now added the equivalent space of three more elementary schools — the size of Franklin, Edgewood and Rupert elementary schools combined.

### Conclusion

**District administrators are driving up the cost of renovations by adding a huge amount of extra "common" space that must be heated and maintained. Why?**