

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

## Does democracy matter?

In 2007, a slate of five candidates ran for the Pottstown School Board promising to retain and renovate Pottstown's five neighborhood elementary schools.

It was the first local election in decades to be focused on such a specific issue. Five incumbent school board members seeking re-election favored the construction of a consolidated "mega-campus" near the Hill School that would contain three buildings, one housing grades K-1, another grades 2-3, and the third housing grades 4-5. The existing elementary schools would then be sold and replaced by housing developments.

The challengers, calling themselves the "Neighborhood Schools Team," mailed post-cards to voters, signed by all five candidates, pledging to preserve Pottstown's neighborhood elementary schools by "making necessary renovations but avoiding lavish facilities our town can't afford."

The Neighborhood Schools Team won by an overwhelming majority — about 82 percent of the vote.

But Pottstown's top administrators, who call themselves the Executive Team, have behaved as if the election didn't happen.

All of the Executive Team members were granted contracts by the previous school board that run through June 30, 2010. Like all Pottstown School administrators, none lives in Pottstown.

A special workshop meeting of the school board was held in April 2008, which was closed to the public. It is hard to say who decided to conduct this meeting in private, because there is no record

in the school board minutes that it was ever voted on or even discussed.

At this closed meeting, the Executive Team put on a Power Point presentation arguing that the optimum educational program called for building one central campus for all elementary school students.

When the Executive Team failed to persuade the school board to create one campus, its fallback position was to eliminate two of Pottstown's five elementary schools and cluster all Pottstown children in three buildings. The Executive Team is now carrying out its revised plan:

1. Double the size of Lincoln and Franklin elementary schools.
2. Turn Edgewood Elementary School into a center for pre-K and kindergarten and possibly first grade at a later date.
3. Close Rupert Elementary School.
4. Renovate Barth Elementary School into a new administration building.
5. Close and sell the current administration building.
6. Close and sell the administration annex building next to Franklin School.

The school board may be maneuvered into acquiescing to this plan. But if so, why did the "Neighborhood Schools Team" run for office?

Why do we have elections?

Why do people bother to vote?

Does democracy matter?

*Thomas Hylton, a 36-year resident of Pottstown and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, is treasurer and Web site editor of Pottstown Citizens for Responsible Government.*



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

### Summary

- **In 2007, a slate of candidates for Pottstown School Board ran on a pledge to preserve and renovate Pottstown's five neighborhood elementary schools.**
- **The candidates won with 82 percent of the vote — a huge majority.**
- **Despite the election, Pottstown School administrators, none of whom lives in Pottstown, continue to push a "centers" approach that requires major new construction and eliminates Pottstown's system of neighborhood schools.**