

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Parents fight for neighborhood schools

Perhaps nothing is more important to the success of a school and its students than parental involvement.

For decades, studies have recognized that parents have more influence over their children's education than anyone else. That's why it is so encouraging to see an outpouring of support by Pottstown parents trying to save their neighborhood schools.

More than a score of parents spoke at a recent meeting of the Pottstown School Board in favor of preserving their schools. "If something is not broken, why change it?" Edgewood Elementary School parent Denise Rubach asked the board. "Edgewood is a school that works."

These parents are not seeking lavish facilities or tens of millions of dollars in upgrades and new construction. Certainly, our schools should be safe, well-maintained, and inviting. Beyond that, however, the relationship between students, parents, and teachers is far more important than brand-new facilities. Many Pottstown parents recognize instinctively what years of research have shown: Small neighborhood schools provide a superior learning environment, especially for students from low-income families. In small schools, student attitudes are better, attendance improves, parental involvement is encouraged, and the level of extra-curricular activity increases.

As educational reformer Deborah

Meier writes: "Every child is entitled to be in a school small enough so he or she can be known by name to every faculty member in the school and well known by at least a few of them, a school so small that family can come in and see the responsible adults, and the responsible adults can easily and quickly see each other."

Two years ago, The Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association sponsored a publication, called "Renovate or Replace," which encourages school districts to strongly consider renovating and retaining their neighborhood schools.

Not only do neighborhood schools provide an excellent learning environment, the brochure pointed out, they are usually less expensive to renovate than building new schools.

In fact, a review of all major public school construction projects in Pennsylvania in recent years shows that new construction is nearly twice as expensive, per square foot, as renovations, when all project costs are considered.

That's why retaining our neighborhood elementary schools is best for our parents, students, and taxpayers.

Thomas Hylton, a 36-year resident of Pottstown, is treasurer and Web site editor of Pottstown Citizens for Responsible Government. His wife, Frances, retired last year after 35 years as a Pottstown elementary school teacher.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Summary

- **Pottstown elementary school parents have asked the school board to retain their five neighborhood schools.**
- **Research shows that small neighborhood schools provide a better learning environment than large schools, especially for low-income children.**
- **It is usually less expensive to renovate existing schools than build new ones.**