

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Questions about special education

The number of special education students in the Pottstown School District has risen dramatically.

In just the last two years, the district has added 64 special education students, although the district's overall enrollment has remained stable. The district has added nine more special education teachers and seven more classroom assistants.

Special education students are those who have identified learning problems that require specially designed instruction. While some students have quite severe handicaps, about two-thirds of special education students have relatively mild disabilities.

A recent state "costing-out" study concluded it costs 2.3 times more to educate special education students than those without special needs.

This is a significant burden for a school district that has the 15th highest taxes in Pennsylvania out of 500 districts.

The "costing-out" study, which was commissioned by the legislature, estimated how much money each district should be

spending to provide a basic, quality instructional program for special education students.

The study found that nearly four out of five districts are not spending enough for special education. But the Pottstown and Pottsgrove School Districts were spending more, per student, than the "costing-out" study calculated was necessary for a quality education. In fact, Pottstown is spending nearly \$1,500 more, per student, than suggested by the "costing-out" study.

Moreover, Pottstown has a higher percentage of special education students than the statewide average. It has a

significantly higher percentage of special education students than high-poverty districts like Reading, Allentown, and Philadelphia. Because the standards for placing students in special education are uniform, statewide, it is not clear why these districts are so different.

Thomas Hylton, a 36-year resident of Pottstown, is Web site editor of Pottstown Citizens for Responsible Government.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

Summary

- **A recent state "costing-out" study estimates that it costs 2.3 times as much to educate special education students as those without special needs.**
- **The state "costing-out" study found that most school districts do not spend enough on special education, but Pottstown spends more, per student, than the "costing-out" study suggests is necessary.**
- **Pottstown has a higher percentage of special education students than most districts, including districts with a higher percentage of low-income students. It is not clear why.**

Special education students as a percentage of school district enrollment		
School District	Percentage of low-income students*	Percentage of special education students*
Pottstown	50.4%	20.86%
Pottsgrove	18.3%	17.16%
Owen J. Roberts	7.4%	18.05%
Reading	83.4%	12.6%
Allentown	73.5%	14.76%
Bethlehem	39.6%	13.86%
Philadelphia	70%	13.55%
Norristown Area	56.5%	20.36%
Lebanon	63%	16.09%
Harrisburg	68%	19.95%

* Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education