

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Pottstown tops in per pupil spending

Why does Pottstown have among the highest taxes of any school district in Pennsylvania?

Pottstown's high taxes stem from a combination of two factors. First, we spend more money, per pupil, than the vast majority of school districts in the state. Of 500 school districts, Pottstown ranks 30th in per pupil spending. In other words, we spend more, per pupil, than 94 percent of the districts in Pennsylvania.

Second, Pottstown's tax base — which the state figures as a combination of the personal income of its residents and the market value of its real estate — is below the state average. About 60 percent of the school districts in Pennsylvania are wealthier than Pottstown. And the total assessed value of Pottstown's real estate is declining, which means taxes must increase just to bring in the same revenue as the previous year.

The few districts that spend more money, per pupil, than Pottstown are mostly wealthy districts like Upper and Lower Merion, Springfield, Cheltenham,

Radnor, and Rose Tree Media.

Members of the Pottstown School Board argue that state mandates are responsible for our high costs. But every district faces the same mandates as Pottstown, and the vast majority spend less money, per pupil, than we do.

Boyertown, for example, spends about 30 percent less, per pupil, than Pottstown.

Another argument is that Pottstown has a high percentage of low-income students.

But other districts with far more low-income students than Pottstown spend less than we do. For example, Reading and Allentown, which have among the highest percentage of low-income students in Pennsylvania, spend about 40 percent less, per pupil, than Pottstown.

Our district must find ways to cut costs. Our level of spending — and taxing — is unsustainable.

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



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

Summary

* **Pottstown School District spends more, per pupil, than the vast majority of school districts in Pennsylvania.**

* **Although Pottstown has a high percentage of low-income students, other districts with a high percentage of low-income students, such as Allentown, Bethlehem, and Philadelphia, spend far less than Pottstown.**

* **With Pottstown's declining tax base, the current level of spending is unsustainable.**

Spending per pupil 2006-2007 school year*			
School District	Per pupil spending	Percentage of low-income students*	State rank of 500 school districts
Pottstown	\$15,478	50.4%	30
Pottsgrove	\$14,050	18.3%	59
Boyertown Area	\$10,856	8.6%	336
Owen J. Roberts	\$15,225	7.4%	33
Reading	\$9,058	83.4%	495
Allentown	\$9,214	73.5%	491
Bethlehem	\$10,884	39.6%	332
Philadelphia	\$11,739	70%	222
Norristown Area	\$14,892	56.5%	42
Lebanon	\$10,776	63%	351

* Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education for the most recent year available.