

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

## Web site misses opportunity to promote schools

Yesterday, I told the story of a recent Pottstown High School graduate who is entering her second year at Yale University, typically ranked with Harvard and Princeton as one of the top three colleges in the nation.

Carissa Youse, Pottstown Class of 2008—Yale Class of 2012, received her entire public school education in Pottstown—kindergarten through 12th grade. Because Carissa comes from a low-income family, and Yale has a “need-blind” admission policy, the university is making sure all her expenses are covered. Over four years, Carissa will receive a \$200,000 education virtually free.

And Carissa says she felt well prepared for Yale by Pottstown schools.

It’s hard to imagine a more ringing, powerful endorsement of the Pottstown School District. It gives parents confidence their children can attend Pottstown schools and receive ample preparation for the nation’s most rigorous universities.

Sadly, the Pottstown School District has failed to mention Carissa or other successful recent graduates on its Web site.

### Web sites a powerful tool

In little more than a decade, Web sites have transformed society. A Web site allows an individual or organization to reach out to the entire world, round-the-clock. It provides unlimited space to inform and persuade. And it costs next to nothing to design and operate. A tiny business can operate a Web site as impressive as a mighty corporation’s.

But just as a Web site can educate and inspire, it can also be a monumental turn-off. Web sites that are unattractive, disorganized, or poorly written can repel an audience rather than attract it.

Unfortunately, the Pottstown School District Web site is bland at best. Inspiring stories like that of Carissa Youse are absent. Information is scattered about haphazardly, and much of it

is outdated. It is obvious that little thought has been given to presenting a comprehensive picture of Pottstown schools in a logical and agreeable format.

### Promoting fear

Worst of all, the district Web site has a prominent feature I’ve seen on no other school district Web site: The Amber Alert.

The Amber Alert is a program run by the U.S. Department of Justice to inform people about abducted children. If a law enforcement agency concludes a child has been abducted, it broadcasts that information over various media, including the Internet.

The Pottstown School District’s home page has a prominent yellow band scrolling across the top—the Amber Alert—informing viewers the names of children who are missing anywhere in America. As I write this, for example, I am informed on Potts-

town’s Web site that Emanuel Guzman is missing somewhere between Colorado and Mexico. Other children are missing in Nevada, Florida, and California.

While the Amber Alert may be a valuable service, it should be limited to those who are looking for it. It should not be plopped down on the top of a Web site that is trying to provide information and generate good feelings about the Pottstown School District. Instead, the first emotion aroused is fear—the polar opposite of what we want to achieve.

### Missing opportunities

Pottstown administrators boast the district receives 20,000 visits or more to its Web site every month. The district’s Web site can be its best, most cost-effective tool to promote itself and communicate with the public.

The district must make much better use of its Web site in the future than it does now.

*Thomas Hylton, a 37-year resident of Pottstown, is Web site editor of Pottstown Citizens for Responsible Government.*



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

## Summary

- **Carissa Youse, Pottstown High School Class of 2008, is now entering her sophomore year at Yale University. Her story is proof positive the Pottstown School District can prepare bright, motivated students to succeed in the nation’s most rigorous colleges.**
- **Carissa’s story is a ringing endorsement of Pottstown schools, but the district doesn’t even mention her—or other successful graduates—on its Web site.**
- **Instead, it features the “Amber Alert” about missing children throughout America. The district must make much better use of its Web site—a potentially powerful, cost-effective way to promote Pottstown and communicate with the public.**