Pottstown schools underrated

The Pottstown area’s most enduring myth is the inferiority of the Pottstown School District. In all likelihood, the opposite is true.

Top Pottstown graduates can — and do — compete with anybody, anywhere. They are admitted into the nation’s finest colleges and universities, and they excel once they get there.

Pottstown’s unenviable reputation has more to do with prejudice than reality. Pottstown has a much higher percentage of low income and minority families than other school districts in the region. Many people, unfortunately, equate minorities and poverty with inferiority.

Of course, we’ve all learned to be politically correct, so no one is going to say that. Instead, they are going to say the “Pottstown School District” is inferior.

Let’s look at the facts. Nationwide, there is a high correlation between systemic poverty and low academic achievement. Moreover, African-American and Latino students generally don’t do as well as whites on standardized tests.

That’s why test scores at Pottstown, in the aggregate, are lower than surrounding districts. But that doesn’t mean Pottstown students are less worthy than anyone else. And for those who value standardized test scores, Pottstown is one of the state’s top performers among high poverty high schools.

For most parents, however, the question is not, “How are students scoring in the aggregate?” but “How will my child do?”

No better place than Pottstown.

By the time today’s kindergartners are in their 30s, demographers tell us, America will be a white-minority country. Pottstown is far more reflective of what our nation is becoming than the overwhelmingly white districts surrounding us.

I’ve spent a lot of time in our schools in recent months, and I know first-hand our kids get along well together. Black, white, nobody cares.

When I first ran for the Pottstown School Board, I learned a recent graduate, Carissa Youse, had been accepted at Yale, even though she wasn’t our top-ranked student. She was one of three children of a single mom living in very modest circumstances.

I talked to her several times in the following years. She felt well-prepared and grateful that her mentors in Pottstown had encouraged her aspirations.

She graduated in 2013 with a bachelor’s degree in education, and thanks to Yale’s ample endowment, she received a world-class education absolutely free.

Can any area high school do better?

Commentary by Tom Hylton

Edgewood Cemetery

Jasheel Brown and Miranda Somich, Pottstown Class of ’13, are thriving at the University of Pennsylvania.

www.pottstowncitizens.org