

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Careful economizing needed

On Tuesday, we noted the assessed value of Pottstown's real estate will continue to decline next year. Our tax base is well below what it was 20 years ago.

This is particularly significant for the Pottstown School District, which receives nearly half its revenue from the local real estate tax.

We also noted it's unlikely the school district will see a significant increase in state revenue, which accounts for about 40 percent of our current budget.

State budget shortfall

The state faces a \$500 million shortfall in this year's budget and expects a \$1.7 billion deficit next year. The legislature, which is overwhelmingly Republican, has voiced

Year	School District Budget	School District millage
2008-9	\$50,407,795	32.86
2009-10	\$53,401,543	34.73
2010-11	\$54,553,223	36.14
2011-12	\$51,108,049	36.81
2012-13	\$52,034,797	37.25
2013-14	\$52,947,845	38.15
2014-15	\$55,929,737	39.25
2015-16	\$57,136,928	39.25
2016-17	\$59,553,150	39.25
2017-18	?	?
10-year budget—millage increase	+18%	+19%
10-year cumulative inflation	12%	
10-year increase in teacher salaries	24%	
10-year increase in support staff salaries	15%	
10-year increase in principals' salaries	19%	

no interest in raising taxes.

It's more likely to cut spending.

As the chart, below left, shows, school district spending and taxation have increased above the rate of inflation during the last 10 years.

Salaries at double inflation rate

The total salary increase for our teachers has risen at double the rate of inflation, and our principals and support staff have also received increases beyond the rate of inflation.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Last August, I voted against a new three-year contract with the teachers' union that will cost the district an extra \$1.3 million annually by the third year of the contract.

In October, I voted against one-year salary increases of four percent for our support staff and principals, which will cost the district up to \$400,000 in the current school year.

And these numbers don't include rising health insurance costs.

With our declining tax base, I have no idea how we are going to pay for this increased spending without raising taxes. But increasing taxes will simply accelerate disinvestment in our town.

Business manager to retire

Our longtime business manager, Linda Adams, plans to retire at the end of the current school year. After that, balancing the budget will be someone else's problem.

Each year, the school district publishes a "big picture" budget, which lacks the details needed to figure out exactly where the money goes.

Last month, after numerous requests, we received a line item budget that can be the framework for intelligent decision-making.

But there are 2,700 line items, so it will be a long process for board members to educate themselves.

Above all, we need to change our culture from "more spending" to "careful economizing."

Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.