

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Schools becoming ever more costly

Last month, the Pottstown School Board approved a three-year contract with the Federation of Pottstown Teachers that boosts pay more at the bottom of the salary schedule than at the top.

That's a good thing. For many years, teachers at the top of the salary schedule earned about 80 percent more than those in their first few years of teaching — a huge difference.

The new contract begins an eight-year process of boosting salaries evenly over a 13-step schedule instead of giving "balloon payments" to those at the top.

The bad news is the total cost of the new contract is more than Pottstown taxpayers can afford, which is why I voted against it.

This year, the teaching staff will collectively earn \$454,000 more than last year. Next year, we will pay out another \$426,000, for a cumulative total of \$880,000 in the second year.

In the third year, more pay increases will cumulatively raise spending a total of \$1.4 million.

That does not include increases in health costs, which will also surely rise.

It also does not include the 300 district employees who are not teachers but will also expect pay increases.

Meanwhile, as shown below, Pottstown's tax base is actually lower than it was 15 years ago.

High taxation is already the No. 1 impediment to the revitalization of our town. We can't make it worse by raising taxes.

Of course, we can always hope the state will provide more funding.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

And it has, substantially, in recent years. Despite all the handwringing about a lack of state aid, revenues to Pottstown from the state have increased 46 percent over the last 10 years — about triple the rate of inflation.

There's little doubt Gov. Wolf will seek increased school funding from the legislature next year.

But the state has big budget problems of its own.

First, there is the \$60 billion unfunded liability for the two state pension systems — one for school district employees and one for state employees — which has to be addressed.

Then, there is a question whether this year's \$31.5 state budget is really balanced, or whether it uses hundreds of millions in revenues on paper that may not materialize.

It's fair to say that unless the legislature raises taxes next year, we won't see significant new state funding.

Earlier this year, the school board set aside time at its February, March, and April meetings to field suggestions from the school community — and the public — on how we could become more efficient.

No specific ideas materialized.

In fact, in seven years on the school board, I've only heard about proposals to spend more money, not less.

To the extent that anyone supports change, it usually consists of hiring more staff or adopting the latest and greatest curriculums or buying more technological equipment.

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

### Selected Pottstown School District statistics

Pottstown taxation rank of 500 Pennsylvania school districts	12th
Per pupil cost, 1974-1975	\$1,584
Per pupil cost, 2015-2016	\$18,387 (2.4 x inflation rate)
1977-1978 employee/student ratio	1 employee per 9.5 students
2015-2016 employee/student ratio	1 employee per 5.7 students
Pottstown wealth rank of 500 school districts	378 (bottom third)
Pottstown spending rank of 500 school districts	144 (top third)
Pottstown tax base, 1998	\$816,841,351
Pottstown tax base, 2016	\$804,630,169