

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Public schools and self-reliance

Pottstown superintendent Stephen Rodriguez will host a forum 7 tonight at Pottstown High School called “Why Are My Taxes So High and What Can I Do About It?”

The featured speakers will be Shirlee Howe of Public Citizens for Children and Youth and Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg of the Public Interest Law Center.

Although I haven't heard them speak, I have a good idea of what they are going to say, because their views are readily accessible on the internet.

### Fair funding

They believe Pennsylvania is not spending enough money on education. They believe Pennsylvania's funding distribution system shortchanges urban schools. Equally unfair, says Urevick-Ackelsberg, the greatest funding inequities are imposed on school districts with the highest proportion of minority students.

### Some pertinent facts

According to the National Education Association, Pennsylvania ranks 11th of 51 states and the District of Columbia in per pupil spending. So we're doing better than 75 percent of the states.

However, Pennsylvania relies more heavily on local taxation than most of its peers.

Many states are scrupulously fair in distributing state aid. Moreover, a few states — Vermont, Hawaii, and Minnesota — pay more than 80 percent of the total cost of K-12 public school education.

But Pennsylvania has an enormous budget deficit, and the state House and Senate are overwhelmingly controlled by rural and suburban

legislators. Therefore, increased funding for urban areas — no matter how deserving — is highly unlikely.

### Self-reliance

Mr. Rodriguez's forum to inform Pottstown residents about school funding issues is commendable. As a practical matter, however, the Pottstown School District must cope with its available resources.

### Pottstown spending

Pottstown taxpayers are not shortchanging our students. We spend more, per pupil, than two-thirds of the districts in Pennsylvania, while we are in the bottom fifth in wealth. That's why Pottstown has the third highest tax effort of 500 districts in the state.

### Urban areas shortchanged

Pennsylvania's cities and towns have a disproportionate share of poor people. This is mainly because, starting in the 1950s, the middle class moved out of our traditional towns into the homogeneous, low density suburbs. These people control Pennsylvania's purse strings, so towns like Pottstown receive an inequitable portion of state funding for many services, not just schools.

But can Pottstown do better with what it has? Of course. For example, about 85 percent of the Pottstown School District's professional staff live in the suburbs. If they moved here, that would significantly increase the number of middle class families — and students — in our town. That, in turn, would increase our quality of life.

On Thursday, I will feature a mayor who says our cities and towns should emphasize their natural advantages.

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



Commentary by  
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