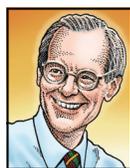


POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Middle school proposal: \$750,000+

Last Saturday, Pottstown superintendent Stephen Rodriguez made a presentation to about 20 parents and members of the public (and perhaps many more watching on the internet) about possibly moving the fifth grade from the middle school to Edgewood Elementary School.

Edgewood was closed in 2014 as renovations were completed at the four remaining elementary schools. In 2013, the fifth grade had been moved to the middle school, which had excess capacity.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

For the first two years, all was well under experienced principal Gail Cooper. But Cooper retired in 2015, and things deteriorated after an inexperienced new principal took over (he has since left).

Some people believe the middle school is too crowded, even though the school is within its design capacity. Moving the fifth grade to Edgewood will make things better, they say.

But additional staff costs at Edgewood would add more than \$500,000 annually to the district's budget, and a bond issue for \$6 million to renovate Edgewood would cost another \$250,000 in annual bond payments for 30 years.

There are many other options besides using Edgewood. For example, it would cost nothing to keep the fifth graders right where they are and revise the structure of the middle school to follow the recommendations of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, which recommends keeping the same teachers and students together for their entire middle school experience.

There are more than 60 middle schools in Pennsylvania housing grades 5 through 8, including three in Norristown. Some, including Upper Merion, Twin Valley, Ephrata, and Stroudsburg, house more than 1,000 students. Pottstown houses 970.

Next year, the Reading School District will eliminate its intermediate high school and create five middle schools with grades 5-8.

Philadelphia's premier public school, Julia R. Masterman, houses about 1,200 students in grades 5 through 12.

Johnstown, which has a higher percentage of low income students than Pottstown, operates a 5-7 middle school and places its eighth grade in the high school. There's ample room for the eighth grade at Pottstown High School, which once housed 1,300 students but now has just 800.

York School District, whose student body is 97 percent low income, operates seven K-8 schools. Teachers keep the same students for two grades.

There are other models we should explore before embracing a "solution" that will cost more than \$750,000 annually and may not solve anything.

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

Pottstown taxes are consistently in the top 2 to 3 percent of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts.

Pottstown taxation rank of 500 school districts in Pennsylvania	
2001-2002	7
2002-2003	8
2003-2004	6
2004-2005	14
2005-2006	10
2006-2007	15
2007-2008	11
2008-2009	16
2009-2010	7
2010-2011	12
2011-2012	10
2012-2013	12
2013-2014	12
2014-2015	3
2015-2016	3
2016-2017	6

Pottstown School District administrators now propose to move the district's fifth graders from the middle school to the former Edgewood Elementary School, which will increase costs more than \$750,000 annually.