Building to excess (1 of 4)

For most of its 85-year history, the Pottstown Middle School was right-sized for its mission.

But in 1997, the school district commissioned an architectural study that concluded all the district’s buildings needed upgrades, starting with the middle school.

Unfortunately, needed renovations soon turned into a costly building extravaganza.

At a pricetag of more than $20 million, the middle school was renovated and enlarged 73 percent.

It has an enormous new gymnasium with a cathedral ceiling; a second, small auditorium; a large group instruction room with a cathedral ceiling (the acoustics are so bad it’s never been used for its original purpose), and grand entrances worthy of an art museum.

Before it was renovated and enlarged, the middle school enrolled about 730 students. When renovations were completed in 2001, the school enrolled just 680 students.

For the next 12 years, the school operated at about 65 percent of its design capacity. Students and staff enjoyed an abundance of underused space.

In 2013, when the fifth grade moved in, building enrollment was still below capacity. Even with its current enrollment of 970, the building is still below its design capacity of 1,070 students.

It’s unfortunate the school district chose to oversize the middle school and add lots of architectural frills.

But the middle school is not overcrowded. With the sixth highest taxes in Pennsylvania, we can’t operate buildings that are 65 percent full.

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