

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Integrated schools are the best

Ask any real estate agent. The biggest negative about Pottstown for prospective residents with children is the school district.

Pottstown has a much higher percentage of low income and minority families than any other district in the area. Many people, unfortunately, equate minorities and poverty with inferiority.

Of course, we've all learned to be politically correct, so no one is going to say that. Instead, they are going to say the "Pottstown School District" itself is inferior.

Over the last 50 years, the percentage of low income and minority students in Pottstown schools has steadily increased, from about 20 percent in the early 1970s to about 70 percent today.

This is a result of segregated housing patterns. Generally, people want newer and lower density housing in the suburbs, where people make as much money (or preferably more) than they do. White parents prefer schools that are majority white, and



**COURTNEY MYKYTYN** Mykytyn of Los Angeles, urged white parents like herself to send their kids to public schools with black and Latino majorities. (Mykytyn, 46, was killed in a car accident last month.)

Not only did Mykytyn enroll her two children in a predominately Latino school, she started a non-profit organization called Integrated Schools, with about 20 chapters nationwide, to encourage white parents to enroll their children in schools where they would be in the minority, even though these schools would likely have fewer resources than majority white schools.

Mykytyn, who had a PhD in medical anthropology, wrote an essay last year about her philosophy:

"Parents often talk about choosing a school to get "the best" for our kids. But what does that "best" mean — and what if it comes at the expense of someone else's kid?

"...our individual choices often support a system that further advantages the advantaged. (The very idea of a "best schools list" perpetuates inequitable schools by guiding parents to ignore the systemic impact of their choices.) While the U.S. has ostensibly been working toward desegregation for 65 years, these efforts are failing in



Commentary by  
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part due to what parents think a good education

should look like.

"The research is clear that test scores, for example, tell us more about the demographics of the families in a school than it does about the integrity of its teaching. The research is also clear that, despite what we may believe, "sought-after schools" actually do not improve student test scores.

"Attending an integrating school — one in which yours may be the only or one of a few white and/or privileged families — can (but doesn't necessarily) mean that your child won't have impressive-sounding academic programs, after-school enrichment activities or big parent-booster budgets.

"But choosing an integrating school is not so much sacrifice as it is a reprioritizing what matters in building a world we want our children to be adults in.

"Along with many parents, my partner and I decided against raising our children in a bubble. We have enrolled our children (now ages 14 and 16) in schools that serve disproportionately high numbers of free or reduced-fee lunch and non-native-English-speaking students. Our experience has been transformative, and while it has not always been easy or comfortable, we are grateful. The conversations we have as a family about justice and inequality, about how the world works and our place in it, have been critical in our kids' development."

As a Pottstown school director and spouse of a retired Pottstown teacher, I have never doubted that for any child, the benefits of integrated schools far outweigh the "advantages" of homogeneous suburban schools.