

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Pandemic barely changes enrollment

The Pottstown School District has been providing eleven weeks of virtual education for all grade levels since the school year began Aug. 24.

The school board will discuss the current situation at a committee meeting 6:30 tonight which will be posted live on the district's Facebook page.

The board voted July 30 to go virtual for the first semester, which ends Jan. 14, 2021.

Given the recent resurgence of the pandemic, it seems unlikely any grade levels will transition to full-time or hybrid in-person classes before that.

Seven teachers at the Lincoln and Rupert elementary schools, plus a pre-K counts teacher, have volunteered to pilot various forms of hybrid programs in their classes starting Nov. 9.

We'll have the benefit of their experience before the school board's regular meeting Nov. 19, when we are scheduled to determine a course of action for the second semester.

No one thinks that virtual is an adequate substitute for in-person learning, but I was relieved that a recent parental survey indicated families are coping better than we might have thought.

A solid majority of parents (nearly 600 responded) were either somewhat or very satisfied with the virtual program. Most were at least somewhat satisfied with their children's academic progress.

Meanwhile, the pandemic has not had much impact on the district's enrollment. The number of students switching to cyber charter schools since the onset of the pandemic only increased slightly.

The enrollment chart, below, shows the impact of an initiative by superintendent Stephen Rodriguez to bring back into the district many special education and alternative education students who had been previously assigned to private schools.

This will save the district money and keep these students closer to home.

The new programs are being housed at the remodeled former PCTV studio at the high school and in a section of the former Edgewood Elementary School.

The district has received a \$1.7 million grant from the federal CARES program, which it will use to upgrade the HVAC system at Edgewood, greatly extending the life of the building. Most of the building will continue to be leased to Montgomery County Head Start.



Commentary by Tom Hylton

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

Enrollment		
	March 2020	October 2020
School district	3,396	3,323
Home schooled	19	20
Cyber charter	135	147
Bricks and mortar charter	50	49
Special ed placed in private schools	137	63
Alternative ed in private schools	35	7
PreK counts	99	50

PARENT SURVEY — On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very good and 1 being not good, how would you rate (left) your current satisfaction with the school district's virtual education program? Right, how confident are you that your child is making sufficient academic progress with online learning?

