

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Community college: a great start

On Tuesday, we reported on 15 Pottstown High School graduates, Class of 2020, who had earned college credits at Montgomery County Community College while in high school, funded by the Foundation for Pottstown Education.

To qualify for grants, they had to be top students.

Other Pottstown students paid their own tuition — but either way, community colleges are the best bargain in higher education.

When my wife and I were college students, back in the 1960s, college tuition was a fraction of what it is today. We both graduated from Kutztown State College debt-free — tuition was just \$250 a semester.

My brother graduated from Lehigh University, where tuition was less than \$2,000 a year. He finished school with \$4,000 in debt, which he could take up to 10 years to pay back at 3 percent interest. If he had gone into teaching, his loan would have been forgiven.

Today, college student loan debt tops an astonishing \$1.5 trillion, and Pennsylvania students have the second highest debt load in the country, with an average of \$37,061 owed per student.

The closest thing we have today to 1960s prices are community colleges. At \$199 per credit, a Montgomery County student can take a full year's course load for less than \$5,700.

And students can get financial aid. At last month's Pottstown School Board meeting, Montco's assistant dean of academic affairs, Kelly Strunk, announced a new mentorship program, College Connections Experience, for first-time college students.

Students are enrolled in two free courses, "Strategies for college success" and Introductory English. They will be assigned a success coach who will help them with course selection and navigating the different departments in the school. They can receive a loaner laptop and loaner textbooks.

The program will be available to select students for the next four years.

The community college offers more than 100 associate's degree and certificate programs, including on-line degrees.

Students with associate's degrees can transfer to more than 30 Pennsylvania colleges and universities. Some colleges will accept up to 60 college credits from Montco.

There are even a few colleges, such as Albright, which offer selected bachelor's degrees from courses taken at the community college campuses.

Pottstown's superintendent of schools, Stephen Rodriguez, started his career with an associate's degree at a community college and highly recommends them as a cost-effective way to enter higher education.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE POTTSTOWN CAMPUS