

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Huge challenge ahead

Like most school districts in the region, Pottstown is going all-virtual this fall.

No one believes on-line learning is an adequate substitute for in-person classes, but with all the uncertainty of the pandemic, it's the least bad option.

All our students will be picking up Chromebooks at their home schools before the school year begins next week. We have Chromebooks for all students except kindergartners. They are on back order.

Our teachers have been taking courses this summer on running live teacher-led video conference sessions (called synchronous learning) on a set schedule with their students (see chart at right). Students will also do asynchronous work on their own schedules.

Teachers will be taking attendance and grading assignments. As of now, the state will still require testing next spring.

Although everyone will be adversely affected by the lack of in-person instruction, Pottstown will be hit much harder than other districts.

The chart below tells the story. Nearly three-quarters of Pottstown students come from low-income families. That's twice as many as Pottsgrove and four times as many as Owen J. Roberts.

It's been well-established that by far the greatest indicator of success in school is the income and education level of students' parents.

Most Pottstown students just don't have the resources at home that families in other districts enjoy.

Many parents in other districts have jobs where they can stay at home and work remotely. Our working class parents don't have that luxury.

Frankly, a substantial number of our kids have chaotic home lives. Many kids don't have a place at home where they can quietly go on-line and do their work.

Our schools are often a

refuge for many students. They can feel safe and interact with other students and responsible adults. The pandemic has taken that away from them, for now.

So are there any bright spots? Yes.

First, we're all being forced to learn technology that will be vital to function in today's world.

All lessons will be recorded, so students can play them over and over until the material sinks in.

Many teachers will offer "office hours" to students and parents in the evening.

Other staff will be available on a "second shift" to provide technical support in

the evenings.

"Attendance squads" of school employees "repurposed" from in-school assignments will visit the homes of students who are enrolled but not engaged (with masks and distancing).

Staff will reach out to students more than in the past. That's something that should continue when in-person schooling resumes.



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.

Synchronous minutes of daily instruction	
Elementary K-4	2 hrs, 35 min
Middle School 5/6	2 hrs, 55 min
Middle School 7/8	3 hrs, 30 min
High School 9/12	3 hrs, 40 min

School districts by wealth and need			
School District	Percent students from low-income families	Wealth, ranked out of 500 districts	Local tax effort, ranked out of 500 districts
Pottstown	72.5%	413	7
Pottsgrove	37.3%	240	26
Boyertown	24.4%	140	208
Daniel Boone	23.7%	255	49
O. J. Roberts	18.2%	61	83
Spring-Ford	16.9%	37	256
Perk. Valley	15.6%	86	74