

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

20 students = \$2+ million in spending

On Tuesday, we discussed how special education enrollment has skyrocketed since 1975, when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed, guaranteeing every disabled child a “free appropriate public education.”

In Pottstown, the percentage of special education students has grown from 3 percent of the total student population in 1980 to nearly 20 percent today, reflecting statewide numbers.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

That doesn't include another 100 or so special education students assigned to private schools, with tuition and transportation paid by the public.

The identification of children with disabilities, and a school district's efforts to compensate for them, involves a complicated series of steps, each mandated by law and rigorously monitored by the state Department of Education. In addition, private advocacy groups and individuals do not hesitate to take legal action if they perceive shortcomings in the process.

Many students are identified as qualifying for special education benefits as pre-schoolers, and the numbers steadily increase as students progress through school.

An evaluation process can be initiated by parents, teachers, and other school professionals.

The process is highly specific and involves “team” meetings and careful documentation on forms mandated by the state.

If a student qualifies for special education, he or she is provided with a detailed document called an IEP (Individualized Education Program), which contains a precise description of the student's handicap and remedies for overcoming it.

This document is developed not by any one teacher, but by a “team” which must by law include an administrator, a special education teacher, a general education teacher, and a parent. It can also include other specialists and an advocate chosen by the parent. Pennsylvania's mandatory IEP form comprises 14 pages,

minimum, and can stretch to scores of pages (sometimes 90 or more).

As one special education lawyer testified before a Pennsylvania legislative committee, “the typical information required in an IEP is more complex than that which would appear in a corporate tax return.”

There is no “cap” on how much money a school district must spend to meet an individual student's needs.

That's why, as the chart below illustrates, Pottstown taxpayers are spending more than \$2 million to meet the needs of just 20 students.

Pottstown superintendent Stephen Rodriguez has begun an initiative to bring back some special education students, now bused to private schools, to be taught here in the district. It's better for the student and better for the taxpayer.

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

Pottstown School District Most expensive 20 students* \$2,168,430

	TUITION	EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR	TRANSPORTATION	TOTAL
STUDENT A	\$124,135			\$124,135
STUDENT B	\$119,971		\$6,300	\$126,271
STUDENT C	\$84,910			\$84,910
STUDENT D	\$65,931		\$45,890	\$111,821
STUDENT E	\$101,701		\$5,850	\$107,541
STUDENT F	\$67,971			\$67,971
STUDENT G	\$79,207			\$79,207
STUDENT H	\$200,000			\$200,000
STUDENT I	\$117,500			\$117,500
STUDENT J	\$114,000			\$114,000
STUDENT K	\$53,820	\$7,774	\$24,516	\$86,110
STUDENT L	\$53,820	\$14,651	\$24,516	\$92,987
STUDENT M	\$53,820	\$14,651	\$24,516	\$92,987
STUDENT N	\$53,820	\$7,774	\$24,516	\$86,110
STUDENT O	\$53,820		\$84,000	\$137,820
STUDENT P	\$68,400	\$18,620	\$24,516	\$111,536
STUDENT Q	\$68,400	\$18,620	\$24,516	\$111,536
STUDENT R	\$68,400	\$18,620	\$24,516	\$111,536
STUDENT S	\$68,400	\$18,620	\$24,516	\$111,536
STUDENT T	\$68,400		\$24,516	\$92,916
TOTAL				\$2,168,430

* As of February 2020

Special Education legal fees

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	TOTAL
\$102,089	\$131,156	\$90,118	\$94,199	\$417,482