

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

High quality leadership

Pottstown Borough government and the Pottstown School District are coterminous. They serve the same people and collect their revenues from the same taxpayers.

This year they are spending a combined \$108 million.

By far the most important government officials are the superintendent of schools and the borough manager, because they control the spending.

The school board and council almost always take their lead from these two administrators.

Last month, the Pottstown School Board approved a five-year contract with superintendent Stephen Rodriguez.

When former superintendent Jeffrey Sparagana retired in 2016, the board reviewed 20 applications and interviewed nine prospective superintendents. They all had big ideas about educational programs, but none on cost containment.

We then asked Mr. Rodriguez, our human resources director, if he would act as interim superintendent for a year. He agreed.

The next year, we went through another round of interviews. By that time, Mr. Rodriguez decided he would be a candidate.

He now had on-the-job experience, and he was head and shoulders over every other candidate.

During the last four years, Mr. Rodriguez has met or exceeded the expectations of the school board.

We have not raised taxes in two of the four years he's been superintendent, and we won't be raising taxes again this year.

Yet we enjoy a \$16 million fund balance as of June 30, 2020.

Unlike previous superintendents, Mr. Rodriguez keeps school board members informed weekly of district issues. He responds promptly to individual board member concerns and requests for information. He doesn't have an assistant and hasn't asked for one.

He recently revamped salaries for principals and other administrators to keep us competitive with wealthier districts in the Philadelphia area.

He is bringing back many special education and alternative education students from private schools to the

former Edgewood school building to save money and keep these students closer to home.

He has raised the district's profile as president of the Pennsylvania League of Urban Schools and speaks out articulately in the media about fair funding and other school issues, including an appearance April 20 on WHYY's popular Radio Times.

Here in Pottstown, he hosts webinars for staff and community members. He has a good relationship with the teachers' union. Pre-pandemic, he frequently visited with community groups and in all our schools.

Other area districts have experienced a lot of turnover at the top: Pottsgrove, Owen J. Roberts, Springfield, and Boyertown have all hired new superintendents in the last year.

Ever since he signed his current contract in 2017, Mr. Rodriguez has assured us he has no intention of going anywhere.

For his new one, he asked for the maximum term allowed by law — five years. His salary is competitive with others in the area but not exorbitant:

2021-2022	\$210,940
2022-2023	\$217,340
2023-2024	\$224,080
2024-2025	\$231,080
2025-2026	\$237,440

Mr. Rodriguez is unpaid president this year of Pottstown Area Industrial Development Inc., the borough's non-profit economic development group.

He has an excellent working relationship with Borough Manager Justin Keller, who is also a forward-thinking leader.

Together, they have the vision and ability to enhance Pottstown's image and quality of life to levels we've not seen in decades.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



STEPHEN RODRIGUEZ

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