

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Hershey school fosters relationships

On Tuesday, we reported on the recent graduation of Pottstown teenager Laighna Will from the Milton Hershey School (MHS), the nation's wealthiest private school, pre-K-12.

Laighna progressed from a troubled middle school student to an honor roll graduate accepted at Ursinus College, with \$95,000 in scholarship money from MHS to get her started.



Commentary by  
Thomas Hylton

As a Pottstown School Board member, I'm delighted whenever a student like Laighna can enroll in a quality private school, especially Milton Hershey, which only enrolls students from low-income families (average: \$22,000 per year) and pays for everything, spending more than \$90,000 per student. That's about five times what Pottstown spends.

Unlike Pottstown, which offers a seven-hour school day, 183 days a year, Milton Hershey kids live on campus 24/7, year-round.

They are housed in same-sex group homes, 12 to a house, two or three to a room, and supervised by married house parents who are full-time MHS employees. There are homes for elementary, middle, and high school grade levels.

Students don't have nearly as much vacation time as public school students. They can go home up to one weekend per month.

Their day is highly structured. Students get up at 6:30, do chores, have devotions, eat breakfast, and walk to school for five hours of classes.

After classes end, they participate

in clubs or sports, or tutor younger children.

Before dinner, they have an hour of "family time" with their housemates. Then after dinner and chores, they have two hours of study time in their rooms followed by an hour of free time.

At 10 o'clock it's bed time and all electronics must be shut off.

In their senior year, students move into their own apartments (4 to 6 students per apartment) with kitchens, common areas, and bedrooms. There is also an apartment for a supervisor.

Students also have advisors to discuss life after graduation, whether that is a four-year college, technical school, or directly into the world of work.

What did Laighna like most about school?

"I loved tutoring the younger students. I would go to their houses in the afternoon after school. I

also liked doing things with my housemates. Our house parents would take us on trips, like to the beach. We also spent a week living in a cabin in the woods."

Besides almost limitless financial resources, a huge advantage Milton Hershey has over public schools is its admissions policy. Hershey does not accept students with serious behavioral problems likely to disrupt the school. Public schools must take everyone.

But one thing Pottstown can model from MHS is relationship-building. The more students are together in small groups, the more they gel as a family. "I knew everyone in my class by their first name by the time I graduated," Laighna said.

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



LAIGHNA WILL



**THE HUB of the Milton Hershey School's 7,500-acre main campus, above.**