

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

More school funding coming from state

Next Tuesday, Gov. Tom Wolf will give his eighth budget address to the Pennsylvania legislature, the last before his term expires.

It should be a happy occasion, because the state is flush with cash.

"Things are doing really well," the governor told the Associated Press. "We had a nice surplus at the end of the year."

In fact, collections for the most recent fiscal year were 7 percent above projections, a total of \$1.5 billion, thanks to booming sales, personal income, and corporate tax revenues.

Gov. Wolf's No. 1 priority continues to be education, especially leveling up low-income districts like Pottstown.

In 2016, the state adopted a "fair funding" formula that gives more money to 137 school districts, including Pottstown, and less to 363 school districts based on a variety of factors including student demographics.

Wolf wants any new money from the state this year to be distributed according to the formula, which up to now has been only partially implemented.

He's unlikely to get much pushback from the Republicans. "Given our cash position," said the Senate appropriations chairman, Pat Browne, Republican of Lehigh County, "it is likely we will be open to additional investments in our schools, no doubt." Browne's district includes Allentown, which is even more underfunded than Pottstown.

Pottstown already enjoys a healthy financial position. At the beginning of the current school year, the

district reported an \$18 million fund balance plus \$15 million in one-time federal funding because of the pandemic.

At the school district's next finance committee meeting, to be broadcast live on Facebook Feb. 10, we will discuss the district's recently released 2020-2021 audit.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Thus far, the district has used part of its windfall to reassign eight veteran teachers as "coaches" to help our classroom teachers improve their skills (I voted no). Of course, we then had to hire eight classroom substitutes to fill in for the reassigned veterans.

We also hired a "culture coach" at the middle school (I voted no).

We hired four elementary school counselors, one for each of our four elementary schools; two school counselors for the middle school (we already had two, now we have a counselor for all four grade levels), and another counselor at the high school (we now have 3.5, with the part-time position for our career technology program).

We are also hiring a social worker, a home school visitor, and an emotional support coordinator.

All these positions, plus \$120,000 in new technology tools, are designed to help students do better.

There will be even more "investments" if the district gets the expected boost in funding this year.

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



Gov. Tom Wolf gives his annual budget address in 2020. At left is former Speaker of the House Michael Turzai; at right is Lt. Gov. John Fetterman.

