

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Spending level unsustainable

After talking to a variety of business people after he was appointed Pottstown's economic development director in 2011, Steve Bamford reported at a joint meeting of Pottstown Council and the Pottstown School Board that high taxation is the No. 1 impediment to economic development in Pottstown. This situation hasn't changed in the four years since his report.

Each year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education collects information on the wealth of individual Pennsylvania school districts as measured by real estate values and income levels. It also measures "local tax effort," based on the local tax rate and the community's ability to pay.

The chart below explains why the Pottstown School District has among the highest taxes in the state: It is spending well beyond what the townspeople can afford.

Pottstown is no laggard when it comes to spending, whether the comparison is at the state, national or international level.

The United States spends more money on K-12 education, per student, than all but four countries — Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Austria.

Pennsylvania spends more on K

-12 education, per student, than three-quarters of the states.

Pottstown spends more, per student, than two-thirds of the school districts in Pennsylvania.

At the same time, Pottstown ranks near the bottom third in wealth. And we are getting poorer all the time. Real estate values have consistently dropped for 20 years, to the lowest level since Montgomery County reassessed in 1998.

Our school district enrolls about 3,100 students in a state that has 1.75 million public school students. We are responsible for a tiny

fraction of the whole.

Moreover, we have a great deal of student mobility. Each year, about 20 percent of Pottstown students who enroll at the beginning of the school year have gone elsewhere by the end of the school year.

Last year, only a third of our high school graduates attended Pottstown schools since kindergarten.

And after graduation, many students will never return to Pottstown and contribute to the community.

Only 15 percent of the district's professional staff live in Pottstown.

We want to offer the best opportunities possible for our children. But we also must live within our means — and we're simply not doing that.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

**Pottstown SD spending and taxation levels: Statewide rankings**

