

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Kids can walk the distance

The Pottstown School District's walking school bus program began with a flourish last October, when the weather was warm and pleasant.

The district established three routes to the Rupert Elementary School, the longest of which is one and a half miles. It starts in the Washington Street neighborhood, continues along High Street to Roland Street, and then south to Rupert School.

Volunteer adults escort the students in the mornings, Monday through Friday, but the kids must find their own way home.

The program was sorely tested in February, when the temperature stayed well below freezing and dipped lower than 10 degrees on some mornings.

Still, the walkers — and the adults — kept at it.

The long-distance walkers include kindergartners and first graders.

In the winter months, the three formal routes have averaged 15 to 25 students daily, only a fraction of the 380 students who attend Rupert. But dozens more walk on their own. At Pottstown's other three elementary schools — Lincoln, Franklin and Barth — the percentage of walkers ranges from 28 to 37 percent.

In the 1960s, nearly half of all students walked or bicycled to school; now the figure nationally is less than 15 percent. One result has been a doubling of childhood obesity over the last generation.

As America has suburbanized, neighborhood schools have been replaced by consolidated schools too far from homes for walking. And many suburbs lack sidewalks.

After 15 years of debate, Pottstown retained and renovated its neighborhood schools. These schools maximize Pottstown's greatest advantage over the suburbs — the ability to walk everywhere.

The surgeon general recommends children need at least 60 minutes of daily exercise.

In Pottstown, students can reach that goal just by walking to and from school.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



October, above. February, below

