

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Investing in Pottstown

For more than a century, The Hill School has been among the most prestigious college preparatory schools in the nation.

The Hill is a member of the Ten Schools Admissions Organization, which includes some of the most venerable names in boarding school education:

Choate Rosemary Hall, Wallingford, CT
Deerfield Academy, Deerfield, MA
The Hill School, Pottstown, PA
The Hotchkiss School, Lakeville, CT
Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, NJ
Loomis Chaffee, Windsor, CT
Phillips Academy Andover, Andover, MA
Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, NH
St. Paul's School, Concord, NH
Taft School, Watertown, CT

But The Hill School has a significant handicap in comparison to its peers. Every other school is located in an idyllic village, or in the woods, or in the countryside.

The Hill School, by contrast, is cheek by jowl with a gritty low and moderate income neighborhood in an older industrial town.

According to a Hill white paper, “an **annual survey of admitted students who choose not to enroll consistently cites Pottstown as the top reason for their decision to go elsewhere.** [Boldface in the original.]

“The students and their families point to the town’s overall appearance and perceived status quo as well as their concerns about Pottstown crime and student safety. **Clearly, The Hill is losing qualified, talented students to other schools as a result of our location in Pottstown.**”

The white paper states that “prospective faculty members often ask questions including: ‘Can I live in

this town?’, ‘Can I see myself raising children in this town?’, ‘Is this a safe town to live in?’ ... ‘Are the schools here in town good?’ ” Many faculty members, the white paper states, describe the town as “bearable, but not something people are proud of, although they want to be.”



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

In a competitive marketplace, **“the School routinely loses a number of bright, highly sought-after faculty candidates because these prospective employees do not see Pottstown as a desirable, safe place to**

live,” the white paper states.

In previous columns this week, we discussed The Hill School’s tax-exempt status, sparing the school from more than \$2.2 million annually in real estate taxes. We discussed its significant resources.

We discussed its “Strength of All” campaign, which aims to raise \$175 million by June 30, 2019, to boost scholarships, increase faculty compensation, and improve campus facilities. Just three percent of the money to be raised would go for the improvement of Pottstown, specifically aimed at a small area surrounding the school called Hobart’s Run.

Considering the major concerns raised in The Hill School’s white paper, a reasonable person might ask why the school is not dedicating more of its resources — perhaps \$500,000 to \$1 million annually — to the revitalization of Pottstown.

It’s not just a matter of enlightened self-interest, although that is obviously important. It’s also a statement of the school’s values.

The Hill School wants its students to “serve the common good.” It should lead by example.

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



HILL SCHOOL from High Street in the spring.