

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Pottstown taxation: 3rd in state

The Pottstown School District now has the third highest taxes of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts.

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.

Last year, Pottstown had the 12th highest taxes in the state. Now we've moved up. Only the Brentwood and Wilkinsburg school districts, in Allegheny County, have higher taxes than we do.

Pottstown's economic development director, Steve Bamford, who recently took a job in Allentown, frequently noted that high taxation is the No. 1 impediment to economic development in Pottstown.

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 or national level.

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 in the bottom fifth in wealth. And we are getting poorer all the time. Real estate values have consistently dropped for 20 years, to the lowest level since the county last reassessed in 1998.

Our school district enrolls about 3,150 students in a state that has 1.73 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, a little more than half of our high school graduates attended Pottstown schools since kindergarten.

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

We cannot afford to raise taxes this year. We must make significant cuts to our budget. We can do that without decreasing our quality of education. But we must do things differently.

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



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Pottstown SD spending and taxation levels: Statewide rankings

