

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

How many will settle here?

Earlier this month, 129 students graduated from Pottstown High School. About 60 percent of these graduates will go on to college — 48 to a four-year college and 28 to a two-year college.

Senior class president Nyles Rome will attend the University of Virginia; valedictorian MaSofia Sosa is enrolled at Georgia Tech; and salutatorian Dylan Brandt is headed to Franklin & Marshall College.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Some two-year college students will transfer to four-year colleges later.

For example, my school board colleague, Emanuel Wilkerson, Class of 2016, just finished a year at Montgomery County Community College and will continue his education at Widener University in the fall.

There's no question Pottstown's best students can compete with anybody, anywhere. This year's graduates have already been awarded \$1.7 million in scholarships.

No one can accuse Pottstown taxpayers of shortchanging our students. Although it is a poor district, Pottstown spends more, per pupil, than two-thirds of the school districts in the state. That's why we have the third highest local tax effort of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts.

When our taxpayers make that kind of financial sacrifice, it's reasonable to ask, what is our ROI — return on investment?

It's great to prepare our students for life, but how many are going to stay here and contribute to the sustainability of our community?



Members of the Pottstown High School Class of 2017

For example, Pottstown public schools prepared Carissa Youse, Class of 2008, to earn a degree in education from Yale University on full scholarship. She now teaches at Beauvoir, the National Cathedral Elementary School in Washington, D.C. (Tuition: \$35,365).

Mobility is a fact of life in modern America, and upward mobility is supposed to be a hallmark of America. We're delighted Carissa is doing so well.

Moreover, too much inbreeding can foster a stagnant and narrow-minded community. A healthy diversity strengthens communities. Many of Pottstown's most beneficial residents did not grow up here.

But Pottstown property owners also have a legitimate interest in ensuring their tax dollars are used to sustain and enhance our quality of life, not simply to enable our most promising young people to make a career somewhere else.

More than 60 percent of Pottstown tax dollars go for public education. Meanwhile, we have potholed streets, broken sidewalks, poorly maintained street trees, and buildings in desperate need of repair.



Carissa Youse

Instead of spending more money on schools, perhaps we should better allocate our resources to improve the appearance of our town to attract and retain productive residents and businesses.

It's been demonstrated time and again the best way to improve the quality of public schools is to increase the proportion of middle class students.

One small step the school district has taken recently is offering a financial incentive for our professional staff to buy a home here (and eventually, send their children to our schools).

Pottstown's viability must come first.

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