

James Cain Editorial
Sunday, November 15, 2015

School District Support - What is at Stake?

On Monday, November 16 the Steering Committee for the “Building Tomorrow, Today” project will present its recommendations to the Port Huron Area School District Board of Education. The Board will listen, and ultimately, will decide in December whether or not to put a building program on the ballot in May of 2016. This has been an ongoing dialogue our District has had with this community for several years and has progressed through many phases.

In 2011, the successful passing of a \$22.8 million Bond to enhance structural facility, site, security and technology upgrades was the first step in addressing the needs of the District to modernize. I wasn't in the District at the time but upon review of all work completed, I can confirm and assure that it was a good step forward, and all projects were completed on time and under-budget. The next phase was having a “Visionary Team” of community residents research, discuss and deliver some desired, ideal and basic requests for programming and building improvements in the District.

This was followed by a facilities assessment my leadership team and I performed when I took the role as Superintendent of the District in 2014 along with the creation of a new Vision, Mission, Board of Education District Goals and the development of the District's Blueprint for Success. The Steering Committee for “Building Tomorrow, Today” has utilized the data from all of these perspectives. They have hosted two Community Engagement sessions. They have requested to hear from each and every citizen via survey, email and personal communication. They have devoted numerous hours and a relentless commitment to improving our schools with learning and student achievement as the priority. Tomorrow they will present the direction for the future of this district based on the vision and goals of this administration and the desires and input of our community.

I encourage each and every person in this community to go to phasd.us and view the information on the www.phsbtt.com “Building Tomorrow, Today” website. This has a lot of the frequently asked questions that have been heard throughout this process. “What was accomplished in the 2011 Bond?” “What is the current millage rate for Port Huron Schools? How does it compare with other districts in the region?” “Why can't teachers be paid more from the Bond money?” All of these are relevant questions and their answers are available to you on the website. If you are not satisfied with those answers, I encourage you to email me at YourVoiceMatters@phasd.us to request additional information.

Let me be clear: **Now** is the time for us to take the necessary step forward as a community and make our schools the top priority. Our competitive edge for attracting businesses and families is at stake. Providing our children with an education that makes them competitive in their next steps toward either a career or college is at stake. Increasing our student population in order to

support the general fund that sustains the Port Huron Schools workforce, which is the second largest in St. Clair County, is at stake. Becoming a relevant education center, supporting the new progressive efforts our community is making through the works of the EDA attracting businesses, the new Convention Center, SC4, the new expansions of our hospitals and the influx of tourism and hospitality ventures in our area - this is all at stake.

I encourage you to know the facts to help understand the vision. The progress or pullback of the education and future we can provide to every single citizen in our community, especially our children, is at stake. We need to go further than we are currently. We cannot live in the past. We need to be ambitious. We need to do this to move forward. Port Huron Schools is not like other education institutions in this area. It is the 22nd largest in the State of Michigan and services a wider and more diverse base of students in terms of every demographic possible. The challenges aren't greater, they are simply on a larger scale.

Now is the time for us to unite and support what is one of the largest organizations of influence in our region, Port Huron Schools. This is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss because of misunderstandings or past issues. We must succeed for the future of our youth and our community, because everything is at stake.