

James Cain Editorial
Sunday, December 13, 2015

Understanding District Needs for a Bond

Last month the “Building Tomorrow, Today” Steering Committee outlined a dynamic and necessary proposal for the progress of Port Huron Schools. Last week, the Board of Education voted to approve the application process for a bond measure that would appear on the May 3, 2016 ballot.

Communication is key as the recommendations from the committee are considered by the community. The concepts, which were previously part of a discussion in public forums that included two community engagement events, online questionnaires and a phone survey of likely voters have demonstrated support behind the concepts that were presented to the Board in November. Please visit www.phsbtt.com to review the presentation in its entirety, along with the process and presentations that led to this point and some FAQs.

There are two propositions regarding the bond that are tie-barred, meaning that the first proposal must pass before considering the second proposal. Proposal 1 includes imminent and pressing needs for our district facilities as well as new construction that will provide STEM/STEAM labs, “Secure Welcome Centers” that route building visitors past a front desk, an early childhood center, the building of a new Kimball Elementary, plus other technology and 21st Century Learning updates to our classrooms and schools. Proposal 2 includes climate control at all of the schools throughout the district, along with creating an accelerated magnet school at Lakeport Elementary and additional facility assessment needs. The passage of both Proposal 1 and 2 will provide the district with longer term stability and a comprehensive update of needs across all facilities.

The first proposition is for the amount of \$125 million and the second is an additional \$27.5 million. The total cost for both to a taxpayer with a market home value of \$90,000 is \$13.32 per month. These are not “wants.” They are not luxuries. These are all current educational resources and necessities that provide our students with learning opportunities equal to those provided by surrounding districts and throughout our state. Without these resources, other neighboring districts will continue to outpace us in terms of student achievement and contemporary learning environments. These proposals provide the facilities, technology and long term sustainability that are needed to make Port Huron Schools both relevant and competitive with other communities.

I encourage you as a member of the community to support these measures. I urge you to become involved and informed as the campaign progresses.

The District is working now to re-launch its media outlets including PHSchools TV (Comcast 6, Vimeo and EBW.tv channels) and PHSchools Radio (WORW 91.9 FM). Along with PHSchools Online (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and phasd.us), there are a host of outlets to stay informed, and learn about the positive and earnest efforts of the district's educators and students.

As superintendent, I encourage you to visit one of our schools if you have not been inside one lately. Ask the principal or a teacher you know about the facilities and programs. You will find through this one-on-one communication that we have been good stewards of our buildings in terms of maintenance and longevity. The average age of the 16 schools in our district is 63 years old. They need to be brought into the 21st Century. Port Huron Schools is the 22nd largest district in the state of Michigan and yet, it has - by far - the lowest millage rate in St. Clair County.

We have done so much, with very little. As the Board communicated its support of this bond request, I ask you to communicate your thoughts as well. Now is not the time for speculation or staying entrenched in the past. Talk to someone in Port Huron Schools, subscribe or follow one of the District's media outlets and become involved in supporting our students and community. Let's all say "Yes," to progress for Port Huron Schools.