

James Cain Editorial
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On a Mission For Our Future in 2016

This month students and staff hit the halfway mark in the 2015-16 school year. This will be a momentous year for so many individuals within Port Huron Schools, but also for our District and the community at large. We will be asking voters to support funding for a two-proposal bond on May 3, 2016. This gives our organization less than five months to educate voters about the very real challenges and opportunities our District faces.

As the 22nd largest school district in the state of Michigan, the volume and cost of our needs are great. Historically, our schools have not been a priority investment for the community. The District has the lowest millage rate in St. Clair County. As a District, we have fallen behind in achievement, facilities, technology and security.

This bond and its two proposals are not about “catching up,” in spending with other local districts. Rather, it’s about making ourselves, our community and our students *relevant, competitive, and poised to gain a competitive edge*. We are on a mission to succeed for this cause for the future of our youth.

We have a fund balance that increasingly is a challenge to maintain at 7 to 8 percent, which puts us too close for comfort to the 5 percent or less threshold that the State of Michigan deems to be a financially distressed district. Lower birthrates, per pupil government funding that remains less than our rate from 2008 due to significant reductions over the last seven years, and school of choice preferences for neighboring districts has greatly strained our general fund and our organization is at risk of peril. There is not a person, organization or business that is not affected by the financial stability of Port Huron Schools, if only because of its size. We employ the second largest workforce in the county. We educate and twice daily, feed approximately 8,800 students. Our property holdings extend across Port Huron, Fort Gratiot and the townships, including 17 schools that are on average, 63 years old. Our “youngest” building is Indian Woods, which will turn 38 years old in 2016.

The mission is simple: fund our schools today, to build a vision for the future. A future that promises learning experiences in modern school facilities that will prepare our youth for life after the pre-k through grade 12 experience. The mission cannot be achieved in isolation or without support. The 2011 bond measure passed by less than 200 votes. The stakes are high and every voice matters.

I understand you may be cynical or may have a hard time shaking a negative opinion based on past experiences. I truly get it. Please consider this:

The current Port Huron Schools leadership is experienced, energetic, proven and committed to turning around this school district along with the many great people who have been here serving

our students for years. My team and I have specific direction and goals under which we operate. Please review them on phasd.us under our “Blueprint: Board Goals & Strategies.” Over 50 new teachers and administrators were hired this summer to inspire and impact our students. Also, please note that this bond and its facility assessment needs and programs were developed and discussed by the community as a collective. This process has been inclusive, transparent and a valuable exchange of ideas.

Please also consider the following questions: Do you currently have a child that is attending school in Port Huron? Do you currently own a home in Port Huron? Do you wish to develop positive and professional opportunities locally? Do you want to ensure that there is a stable economy in our region? Do you want to sustain the second largest workforce in our county? Do you hope our local quality of life improves by attracting new businesses, jobs, culture and entertainment? Do you support progress?

If you answered “**yes**” to any of these questions, then you are part of our mission in 2016. Welcome to our team as we build tomorrow, today for our students, businesses, community organizations and each other as citizens.