

Jamie Cain editorial  
November 20, 2016

### **Thankful for Progress, Wary of False Pretense**

This month, it's easy to reflect with gratitude on all of the progress one sees throughout our community. Whether it's new housing, business or entrepreneurial investments, or the updates we are working on throughout our district, the positivity is both hard earned and exciting.

One of the things I appreciate in a district such as ours is the variety of instruction and specialized programs we are able to provide for children and young adults in our community. A place where this is evident is in our alternative education program at Harrison Center. This is a facility where people get second chances and an ability to customize their education so that it works for their life circumstances. Each year when I attend the Harrison Center graduation in the spring, I am tremendously impacted by the stories of challenge, hard work and commitment the students have had to see through in order to achieve their goal.

We have a strong, healthy vibrant alternative education program in the Port Huron Schools District. In fact, we have several in our community. As Superintendent of Port Huron Schools, I am excited about the partnerships we have with some of those entities who serve for the good of our local community. They include the RESA's Virtual Learning Academy and East China's Riverview East program.

Most recently, we have partnered our district with an organization called The Crossing. This program, through its dedicated and committed professionals, provides entrepreneurial and "soft skills" training geared toward employability for students who are enrolled - or not - in alternative education. Together they learn teamwork, develop their own company and go to work on sales, networking, marketing and a host of other important real world endeavors. Plans are in the works to have their primary site located in the new incubator space in the Sperry's building. They also serve a critical role in helping these students re-integrate into our school district if for some reason, they stray away.

There are no students who are left without options in our district. We have created the net, along with our community and educational partners, which is in place and continually strengthened. Flexible, online learning has been in place for our students in alternative education and will be significantly expanded in the near future.

Given all that we already do collaboratively in the county to support alternative students, I must warn you of a real threat that is planning to set up shop in our community under false pretenses.

There are plans for a new alternative education center to open its doors in downtown Port Huron this January, claiming they are coming in to help the "problem" with drop-outs in our county. Given the number of dropouts is very small and tracked vigilantly already, the real target

is any and all students in our high schools across the county. I can assure you, it is a for-profit business that wants to divert money from our local economy, using young people in the process, and sending the per pupil foundation amount attached to these students back to their homebase on the west side of the state.

Here in Port Huron Schools we are thankful. We are thankful for the support of the community, the shared success with our education and business partners, and the progress we are all making with *our* citizens for the improvement of *our* local environment. I am confident we will stay the course and not be swayed by those who see an opportunity to make a “quick buck” from our success or the success of the schools across the county. I know we all care too much about the young people in our community to allow them to be the subjects of an outside entity looking for a money grab at their expense.