

Community Update

Serving 24,000 households in Portage, Texas, Pavilion, and Kalamazoo

NOT A NEW TAX

Countywide Millage is a Renewal; \$3 Million at Stake for Portage Schools

Support For Instructional Funding

Residents of Portage Schools, along with all other citizens throughout Kalamazoo County, will be voting on a 1.5 countywide millage renewal in the May 6 school election. Board of Education candidates will also appear on the ballot (see page 5).

Our school District receives almost \$3 million a year from this operational millage, first approved in May 2005, to help cover instructional expenses. The bond proposals approved by voters this past fall are for construction and remodeling.

The Board of Education discussed the challenging position the District will be in without this millage renewal and voted unanimously in February to place the renewal on the ballot. This gives residents of the District the opportunity to continue the current level of instructional support without any tax increase.

Next Steps: Potential Budget Cuts

The Board of Education will analyze potential cuts at its Monday, April 21 work session at 6:30 p.m., and during its regular meeting on Tuesday, April 29 at 7:30 p.m., (following its joint-session with the City Council).

For more information on Millage Open Houses see page 5.



Bond Project Update Inside

What Happens Without the Renewal?

Without the \$3 million annually that this millage provides, students will face reductions in programs and services, such as:

Cuts in:

- athletic programs
- music and theatre programs
- textbook purchases and other instructional materials
- busing, resulting in fewer bus stops and more walkers

Cuts in teaching staff, media specialists, counselors, and support staff that will:

- reduce up to 40 positions
- reduce course offerings
- increase class sizes

Cuts in programs that give our students an edge:

- International Baccalaureate and AP fees and support
- Education for Employment intern programs
- Kalamazoo Area Math & Science Center services
- Gifted & Talented Services
- Reading

According to Board President Shirley Johnson, even with the revenues from this countywide millage for the past three years, the District has had to make about \$1.3 million in cuts to balance the budget. She explained in February that even with the renewal of this countywide millage, more budget cuts would be likely – and therefore failure of the renewal would result in an even greater shortfall.

MESSAGE FROM Superintendent

Marsha Wells

Sound Choices,
Solid Priorities
Shape the Future



Spring is an exciting time of year, especially with planning for the bond projects well underway! This issue provides you with updates about each of the construction projects, and ways that you can join students, staff and community members in providing feedback to us during this design phase.

These new schools are first steps in shaping our District for generations to come. Groundbreaking for the first project, the new 12th Street Elementary School, is scheduled for early May. It will generate work for many local contractors and activity with area businesses. Again, we thank the community for this support! Strong schools prepare students well for their futures, attract new families and new businesses to the area, protect property values, and overall, help make a strong community.

Maintaining High Expectations

May 6 brings another important school election – a request to renew 1.5 mills for an additional 3 years that will help maintain the high caliber of our educational programs. Due to the ongoing instability of State funding for public schools, Portage Schools are at a critical place. Without the nearly \$3 million this millage provides, the District will be forced to make cuts this fall. In the next few years, we may have to make cuts to many programs that are hallmarks of its reputation for excellence—programs and learning opportunities that give our students an academic edge in a high stakes world! Some of these are noted in the section on Points of Pride.

We're a District that has been doing everything right:

- we work within our means,
- we make the painful, tough cuts,
- and we find creative ways to channel more funds into the classroom.

Over the past few years, the District has cut \$3.8 million from its operations. Next fall, it plans to make \$800,000 in cuts as fewer kindergarten students come to school in place of those who will graduate. The Board of Education will use guidelines as it considers budget cuts in April and will listen carefully to community feedback about how to address needs in the most cost efficient manner possible. Student academic achievement and fiscal responsibility remain our primary focus.

We value the trust that you place in us to be good stewards of the community, to make sound choices based on solid priorities. We invite you to share with us your ideas about how we can best continue to make strong schools and a strong community.

PPS POINTS OF PRIDE: An Extraordinary Reputation



Northern varsity debaters recently took 1st Place in the State Championships and were honored at a Board of Education meeting. From the left are Kush Sharma, Aakash Gupta, Sanjay Sharma, and Amrit Kamboj. Their coach is Northern faculty member Bonnie VanEenennan.

The District's vision statement is "Portage Public Schools will shape the future by empowering every student to contribute intelligently and ethically in an information rich, global society."

Portage Schools has long-enjoyed an extraordinary reputation as a place for outstanding teachers and involved parents to help their students discover the magic of learning and graduate with the education necessary for happy and productive lives and successful careers.

Recent Highlights:

- Northern's Varsity Debate team recently took the State Championship title.
- Students from the Northern Wind Ensemble returned recently from performing at Carnegie Hall in New York City (one of only 15 high school bands nationwide).
- Student leaders from both Central and Northern High Schools were recently in Washington, D.C., for a week, experiencing government close-up (see photo on page 5).

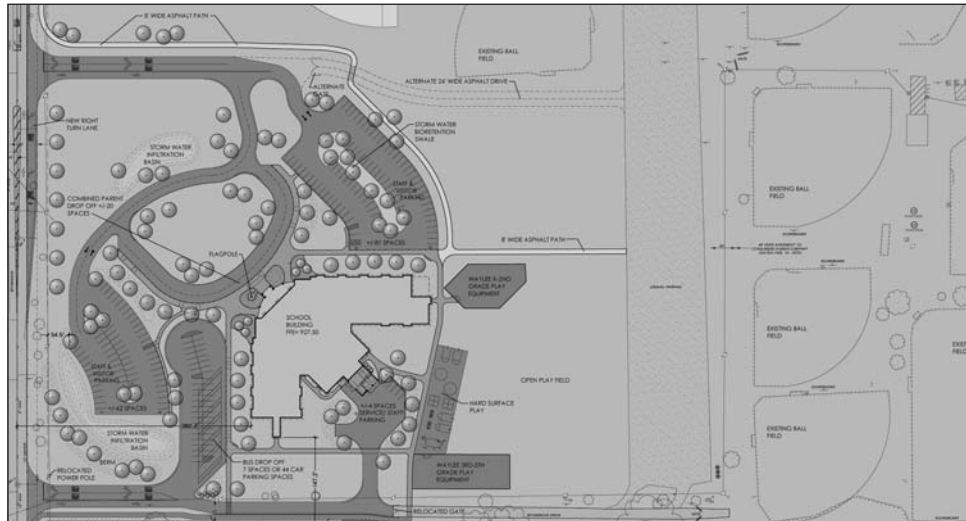
A Tradition of Excellence

- Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Association of School Business Officials (3rd year in a row).
- Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association for the Business Office (2nd year in a row).
- The first district in Michigan to have its high schools accredited with International Baccalaureate programs. We are currently in the early stages of considering adoption of the IB Middle Years Program (grades 6-10).
- First area school district offering online education, Parent Internet Viewer, and wireless connections throughout its schools.
- Perfect Bus Inspection by the Michigan State Police (6 years running), and Transportation Manager of the Year by the Michigan Association for Pupil Transportation.

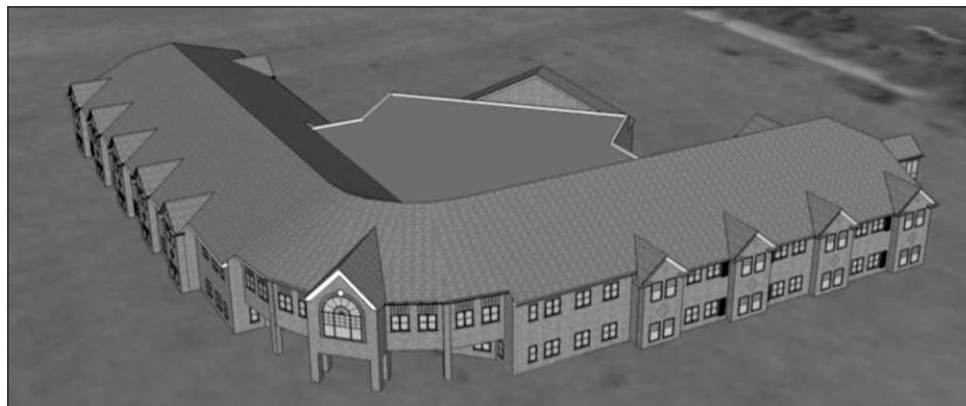
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YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED.... And We're Still Listening

12TH STREET ELEMENTARY: SITE PLANS REFLECT COMMUNITY INPUT



12th Street Elementary draft site plan



12th Street Elementary architectural concept

Your school District has been busy since voter approval of the \$119 million bond project to replace our two oldest elementary schools and rebuild and remodel our two high schools.

Steering Committees for the four projects have been busy gathering design input by visiting new schools throughout southern Michigan, meeting with architects and school faculty and staff, and incorporating community input. Approximately 40 citizens attended an open house at Texas Township Hall in February to see plans for the new 12th Street

Elementary and to ask questions and share concerns about traffic patterns.

Community input has also been present through two District groups. The District Advisory Council, a group composed of parents and staff from the 14 schools and community representatives, meets monthly and provides valuable input to the Administration on issues such as the bond projects. The Attendance Area Study Committee, comprised primarily of parents from all the schools, has also been meeting

since fall studying the best options for redistricting where necessary.

Meanwhile, plans are moving ahead to save the middle section of Waylee Elementary to house Technology Systems, Portage Cable Access, and professional development rooms. The bond project also includes updating technology throughout the District.

12th Street Elementary & Lake Center Elementary

- These schools are being designed as two-story schools to achieve both cost and operational efficiencies (and in the case of Lake Center, to fit the available space).
- A community open house is scheduled at Lake Center on April 17 from 6:30-7:30 p.m., to share initial site design concepts and to answer questions and gather citizen input on traffic flow.
- We break ground this May on 12th Street Elementary with an opening date of September 2009. The new Lake Center (behind the existing school) begins construction next spring and will open in September 2010.
- Contacts: Waylee Principal Ron Jones for 12th Street (323-6500) and Lake Center Principal Mark Root (323-6361).

Northern & Central High Schools

- Like the two elementary schools, the two high school committees have been holding joint meetings during the design process.
- Construction and remodeling begins at Northern this coming fall, while construction of Central (behind the existing school) begins next spring.
- Both schools will be finished by September 2011.
- Contacts: Northern Principal Jim French (323-5461) and Central Principal Eric Albutus (323-5261).

For General Information

- Subscribe to the free District E-mail List Service for updates on the bond projects (see the box on our homepage: www.portageps.org).
- Visit our Bond Project Updates pages online (also linked from our homepage), which includes a Project Timeline and Frequently-Asked-Questions.
- Call the Steering Committee chair listed on previous page.
- Contact Community Relations Manager Tom Vance at 323-5167 or by e-mail at tvance@portageps.org.

Guiding Principles for Project Implementation

The Board of Education established four guiding principles that will help with the successful implementation of these projects:

- **Community Outreach:**
Ensure there is ongoing communication that invites feedback as the projects are under development, connects closely with the community and those who are most directly affected by the projects, and provides clear information about the status of the projects while they are underway.
- **Local Preference:**
Seek partnerships and use of local vendors or contractors where it is fiscally responsible to do so. Analyze multiple considerations to determine vendor/contractor selection that is in the best interests of the District. All considerations being equal, selection will be made from local sources.
- **Environmental & Efficiency Focus:**
Create educationally positive learning environments, such as lighting, sound, and air quality, by investing well in infrastructure that will also provide sustainable energy and operational efficiencies to minimize long-term maintenance costs.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:**
Execute the projects so that they address educational needs in a fiscally conservative, responsible manner.

Attendance Area Study Committee Making Progress Toward Goal

The Attendance Area Study Committee (AASC), organized last fall and meeting on a regular basis since January, has reviewed a number of concepts for new school boundaries that will be necessary with the addition of 12th Street Elementary School in the fall of 2009.

The AASC has used these guiding principles:

- Maintain neighborhood school groups
- Move as few students as possible
- Minimize student time on buses
- Balance Socio-Economic Status
- Balance high school enrollments

The Administration will bring the AASC's proposed plan to the Board of Education and the District Advisory Council in May, with the District hosting open houses that month for community input. The AASC will then review the feedback and finalize its recommendation. Following further Board review, the plan will be formally announced in June.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY: PPS Has Cut Nearly \$3.8 Million Since 2002-03

Since the 2002-03 school year, the District has made almost \$3.8 million in cuts. For the most part, these cuts were made away from instructional programs.

Reductions included administrators and Administration Building support personnel through attrition, out-sourcing support services, cutting custodial and maintenance services, and implementing an energy savings program.

District Responds to State Funding Shortages

See the following charts online at www.portageps.org:

- PPS Revenue Below Inflation Since Countywide Millage Approval
- State Spending Changes: 2002-03 through 2008-09.

Fast Facts:

- Funds raised in November for the Bond Project are for the four building projects and technology only, and cannot be used for instruction.
- The May 6 millage is a renewal of existing funding for instruction and program expenses.
- Proposal A, which funds schools through state sales tax, allows for countywide school districts to ask voters for an operation millage, which we have on May 6.

Community Open House On Lake Center Project

Thursday, April 17, from 6:30-7:30, at Lake Center on Portage Road, to gather neighborhood input on traffic flow at the new school (to be built behind the existing Lake Center).



For more information

Millage Informational Open Houses:

- Thursday, April 24, 3:30-4:30, Portage Senior Center
- Thursday, May 1, 6:30-8 p.m., West Middle School
- 323-5000
- www.portageps.org
- District page every Monday in the Portage Gazette
- Free E-mail List Service updates (sign up at www.portageps.org)



PPS POINTS OF PRIDE: An Extraordinary Reputation

Continued from Page 2

- 43 State Championships, and most recently State Champs in Debate for 2007-08.
- Annual Education Quotient's Gold Certificate.
- District of the Year by the Michigan Alternative and Adult Education Association.
- District of Excellence in Child Nutrition Award from the School Nutrition Association and Child Nutrition Foundation.

Shaping the Future

- Our students, grades 3-12, continue to achieve high marks in standardized testing programs, ranking above state and national averages at each grade level and in each subject area.
- We're proud that 98% of our students graduate, with anywhere from 90-93% pursuing college immediately following graduation. Our faculty members win state and national "Teacher of the Year" awards, have earned national certification, present at state and national conferences, publish a variety of articles, and win numerous grants.

Two Open Seats On Board of Education

District residents also have two Board of Education seats to fill in the May 6 election. Trustee, and past Board president, Tom Eddy is retiring from the Board, and current Board Vice President Jennifer Whistler is running for re-election.

In addition to Trustee Whistler, candidates running for the two four-year seats include Kurt Kuppler, Russell "Rusty" Rathburn, and Joanne S. Willson.

Forms to request absentee ballots are available from our homepage at www.portageps.org.

Visit our Board of Education page (click on Administration link at www.portageps.org) for meeting schedule, minutes, and Action Briefs (summaries of the meetings released the day after, since minutes are not posted until approved at the next regular meeting).

Student Leaders Experience Washington



Student leaders from Northern's Student Senate and Central's Student Council pose in front of The Capitol during their recent visit to Washington, D.C.

Millage Renewal Information • Vote May 6

Designing a Green School

High School Students Present Research On Sustainable Design & Energy Conservation



Central High School International Baccalaureate Science classes recently worked in 18 teams of 5-6 students each – representing biology, chemistry, environmental science and physics – and presented their findings during a “Leaving a Legacy” Open House focusing on planning for the new Central High.

According to teacher Jon Taylor, “The project was entitled ‘Leaving a Legacy’ since all of the students who worked on this project will have graduated before construction even begins. They have been excited to have the opportunity to play a role in researching design possibilities and limitations for the new building projects.”

Students presented research on green-building design, construction, and energy-resource conservation strategies. The science students sought to create a better understanding of “green” building and its fiscal, aesthetic, and practical benefits. Many of the ideas discussed illustrated not only the dollar impact of “green” building, but also the positive effect it can have on the learning environment and student performance.

Millage Renewal Information • Vote May 6



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