



HOUGHTON-PORTAGE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

1603 Gundlach Rd. | Houghton, Michigan 49931
(906) 482-0450 | FAX (906) 487-5218
www.hpts.us

ANDERS HILL – Superintendent

HPTS Board Statement 1-20-2025

Thank you for attending tonight. We value community engagement because, after all, our school belongs to the community. Before I open up for public comment, I'd like to share information to address some of the concerns we've heard circulated in the community regarding the school bond that was passed by voters in the November election.

I have to start on a positive note, we are very proud of our schools. All three of our schools are ranked in the top 3% in the state. We have incredible educators helping kids work toward their potential every day. Our mission is to equip and empower all students to achieve through education.

Moving into the concerns and questions we've heard.

The millage narrowly passed in November, please delay the bond issuance or put the millage up for a re-vote.

Election results cannot be cancelled. This Board could potentially delay issuing the bonds; however, there is no legal mechanism to nullify the election results or conduct a re-vote. Delaying the issuance just means that any future board, at any time, could decide to start moving forward and issue the bonds.

We recognize the community vote was close and this means not everyone in the community feels the same way about the results. Putting the proposal to a vote is the only way a Michigan school can formally ask its community if they would support a bond, so that's what we did. And we intentionally chose to do this during a presidential election when the most voters participate.

Also please note, the agenda for tonight has never included action to issue the bonds; we are not to that point in the process.

Will I see a property tax rate increase next year due to the school debt repayment millage?

No. The millage that passed extends the current school debt rates for an additional two years and then follows a different schedule until repayment is complete. This means our school debt millage rate is not going to increase higher than the current level.



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Whether the bond proposal passed or not, our current rate of 9.64 mills would have continued until 2029. Our request to voters was to extend the 9.64 mills another 2 years until 2031. To see the change across every year, please see the Millage Chart posted on our website.

[Millage Chart](#)

Why this proposal and why now?

During our community strategic planning process in 2022, it appeared the district was at an inflection point and some big decisions needed to be made on how to move into the future. We wanted these big decisions to reflect the will of the community. To accomplish this, we explored the feasibility of many options including student needs, consolidation opportunities, capping school of choice, the optimal timeline, financial considerations, enrollment trends and projections, space constraints, and facility needs.

We shared this body of work with the community to develop the ballot proposal. This was done through a series of public workshops and electronic communications. Progress was reported monthly during regular board meetings. The proposal on the ballot and the timing reflected what we clearly heard as the will of the hundreds of community members who engaged. We're grateful for the amount of community involvement through this process.

The millage will fund many improvements. The early learning center represents a little less than half of the project scope. We're thrilled about making significant safety improvements through secure entrances at all buildings, and modernization of HVAC, air handling and alarm systems. Additionally there will be investments in STEM and Career Tech facilities, modernization of digital and traditional education tools, increased parking, and plans to add a middle school outdoor recreation space and elementary multi-purpose space. We'll also be able to allocate proper space in the elementary building to the music room, library, and science lab along with student health and wellness services.

Is the District meeting all financial responsibilities?

Yes. All Michigan schools are subject to State oversight on an ongoing basis to ensure fiscal responsibilities are met. We carry a fund balance above the State recommendation, we participate in all required financial audits, and our Moody's credit rating was upgraded this year.



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In order to place a bond proposal on the ballot, a school must complete required due diligence and be approved by the Michigan Department of Treasury. Our proposal passed all of these professional reviews.

Why has the Board allowed “overcrowding”?

We are not aware of overcrowding. We certainly have a high utilization rate at our elementary building as confirmed by a space study. Our elementary classroom sizes are all below our informal targets of 22 or fewer students for younger grades and 25 or fewer students for the older elementary grades. We will continue to monitor grade levels and cap enrollment as needed.

Our District has enrollment projections from two professional firms to provide guidance on expected future enrollment trends, but we have no strategic plans to increase or decrease enrollment other than just meeting the needs of the community. We will continue to explore grade-level caps and enrollment targets as part of our future planning.

How will this millage impact surrounding schools?

The improvements to our District from the new millage are focused on enhancing safety and quality for our existing students. We are working every day to take care of our students and other districts do the same. There is no intention to have any impact to surrounding schools. We do not intentionally seek to “recruit” students. We have never considered actions like taking out radio advertisements or running bus routes into other school districts. We have many great schools in the area and we will continue to seek ways to collaborate and partner with them when feasible.

Below are links to our bond information on our website and our community letter.

[HPTS Bond 2024](#)

[Community Letter](#)



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Please reach out if you have questions.

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