

# NEWS *from* Port Jervis

## SCHOOL DISTRICT

Vote set for December 16

## Referenda would address building needs at no cost to local taxpayers

The Port Jervis School District is at an important cross road. Recent state-funded building renovations have improved our schools. But, there is still much to do to ensure our schools remain safe, healthy places for all of our students.

On December 16, district residents will vote on proposals that would allow Port Jervis to address safety concerns and plan ahead for anticipated building needs.

Two propositions will appear on the ballot. The first item is a proposal to use EXCEL Aid to fund a \$5.55 million capital bond project that includes safety and security enhancements, and the replacement of antiquated, inefficient heating and ventilation systems.

The other ballot item seeks approval to establish a 10-year capital reserve fund to offset the costs of a future school building. The proposition will not impact taxes. It's a request to allow the district to roll unspent budget allocations at the end of each school year to an interest-bearing "savings" account.

### Propositions will not increase taxes

The infrastructure upgrades – and the need to start setting aside funds for a new school – were identified by the district Master Plan Committee, comprised of administrators, staff, parents, and community volunteers.

District planners timed the bond proposal so that Port Jervis would be able to use its remaining allocation of

EXCEL (Expanding our Children's Education and Learning) Aid to cover the cost of the needed building renovations and security upgrades.

EXCEL Aid will not be affected by the recently proposed state budget cuts, but it's unlikely the state will offer this type of aid to school districts in the near future.

"The proposed capital project would give us another opportunity to use state EXCEL Aid to address many of our remaining needs - with no impact on local taxes," says Superintendent John Xanthis.

But, he notes, "we can't stop there." "The district must plan for the future by looking at ways to address the increasingly-evident need to build a new school," says Xanthis.

What's on the

## Ballot

### Proposition 1

Proposal for a \$5.55 million capital renovation project that would provide the following school improvements:

- Safety and security enhancements
- Replacement of inefficient heating and ventilation systems

### Proposition 2

Establish a new capital reserve fund to offset the costs of a future school building

inside



**What's wrong with this picture?** The windows in both elementary schools and the high school do not meet today's safety standards. The proposed Capital Project II would allow the district to replace all of these windows - many of which leak - with tempered glass units designed to serve as emergency classroom exits.

# Creating safer, more secure learning environments

**School security is a growing concern in communities across the country.**

## Proposed Projects

### Port Jervis Middle School Health, Safety & Security

- Replace damaged sidewalks
- Electric room upgrades
- Upgrade emergency/exit lighting

### Hamilton Bicentennial Elementary School Health, Safety & Security

- Replace public address system
  - Install new windows
  - Make upgrades to emergency/exit lighting
- Building Integrity
- Upgrade automation system for HVAC

In Port Jervis, the district is working to keep students and staff as safe as possible by creating safer, more secure learning environments.

The district's long-range plan to heighten school security began with the recently-completed bond project, which used EXCEL Aid to cover the cost of security upgrades that included the installation of video surveillance cameras, new fire alarms and public address systems, keyless entry system, and the addition of a safety vestibule to Hamilton Bicentennial Elementary School.

The proposed Capital Project would allow the district to further improve safety on its school campuses. One of the most significant upgrades would be the addition of safety vestibules to the entrance of Anna S. Kuhl Elementary School and Port Jervis High School.

## **"An open school that's filled with children presents safety concerns,"**

**Police Officer Kelly Decker**

As recommended by safety experts, the entrances of both schools would be redesigned so that all visitors would enter the school through the main office. Visitors would be welcomed into the locked building once they are identified by the building greeter.

"An open school that's filled with children presents safety concerns because you cannot predict what an unwanted person will do once he or she has free reign of the building," says School Resource Officer Kelly Decker.

The 20-year veteran of the Port Jervis Police Department noted, "The safety vestibules - combined with the new surveillance cameras - would serve as an effective deterrent to unwanted persons seeking access to our schools."

Decker, who has four children in Port Jervis schools, feels the proposed safety upgrades are "a needed investment in our children's safety."

## An investment with a payoff

### Energy efficient upgrades would reduce fuel costs

Many of the renovations included in the proposed Capital Project II are designed to increase energy efficiency and help cut fuel costs.

The greatest impact will result from the replacement of leaky classroom windows and antiquated ventilation systems. "The window units at Bicentennial Elementary School and most of the ones on the High School/ASK Elementary School campus are original to the buildings and approaching the end of their useful life," says Assistant Superintendent for Business Lorrie Case, who notes that the older windows do not meet today's safety or energy-efficiency standards. Many leak when it rains, and none are made of tempered, energy-efficient safety glass.

In addition to reducing energy consumption, new window unit ventilators would further enhance the learning environment by improving the air quality in the classrooms.



# Prudent planning for our students' future

Teachers, parents, and community leaders are working together with district administrators to develop a long-range plan for Port Jervis schools.

The goal is to develop a comprehensive master plan that will serve as the blueprint to help the district address facility needs and provide recommendations for future building projects.

The Master Plan is being facilitated by Tom Ritzenthaler, the principal architect at CSArch. One of the leading school district architectural and construction management firms in New York State, CSArch was selected by the district based on the high marks it receives for providing school districts and other clients through long-range planning, and providing them with skillful, award-winning design solutions.

## Long-term facilities plan

The Board of Education asked Ritzenthaler and the members of the Master Plan Committee to develop a long-range plan that includes the following:

- Evaluation of existing school facilities;
- Analysis of anticipated future enrollment projections, capacity needs, and academic goals;
- Develop a set of strategies to address current infrastructure problems and future building needs.

The first step was to provide the district with an evaluation of its existing school facilities. Based on staff input, building walk-throughs, and the results of a previous building condition survey, the Master Plan Committee made two recommendations to the School Board:

- Take advantage of the state's remaining allocation of EXCEL Aid to proactively make necessary improvements and repairs;



While still an attractive structure, Port Jervis Middle School was built in 1922 to serve the educational needs of our students' grandparents, and in some cases great-grandparents. Recent improvements have addressed infrastructure problems, but the 90-year old building is sorely lacking in terms of classroom space, electrical, and technical needs.

- Prepare for future building needs by establishing an additional capital reserve fund, essentially a savings account, to accumulate funds over the next decade.

## Establish a savings account

"Given the fact that our middle school is nearly 90 years old, it's becoming increasingly evident that the district is getting closer to the point where we are going to need to build a new school," said Superintendent John Xanthis.

"On December 16, we are asking voters to help us to prepare for the inevitable by allowing the district to set money aside at the end of each school year to help cover the anticipated costs."

This is a no cost proposition. It won't cost taxpayers anything to establish the new capital reserve fund account or to roll unspent funds into the account.

Ultimately, the account - and the interest that would be accrued over 10 years - would save taxpayers money by eliminating or greatly reducing the amount needed to finance a new school.

## Proposed Projects

Port Jervis High School & Anna S. Kuhl Elementary School  
Health, Safety & Security

- Add safety vestibules to both school entrances to improve security
- Replace unit ventilators
- Make upgrades to emergency/exit lighting

### Building Integrity

- Replace leaky windows in both buildings with energy-efficient replacements

## VOTE

Tuesday,  
Dec. 16

6 a.m. to  
9 p.m.

### Polling Locations

#### Election District #1

Huguenot Fire House

#### Election District #2

Deerpark Municipal  
Building 2

#### Election District #3

Sparrowbush  
Fire House

#### Election District #4

Port Jervis  
Middle School

## Who may vote?

You may vote if you are a U.S. citizen, 18 years of age or older, have been a district resident for at least 30 days prior to the vote, and are registered with either the school district or the county Board of Elections.

## Voting by absentee ballot?

Absentee ballots are available if you are unable to vote in person because you are ill, plan to be away on vacation or business, or are accompanying a spouse, parent, or child of the same residence who can't come to the polls for one of the above reasons. You can obtain an absentee ballot by calling District Clerk Michele O'Donnell at 858-3175. Absentee ballots must reach the District Clerk Office's no later than 5 p.m. on Dec. 16.

## NO local tax impact...

### If the proposed capital project won't impact local school taxes, why is the district holding a referendum?

Under state law, district must seek voter approval before it receives aid on construction projects or establishes any type of capital reserve account.

EXCEL Aid is available to districts for a limited time to cover the costs of building improvements such as health and safety, and energy management. The aid comes from income and sales taxes paid by NY residents and businesses. If the proposed project is approved, it will mean that more of your state tax dollars will be spent locally to make improvements to your schools. If the project is not approved, the allocated aid cannot be used for other purposes. It would be used, as needed, by the state to fund EXCEL projects in other qualifying districts.

## Need more information?

■ Visit the district's  
Web site: [www.pjschools.org](http://www.pjschools.org)

for the latest information about the two propositions, including:

- Frequently asked questions
- Voter information
- How to sign-up to receive electronic notifications about the proposed capital project and capital reserve fund.

■ Attend a meeting or watch a presentation on cable Channel 20

The last presentation prior to the vote will be held :

**Thursday, Dec. 11**

#### Board of Education meeting

Port Jervis High School  
Cafeteria, 7:30 p.m.

\*If you can't make the meeting, you can watch it live on cable Channel 20.

**Weekdays on Cable 20**

#### TV interview with District Administrators

Aired daily on cable Channel 20  
See district Web site for times.

#### Board of Education

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For more information, visit: [www.pjschools.org](http://www.pjschools.org)