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Investing in the Community

Port Huron's tale of contracting and commitment

Port Huron, Michigan - located on the banks of Lake Huron just yards from the Canadian border - is thick with history. Known as home to young Thomas Edison and his many experiments, the city maintains a strong focus on education and innovation. When budget constraints began to impede their educational focus in 2011, the Port Huron Area School District (PHASD) looked for opportunities to lower non-education expenses – and transportation was the obvious choice.

PHASD conducted a comprehensive review of their existing transportation system strengths and costs. They researched Governor Synder's Financial Best Practice Incentive and knew contracting had significant cost savings, but still had concerns. Assistant Superintendent Eddie Kindle stated, "Transportation is extremely sacred in any community, because you're transporting what's most important to any school district, and that's our kids. We wanted someone to come in, help us establish new relationships or investments within the culture that we already had . . . but with respect to saving money, we wanted someone to come in here and do things differently."

PHASD focused on keeping the community informed and involved throughout the process so they were comfortable and confident with the decision. According to Kindle, "Communication and information was timely, accurate and effective . . . (which) really minimized the anxiety within our community."

Being the first time the district considered contracting with any outside company, the challenge would be to deliver on the administration's expectations as well as those of the community as a whole. Kindle says of the contracting process, "We were looking for somebody to help create an investment within our school . . . and with the people of our community."

When the process was complete, First Student was the clear choice for the PHASD. They offered Port Huron significant savings, a smooth transition, customer control, advanced technology, and consistency for drivers and district staff. "It was easy to see our connection with First Student, and the difference between First Student and other vendors," adds Kindle. "Our standard of performance that we talk about daily within our school district starts with account-

ability . . . we want people to perform at a high level and knew we were going to make a connection with somebody who understood the importance of performance, and performing at a high level . . . and delivering results. It was easy to see that connection with First Student."

PHASD and First Student immediately began the next phase of the challenge, which was a quick, smooth transition with school startup in approximately 60 days. Doug Meek, First Student's Area General Manager, states "First Student resources, expertise, and dedication to success allowed us to effectively manage this project. Our startup plan has over 600 touch points including concentrated areas in IT, finance, safety, recruiting and training, amongst other things, including communications to the community. We met the challenge by bringing in resources from across the country to get the local staff up and running." First Student retained the majority of the district's driving team and trained them on First Student safety policies, procedures and best practices surrounding the delivery of safe service to the community.



Scan this QR code to watch the Port Huron SD Video.

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First Student attended every school board meeting to answer questions by parents, students, drivers, and school staff. They encouraged an open line of communication with the community and district. That increased level of transparency and commitment minimized the anxiety and created a solid relationship with the district. First Student invested in the community through significant cost savings and efficiencies, as well as the retention of jobs and use of local resources.

Kindle says, "This was our first real, true relationship with contracting with an outside vendor for a service provided within our district. Because of our good experience with First Student, we feel comfortable moving forward with looking at different opportunities [to contract] if they present themselves."

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