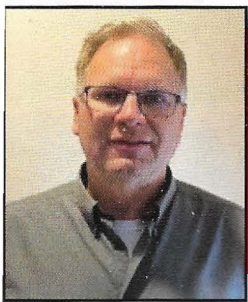


STATE OF OUR SCHOOLS BIG JACKSON SCHOOL

2025

Big Jackson School
4020 13 Mile Road
Paris, MI 49338
Phone: (231) 796-8947



A Word from
Ron Veldman
Superintendent

Looking Back... The Big Jackson Legacy



Dear Friends:

Please take a few minutes to read our 2025 State of our Schools Report which highlights a few areas of our District. I had the opportunity to start work as part-time Superintendent in Big Jackson in October. Since that time I have learned a lot about the school and the community. The one thing that stands out the most about this District is the people. I have appreciated so many dedicated, passionate, hard-working, people who are part of this community!

As we look to the future, we are at an important point in time in this District. There are many important decisions to be made as far as education and how best we can provide that for our next generation. As we decide as a community on the future for our students, our hope is to provide the best options for a quality education in order to prepare our students for their future.

Thanks again for your commitment to children. Please feel free to stop in or call if you have any questions.
Sincerely,

Ron Veldman

There is an old African proverb that says, "it takes a village to raise a child." It's a simple idea that suggests raising happy, healthy, children is not solely the responsibility of good parents, but that producing successful well-adjusted adults is a community-wide endeavor. Researchers have found that when children are able to connect to just a handful of adults who truly love and care for them, they are not only happier and healthier, but also more likely to find their passion and develop their potential.

This old African proverb is also one of the guiding principles of the success which Big Jackson School has had over the past 100 years. As I have enjoyed looking through the history, I see faces and people who gave their heart and soul to help our students. There have been many passionate staff members and Board members through the years whose focus has been to our students' reach success. We are thankful for so many of those individuals who have stepped forward to serve in various roles and to volunteer.

Where We Are

Big Jackson School is at a very critical point in time. Over the past 1 ½ years a lot has happened. Here is a timeline of a few of those items:

Fall of 2023 – Big Jackson had 20 students enrolled in the District. The number of students has declined over the past several years, partly due to the decline of overall birth rates in the state and country, but also because parents may be finding other alternatives for providing an education.

October 2023 – Several areas of maintenance/repairs were identified based on the conditions of the buildings on site and the end of life expectancy on some of the portable units.

End of year 2023 – Mold was identified in the District's Main Building behind some wall mount heaters which had been removed and subsequent mitigation steps were taken. Throughout that process, a number of building inspections were performed and the state bureau of construction codes identified some code and permit violations which needed to be remedied. In addition, the District's insurance company identified items which needed to be addressed in order to

maintain insurance on the buildings.

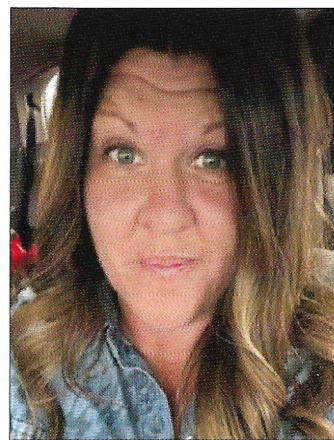
February 19, 2024 – The Newaygo County RESA Board of Education voted to terminate the shared services agreement between Big Jackson School and the NC RESA which provided Superintendent/administrative assistance, business manager services, and maintenance services. NC RESA had provided these services for many years previous to this decision.

From February 20, 2024 forward, the District has worked to try to support the educational program which was in operation, as well as work to remedy some of the facility concerns and numerous other items which have surfaced. Due to the variety of facility issues as well as the operational issues, the District was unable to open school for in person instruction in the Fall of 2024. We have a couple of students who chose to be part of a virtual program still enrolled through the school, but most of the students were

placed or chose to attend schools in neighboring districts through cooperative agreements. Our staff finished out their time in Big Jackson while interim Superintendents have been in place as required by law for the District.

October 8, 2024 – The Board hired a superintendent and was also able to hire a company who provides business services to small districts in order to step in and address the finance portion of the District to pay bills, and deal with the multitude of state and federal requirements of school finance.

Since October, we have continued to deal with working to provide the required state reporting and operational needs of the District, and work to understand the current status of the facilities as identified through the various inspectors and insurance company.



Thank you!

Special thanks to Carrie Beeney who helped support Big Jackson through last summer and who continues to help support Big Jackson School!

Challenges or Opportunities?

There are a number of items to address but three overarching questions in regards to working to open school in Big Jackson include:

1. Can we operate as a very small school financially/operationally and provide a quality education for our students?

This question may be the most challenging. Small schools of 20 students have all the same

reporting requirements and legal requirements as do schools of 5,000. The difference is larger schools have people they hire who are experts in different areas to help do the work. There are few efficiencies in small schools to meet the requirements to operate and to run similar programs.

2. Will District students attend?

Even before the Fall of 2023, over 50% of our K-5 families have

chosen other educational public school options outside of Big Jackson Schools. Are we able to provide a quality program to attract families?

3. Are we able to address facility needs short and long term?

This decision will be part of a broader community discussion moving forward.

Moving Forward

The Goal of the Big Jackson School District Board is to open school for the Fall of 2025. Based on enrollment and interest through May, the School Board will determine if opening school this Fall is feasible. The Big Jackson School Board is committed to keep our Main School Building long term. The use may be for school or other community needs into the future. We will simultaneously be working to determine how best to meet the various needed support systems for the District to operate and strive to make our budget sustainable with an end result of providing a quality education for our students. There will be several steps which are occurring over the next several months to strive to reach that goal.

- The School Board has approved the removal of two portable units on the west side of campus which have deteriorated. There is a bid process for anyone interested in submitting proposals to purchase these units or submitting a proposal for the cost to remove these units.
- The District Office will be located in one of the two remaining portables.
- A new roof will be put on our main building along with other requirements to meet compliance of the State Bureau of Construction Codes and the Fire Marshall.
- Thanks to the generosity of several groups and individuals, the District has received donations of newer

furnishings and equipment. The District will be holding a public sale of furnishings and equipment that is no longer deemed necessary for the District based on the current inventory and newly available furnishings. All proceeds will go back in to support the needs of the District. The sale will be held on Saturday, March 29, from 9am - noon.

- The District plans to have an Open House on May 13 from 4 – 6:30 pm for anyone to stop in. We are registering students who may be interested in attending for the 2025-26 school year. Please call with any questions or for more information: (231) 796-8947.

Thank you!

Special thanks to
Linda VanHouten
who helped
support
Big Jackson
last fall!



Big Jackson School Board of Education

Michelle Ruelle President

Andy Cook Vice-President/ Treasurer

Sami Jackson Secretary

Ross Fulton Trustee

Laura Johnson Trustee

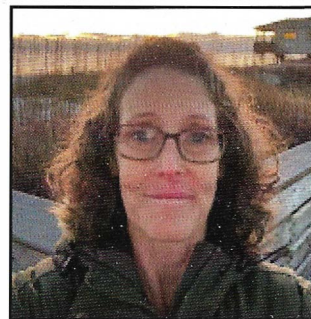


A Message from Michelle Ruelle

Board of Education President

Greetings from the School Board!! We are very excited for all the upcoming changes to our school, and hope that you are equally excited. A fresh look is going to be an amazing way to have a great, new start for our kiddos this upcoming year.

We are working very hard at creating a fresh new learning environment for the students to excel and reach their peak



potentials. We are always looking for community feedback and are grateful for your support!

Thank you for helping to make Big Jackson a place where we can continue to grow together.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why doesn't the District close and merge with another District?

This is an option. Various state laws provide different paths for that to occur. Most of those options will require votes/approval to take place and the District residents to incur the debt levy of the District to which they would join.

2. Why doesn't the District just fix up the current main school building?

This is an option. The challenge is with this main building going forward as noted by the State Inspector; any changes to doorway openings or making improvements

to alter spaces or make more accessible, etc. will result in the entire building needing to be brought up to code which would require all new electrical systems/wiring and other major renovations. The costs of doing this may not be a financially wise decision to pursue.

3. Why doesn't the District look to build a new building?

This is an option and has been explored decades earlier in the past. If the District is able to operate as a small District to provide an education for district students, then a new facility would be a decision for the Board to

consider. The extensive costs of trying to repair aging facilities continues to strain the budget. We hope to have a two or three- year window of time in continuing to utilize our two east portable units. If our community wants to continue providing K-5 education in our current Big Jackson School District, then building a new facility will need to be a consideration. If all goes as hoped, and we can open Big Jackson for in person learning this Fall, we will be connecting with our community members to better understand what you would like to see for our future!