

# A DECADE OF GROWTH



## Executive Summary of the Superintendent's 100 Interviews in 100 Days

Robert R. Ike, Ed.D.,  
Presented January 2017

As Dr. Ike marks his 10th year as the chief education officer of the district, with support from the Board of Education, he conducted 117 interviews with a broad range of constituents as part of this second round of "100 Interviews in 100 Days" — a follow-up to the same project he conducted a decade ago.

**"In stark contrast to 10 years ago, people willingly share their pride in Pal-Mac ... that Pal-Mac has made a name for itself throughout the Rochester and Finger Lakes region," said Dr. Ike. "Ten years later we can reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and look toward the future."**

He has drafted an executive summary from the interviews pulling together individual threads from the interviews and forming a district "tapestry."

## ***Looking Back: The Story of 2007***

Having accepted the position of Superintendent in May 2007, I accepted the position with eyes wide open to the challenges that lay ahead and a strong belief that none of those challenges would be insurmountable.

In those days, Pal-Mac had been plagued with a climate that had been deemed litigious. Given this local climate I set out on an ambitious entry plan to hold at least 100 interviews within 100 days. The results of the interviews most frequently identified the need of teamwork. The word “team” was often defined as the participation of all staff, regardless of title, to be treated fairly and with equitable input.

At the time, the most notable reason cited for holding the district back was the parade of negative press. This negativity also seemed to have contributed to a local and regional perception that Pal-Mac “had issues.” It appeared that the District’s reputation had been tarnished on a large scale with a belief that the District had purposefully behaved in a secretive manner and was not a transparent, public agency.

This supposition left questions about trust and integrity in the minds of the members of the community. By and large, informants noted that they felt that Boards had not been unified, that individual Board members had personal axes to grind or brought independent platforms that were a distraction to the general mission of the school.

- One of the most significant needs to be addressed in 2007, as reported by respondents, was the disparity between the two elementary schools. Those interviewed noted the importance of providing an equitable education and elementary learning experience, regardless of attendance zone.
- Many advocated that the District consider long-range plans for the facilities, consider the potential of property usage between Hyde Parkway and Yellow Mills Road, and review possible consolidation of efforts for all schools to be housed on one main campus.
- With regard to facilities, concern was also noted (particularly with Palmyra Elementary School) that

the internal structure and systems were outdated and maintenance-intensive. There is little opportunity for expansion at the Palmyra Elementary site and safety concerns with the bus loop and limited parking remain at the forefront.

- In addition, the growing mental health concerns for primary-aged school children was of concern and suggestions were made to expand early intervention services, regardless of socioeconomic status.
- In 2007, interview respondents were clear that they wanted Pal-Mac to be widely known as a school of excellence, having a reputation that would exude the idea that great things are happening for kids in this place called Pal-Mac, a school of prestige that was “on the map.”
- Another common hope was that every child who started kindergarten and continued at Pal-Mac would receive a high school diploma; the message was clear that it is our collective responsibility to make sure kids grow to become productive contributors to society, and ... no one “falls through the cracks” along the way.
- Many respondents noted their desire to have an expanded music program where all performing arts groups were of the same caliber. Several individuals noted a desire to have a strings program. Several participants dreamed of a Performing Arts Center that served the community, had well attended performances, and was desirable in order to boost interest in the area and promote cultural and arts diversity for the region.

Ten years later we can reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and look toward the future.

**The Pal-Mac community is  
very proud of their school  
and its traditions.**

## **Gathering Input: Fall 2016**

Marking my 10th year as the chief education officer of the District, with support from the Board of Education, 117 interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2016.

The intent was for interviewees to be representative of a broad range of constituents throughout the school district, with an emphasis on student input. Interviews were held, both individually and in small groups. Interviewees included students, staff, retirees, past and present Board of Education members, elected officials, business owners, and members of the community.

Notes were taken during each interview. Along with this record and as a member of the community myself, I gathered informal impressions and made observations to shape this summary.

This Executive Summary serves as the formal mechanism to communicate the results of this project, pulling together individual threads from the interviews and forming a District “tapestry,” sharing those results publicly.

Each interview — in both 2007 and then again in 2016 — focused on five key questions:

- 1. What makes the Palmyra-Macedon School District all that it is?**
- 2. What is keeping Pal-Mac from being all that it can be?**
- 3. What do you see as the top priority for the school district in the next ten years?**
- 4. What are your hopes and dreams for the Palmyra-Macedon Central School District?**
- 5. What advice do you have for the superintendent?**

## **Telling the Story: What makes the Palmyra-Macedon School District all that it is?**

The Pal-Mac community is very proud of their school and its traditions. To identify specific reasons this is the case, the

question was asked, “What makes Pal-Mac all that it is?”

In stark contrast to 10 years ago, people willingly share their pride in Pal-Mac. Through anecdotal experiences they relayed how this has impacted the community-at-large and that Pal-Mac has made a name for itself throughout the Rochester and Finger Lakes regions

### **The People**

- As was the case in 2007, almost every individual interviewed made note of the dedication of Pal-Mac residents to the School District. Interviewees were quick to recognize the influence that people (students, staff, parents, leaders, community) have on the success of Pal-Mac.

**Teachers are approachable and the students at Pal-Mac seem to take pride in being Red Raiders.**

- Non-employees pointed out that they believe the staff is loyal to the District and staff noted that they recognize the strong parental and community support that exists for the school system.
- Respondents felt that teachers are approachable and that the students at Pal-Mac seem to take pride in being Red Raiders; from the student perspective, they appreciate and enjoy the many opportunities afforded to them in the school. Teachers feel they are encouraged to go above and beyond and are proud to say they are employed by Pal-Mac.
- Staff members see their roles as “more than a job;” many see it as service to children and the community and can be found assisting the district and community in ways beyond that of a job description.
- Adults and students alike noted the breadth and depth of program offerings for students. Specific note was made to the music program, athletics, and opportunities through

the International Baccalaureate/inquiry-based learning across grade-levels.

## The Community

- Not only was it noted that the communities of Macedon and Palmyra are supportive of youth and the school district, there was recognition that these two places are no longer seen as separate or disparate entities; instead it was generally seen that the two towns, by way of the school district, have come together to create one community known as Pal-Mac. The school is seen as a focal point of the community and residents want to serve the school and our children, having deep-seated school spirit.
- Youth programs offered by our towns and villages are strongly connected to the school program. Informants declared their love for living in the region of southwestern Wayne and northern Ontario counties and appreciate the values that are instilled in children as part of growing up on the fringe of the Erie Canal.

**The two towns have come together to create one community known as Pal-Mac.**

## ***A Critical Lens: What is keeping Pal-Mac from being all that it can be?***

No school system or organization is perfect. Public schools, in particular, can be held hostage to political influence where the “flavors” of state and federal bureaucracy impact local decision-making.

In asking this critical question of the organization, it is important to note that a model of continuous and never-ending improvement has been adopted by the District.

Respondents were afforded the opportunity to identify barriers that may be preventing the District’s ability to meet its full potential.

**The topic of a single campus reverberated in a majority of interviews**

## Students

- From the students’ perspectives, they overwhelmingly want exceptional educational opportunities. Students recognize why Pal-Mac exists and are appreciative of the support that adults give to them.
- Many of the older students interviewed expressed the importance of our local standards being higher, particularly when it comes to school climate. Students do not want to be in school with other students who are disruptive or don’t want to follow the rules.
- There was a strong expression for student accountability particularly with regard to disrespect. The conditions and age of the facilities, particularly the bathrooms at the High School, were regularly mentioned by students as needing improvement.

## Facilities

- The topic of a single campus reverberated in a majority of interviews and, by and large, positive support for such a movement was expressed. Some concern was raised as to what would happen to the Canandaigua Street school if it did not house students; there was consensus that it could not become an eyesore of our community as has been the case in other communities when school buildings have been taken out of use.
- The conditions of the facilities are a concern, with a general feeling that Pal-Mac students deserve to have facilities at least on par with other communities. Some expressed that our facilities should be better than others given the performance of our students and the use of the facilities by the community. The current buildings were erected between 45 and 95 years ago and cannot accommodate today’s significant shifts in technology, methods of learning, electrical capacities, and energy efficiencies.

## Financial Revenue

- Individuals had general familiarity with funding for public schools being two primary sources: local tax levy and state aid. While only one respondent mentioned taxes, many interviewees noted concern about future revenue sources for the School District. Some shared understanding of the state's failure to adhere to the established foundation aid formula, thus pushing more financial burden to local property taxpayers. (Note: At present, the state has withheld more than \$51 million dollars in school aid revenue from Palmyra-Macedon since 2009.)
- There was also general consensus among the majority of respondents that a lack of parental involvement, overall complacency, and social media were barriers to advancing positive change for our children.

**At present, the state has withheld more than \$51 million dollars in school aid revenue from Palmyra-Macedon since 2009.**

- Emphasis was noted that the school organization is not simply an educational institution but also performed other functions including, but not limited to, human resources, food service, transportation, and environmental services. In particular, concern was noted that without balancing all of the functions of school and having the community recognize the merits of these functions, it will be difficult to create financial buy-in for services to the School District.
- A lack of empathy by the community was expressed as a barrier to progress along with the notion that state mandates on public schools have hindered learning for all students and increased the tax burden on local property owners.

**...“our success is our students’ successes”**

## ***Making the Leap: What do you see as the top priority for the School District in the next 10 years?***

Ten years is a significant span of time. For instance, what priorities should the Board of Education have addressed when we are at the dawn of 2026-2027? A consistent thread from the interviews recognized the changing demographics of the community and for the district to plan accordingly — with consideration given to the growing poverty, the local tax burden, and ethnic diversity.

- Noting that “our success is our students’ successes,” an examination of resources is needed to address the changes that are occurring and will have impacted the District in another 10 years.
- Equipping students with the tools not only for these changes but to succeed as citizens in a rapidly changing society is critical.
- Suggestions included campus consolidation and/or unification to maximize resources and minimize economic constraints brought about by the existing facilities.
- Facility upgrades, including brick and mortar and school grounds, can show the pride of our community and infrastructure changes to support learning in a team-based approach are warranted.
- Several individuals noted the importance of offering “common sense” or practical skills for students to learn that will serve them well beyond the classrooms and the walls of their homes.
- Many individuals noted the importance of supporting “The Pal-Mac Way.”

- People want students to be more than book smart; people want polite, respectful, and caring citizens in our community, nation, and world. Folks felt our community could be the biggest asset to support this but, at the same time, the community needs to understand that disruptive students, criminal behaviors, and disrespect cannot be tolerated.
- A final priority that was noted is to “get our fair share” of funding from the state or other sources. The community sees public education at Palmyra-Macedon as an investment in the present and as shaping our citizens and leaders of the future. Sensitivity and balance to taxation and public education, amongst other financial burdens faced, is critical.

### ***Imagine the Future: What are your hopes and dreams for the Palmyra-Macedon Central School District***

As was the case in 2007, I intentionally pushed the envelope a bit on this question trying to get people to truly dream and think about things that are difficult to achieve, or may be perceived as only what we could hope for but is hard to see as reality.

**“If we lift the kids, we lift the families, and then we lift the community.”**

One person noted, “If we lift the kids, we lift the families, and then we lift the community.” This summarizes what many interviewees expressed in the value of the Palmyra-Macedon Central School District to the community-at-large.

- A design of the school to serve not only as the hub of the community but a major source of activity would be an asset to other aspects of our district. It is hoped that collectively our community continues to be a family, pulling together at difficult times and not splintering over issues that surface.

- In addition, aside from a financial windfall, many noted that they want students from Pal-Mac to realize they can become anything they want to be. One just has to look at Pal-Mac alumni or other Macedonians and Palmyrans in history to see how far one can go to fulfill dreams.
- If every child in our school district has an identified purpose, it can be known how everyone is contributing as a citizen.
- Students, in general, had a slightly different take on this question. They made note of items relevant to them at their present stage in life. Such items included use of thumbprints to access lockers and changes in lunch menu offerings.
- Of critical importance, was the general feeling that students want to eradicate bullying and that this type of behavior has no place in school or our community. Students want caring environments. This is a mission for the entire community in that bullying is addressed and is not tolerated but more importantly students have models to see how people should interact with each other in a civil, respectful manner.

### ***The Next Chapter: What advice do you have for the superintendent?***

While some individuals replied with little advice, others were eager to share their thoughts. Most recognized that it would be next to impossible to please everyone. The majority responded that, first and foremost, there were necessary character traits for the person serving as the school district’s superintendent as well as a community leader.

- Expectations are high that the superintendent is visible. Regardless of constituency representation, individuals expect the superintendent to communicate with the public, build trust with the community, and to be straightforward, direct, approachable, and honest.
- There is an impression that people do not understand what the superintendent really does. One person explained, “People generally lack empathy for what you do.” Another

**“Stay the course.”  
“Keep doing what you’re doing.”**

respondent suggested, “People really do want to know about the superintendent and be supportive.”

- Similar to 2007, respondents indicated that the superintendent needed to be involved with and have a positive influence on kids.
- Believing in others, having a backbone, being consistent, providing stability, and having energy were all expressed as traits needed by the superintendent. Students expressed wanting to have more interaction with the superintendent and opportunities to offer feedback about the district. Although it is uncomfortable to write this, a consistent message from the interviewees to the superintendent was “Stay the course. Don’t leave. Keep doing what you’re doing.”
- Respondents noted the civil and caring nature of Boards of Education in recent history and urged that they remain positive, supportive, and aware of their proper role. This can only be done in tandem with the superintendent; a strong, collegial and open relationship must be maintained.
- Individuals urged the superintendent to continue to be a caring individual, remain visible, and “stay ahead of the curve.”
- Some noted the importance of not personalizing “the bad,” and instead continuing to have an open mind, support others when needed, and always remember that Pal-Mac exists for the students.

**When the community has faith in the School District, students, faculty, and staff are able to thrive.**

## **Conclusion: So Now What?**

After the 2007 report of interviews, a baseline was identified. More than 100 representatives of Pal-Mac provided a descriptive picture of what was and what is, with hope of what was to come.

In 2016, 117 individuals participated in interviews. This project was intended to provide generalized input from the Pal-Mac constituency. This narrative will be reviewed by the Board of Education and any specific district goals that are annually agreed upon between the Board and the superintendent, or information on the District’s overall performance, financial information, and news items will be detailed and will be found:

- **on the website [www.palmaccsd.org](http://www.palmaccsd.org)**
- **in the monthly e-newsletter**
- **in the biannual *Pal-Mac Magazine***
- **in the annual *State of the School* video**
- **via meetings of the Board of Education and public hearings**
- **local newspapers, including *Times of Wayne County* and *Wayne Post***

When the community has faith in the School District, students, faculty, and staff are able to thrive. When the Board of Education establishes a sense of trust and collaboration, hope becomes alive.

Loving our School District directly impacts our community, family decision-making related to school enrollment and residency in the District, and solidifies an attitude that public education matters in Macedon and Palmyra and is valued as an investment in America’s future.

My warmest personal regards are extended to all those who participated in the interviews past and present and to all residents of the Palmyra-Macedon Central School District.



**Dr. Bob Ike  
Superintendent**

