



MISSION STATEMENT

The Palmyra-Macedon Central School District, as part of the community, will empower all students to acquire the skills, attitudes and abilities to achieve a responsible, productive and fulfilling life in our changing world.

Palmyra-Macedon Central School District



November 2007

Dear Neighbors, Faculty, and Staff of the Palmyra-Macedon Central School District:

On August 1, 2007, Dr. Robert Ike began as the new superintendent of Palmyra-Macedon Central Schools. One of Dr. Ike's commitments to the district upon his entry was to develop a plan as a course of action to set the district in motion for a new chapter. Enclosed please find a copy of the Executive Summary prepared by Dr. Ike that outlines the results of his extensive interviews. It is our sincere hope that you will find the time to read this summary and join us in closing one chapter as we open a new one.

In December 2007, the Board of Education hopes to adopt a *Nine for '09* initiative setting forth the goals and objectives for the future. Help us celebrate along the way!

All our best-

The Palmyra-Macedon Central School District Board of Education

John Kratzert, President
Norbert Miller, Vice-President
Elaine Hartnagel
Heather Harvey
Sharon Lang
Timothy Ludwig
Susan Moak
Patricia Morrison
Scott Smith

Executive Summary of the
Superintendent's Entry Plan

The Public Airing

November 2007

Robert R. Ike, Ed.D.

Palmyra-Macedon Central School District

151 Hyde Parkway

Palmyra, New York 14522



“The opportunity to listen has had a profound impact on my leadership and will establish a vision for the future of Pal-Mac.”

Introduction



Entry 101

The recent history of the Palmyra-Macedon Central School District has been plagued with a climate that has been deemed litigious. Upon making application for this superintendency, I was well aware of the perceptions of Pal-Mac from both a local and regional perspective. 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. Although I had experience as a superintendent in another district, having knowledge of the climate of Palmyra-Macedon made it critical for me to be overt and deliberate in my actions as I began my work as Pal-Mac's new superintendent.

In August I set out on an ambitious entry plan to hold at least 100 interviews within 100 days, or by no later than November 8th. (As an aside, I also plan to visit every classroom in the district within the first 100 days of school. As I am certain that the weather will be cooperative, the 100th day of school will be February 11, 2008.) I intended for these interviews to be representative of a broad range of constituents throughout the school district. Interviews were held with 114 people, most individually and some in small groups. Interviewees included students, staff, retirees, past and present Board of Education members, elected officials, business owners, clergy, and community members-at-large. In addition to the person-to-person interviews, I met many business owners in both Macedon and Palmyra, having the opportunity for introductions and informal discussions.

Each entry interview targeted five key questions:

- What makes the Palmyra-Macedon School District all that it is?
- What is keeping Pal-Mac from all that it can be?
- What are the needs of the District?
- What are your hopes and dreams for the District?
- What do you need from the new superintendent?

Notes were taken during each interview. Along with this record initial impressions, from the first 100 days as a member of the community myself and informal observations and visits, helped to shape this summary. As promised, it was and is my intention to pull together individual threads from each of the interviews and then form a District "tapestry," sharing those results publicly. This Executive Summary serves as the most formal mechanism to communicate those results.

One

What makes the Palmyra-Macedon School District all that it is?



Telling the Story

One of the things I quickly learned about Pal-Mac is that the community is very proud of their school and its traditions. In order to capsule the details of why this feeling exists, I began with this targeted question:
What makes Pal-Mac all that it is?

The People. Almost every individual interviewed started by making note of the quality of the District's staff. Overwhelmingly participants feel that the staff is committed to student success and informants were quick to recognize the influence that people (students, staff, parents, community) have on the success of Pal-Mac. 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 a Red Raider; 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. It is also important to note that there is strong recognition that regardless of adversity, the staff remains committed to their primary mission, providing a quality education for students.

The Community. Not only was it noted that the communities of Macedon and Palmyra are supportive of youth and the school district, there is also recognition of the community within the 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/northern Ontario Counties and appreciate the values that are instilled in children as part of growing up on the fringe of the Canal.

The History. Our region has made significant contributions to chapters in American History. People are proud that the Erie Canal represents economic growth of the past and serves as a cornerstone of pride for today and the future. The Pal-Mac Select Choir is widely known for its rendition of the *Erie Canal Song* as well as enjoys a reputation of national and international success.

In general, respondents believed that Pal-Mac is a perfectly-sized school district. It is large enough to have many opportunities for its students, yet small enough to enjoy a personalized experience. Of particular note were the International Baccalaureate program, Advanced Placement, special education programs, extracurricular clubs and activities, alternative programs, and quality athletic offerings. Overall people felt that the scale is tilted toward greatness, in Pal-Mac's behalf. To quote one informant, "Pal-Mac is a gem that we often take for granted."

*What makes Pal-Mac
all that it is?*

The people

The community

The history

The size

The programs



Two

What is keeping Pal-Mac from being all that it can be?



A Critical Lens

No school system or organization is perfect. Public schools, in particular, are dynamic. They are in a constant state of change and growth. In asking this critical question, I recognized that improvement is essential to the health of the school district and its vitality for the future; but what needed to be improved? Respondents were afforded the opportunity to identify those barriers that may be preventing the District's ability to meet its full potential.

An inability to move forward. The most notable reason cited for holding the district back is the parade of negative press. While people recognized the mission of the media to sell papers and that there were some legitimate issues to bring notoriety, people vehemently expressed concern that the local newspaper represented minority voices and not the true picture of the school district. Respondents felt as though the community won't give up on the indiscretions of the former Assistant Superintendent for Business. This continued regurgitation of an old issue distracts from the positive qualities of the school.

Perception. The continued press seems also to have contributed to a local and regional perception that Pal-Mac "has issues". The scars that have been left by the indiscretions of one individual or the perceived dereliction of duty by former members of the Board of Education are far reaching. The wounds on the district are not only "close to home", but have given a multi-county perspective that the Palmyra-Macedon School District is troubled. The District's reputation has been tarnished on a large scale. In addition, local residents believe that the District has purposefully behaved in a secretive manner and is not a transparent, public agency. This supposition has left questions about trust and integrity in the minds of the members of our communities. Communication, or lack thereof, is likely aiding perception.

The Board of Education. By and large, informants noted that they felt that recent Boards have not been unified. People feel that individual Board members have had personal axes to grind or brought independent platforms that were a distraction to the general mission of the school and purpose for the District's governance team. Individuals shared that they feel that the previous Boards have not been conscious to the fact that they are not loners and that they have not exposed themselves to other Board members from other school districts. The fact that recent Boards have not seen themselves as a group and that Board members have served to advance their own personal interests has turned the district's wounds into gashes. To the respondents, it has not appeared that past Boards have shown a desire to improve and work collectively on behalf of the school district.

Taxes. A significant number of informants spoke about the District's high tax rate as compared to other districts in our region. In direct relation to economic growth, individuals felt that people need to choose to live here and that choice should be influenced by the quality and reputation of the school system. People shared that this issue is collective amongst the school district and the other municipalities to promote school excellence, increased property values, and economic growth.

In addition to these three areas of significance, individuals mentioned the change in the 21st Century society, that kids seem distracted by outside influences, and that State mandates on public schools have hindered learning for all students. Individuals also noted the disconnect between the importance of 21st Century skills and the strict protocol required for use of technology by students and staff.

*What is
keeping
Pal-Mac from
being all that it
can be?*

An inability to
move forward

Perception

The Board of
Education

Taxes

Three

What are the needs of the District?



Making the Leap

Jim Collins, in his best selling book *Good to Great*, noted that *stop doing* lists are more important than *to do* lists (2001, p. 143). I hesitated asking the question, *What are the needs of the District?* on the grounds that recognition would not be given to what is working and should be continued, instead developing a list of items needing to be immediately addressed. Instead, people responded with first identifying all of the great attributes about Pal-Mac and then shared a wealth of healthy ideas to continue progressive momentum.

The most frequent need that was identified is teamwork. Team was often defined as the participation of all staff, regardless of title, treated fairly and with equitable input. Teamwork was readily followed by the accentuation of the positive. Informants were adamant about the many positive attributes of Pal-Mac and that they are not celebrated or recognized to the greatest extent possible.

Another need addressed by many respondents was the disparity between the two elementary schools. Informants noted the importance of providing an equitable education and elementary learning experience, regardless of attendance zone. Comments suggested a bridge and camaraderie be developed between the staffs of the two schools, an alignment of vision and programming for all students K-5, and an elimination of any connotation of division or disconnection as a result of particular attendance at a school. Many informants advocated that the District consider long-range plans for the facilities, consider the potential of property usage between Hyde Parkway and Yellow Mills Road, examine energy reduction initiatives, and review possible consolidation of efforts for all schools to be housed on one main campus. In addition, there are growing mental health issues amongst primary-aged school children and suggestions were made to expand early intervention services, regardless of socioeconomic status.

With regard to facilities, concern was noted (particularly with Palmyra Elementary School) that the internal structure and systems are 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.

While it appears that Pal-Mac is “tool rich” in terms of technology, professional development for staff and student skill development is lacking. With the requirement to prepare students for a 21st Century global economy and to be trained for success in a competitive world, students need to leave school with the technological skills able to allow them to be on par with their peers. In addition, people noted the dire need for a state of the art district website.

Other concerns mentioned on a limited basis, but by multiple individuals, included the following: Maintain smaller class sizes; continue the improvement of home values and lower taxes; insure that academics drive the school program (not athletics); Board of Education members should engage in training to help them understand their role; the Dress Code should be enforced at all levels; and foreign language needs to be expanded and/or reviewed at all levels. In addition, individuals mentioned that Pal-Mac has really good teachers, but that it appears that many of them “jump ship” to neighboring districts; turnover in faculty is too great.

A concluding theme is that of time. American humorist Franklin P. Jones once quipped, “Time is a versatile performer. It flies, marches on, heals all wounds, runs out and will tell.” How true are his words! Time is certainly a luxury for all of us. While it may be well advised to examine our use of time at Pal-Mac, an even greater focus may be to be proactive in the healing process. Pal-Mac has suffered. Pal-Mac has endured the test of time and its dark period. Just as the European Renaissance followed the Middle Ages, learning was revived, and artists developed techniques to render perspective. So, too, the time has arrived for Pal-Mac’s own *Renaissance*.

Four

What are your hopes and dreams for the District?



Imagine the Future



I purposefully asked this question as I wanted to promote critical thinking among the constituents of the school district. If we truly have a vision for Pal-Mac's next chapter, what does the collective wisdom say? I intentionally pushed the envelope a bit on this question because I wanted 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.

To best summarize the collective responses to this question, I offer the following quote from an interview participant: "If people had school choice for their children, I would want them to choose Pal-Mac." This statement should be cherished by each of us. The future of our children is at stake. The business of public education in Pal-Mac is mission critical. Individuals 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 "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.

We currently have an exceptional select choir at the high school. 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.

Above all, a thread of excellence was interwoven through the interview dialogue, eager that Pal-Mac is a "go to" District with a reputation of educational distinction.

"If people had school choice for their children, I would want them to choose Pal-Mac."



Five

What do you need from the new superintendent?



The Next Chapter

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 not only the school district's leader but 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 and people really do want to know and be supportive.

Everyone clearly indicated that their 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 actions needed by the superintendent.

Many of the respondents noted their expectation that the superintendent help the district heal, serve as an advisor to the Board of Education, and try to stop the public bickering of Board members. Concern was expressed that the superintendent must have a collaborative spirit and provide hope for Pal-Mac. There is a strong need for district leadership to inspire others, act with integrity, and unify the district as a whole. Above all, an expectation exists that the superintendent be a good listener, always remain committed to children, and "steer the ship, giving a clear vision".

Conclusion



So Now What?

First it is important to recognize that a baseline now exists. Over 100 representatives of Pal-Mac have provided a descriptive picture of what was and what is; there is hope of what is to come. With the release of this Executive Summary, intense planning will occur to identify nine target areas for school improvement in anticipation of the Board's adoption of these goals as part of the *Nine for '09* initiative. Recognizing that change takes time, the content of this document serves as a discussion starter, clearly indicating the commitment of the students, staff, and community as well as providing points that will not only help the District celebrate, but will lead to needed change and growth.

Always a teacher at heart (and a former social studies teacher at that), I reflect on the work of historians as they have researched and written on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's First 100 Days in the Presidency and how it influenced American life, some would argue even to this day. I wish to extend my gratitude to the Board of Education for the opportunity to spend my first 100 days on the job listening. People have been allowed to tell their stories, sharing successes and heartache. I feel fortunate to be a part of the Palmyra-Macedon community and look forward to spending many more days like that of an orchestra conductor, making sure everyone is on the same page, encouraging, cajoling, and pushing to produce their best - in harmony. I can only speculate what impression people have about Ike's First 100 Days . . . time will tell. The opportunity to listen has had a profound impact on my leadership and will establish a vision for the future of Pal-Mac. Stay tuned.