

# SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

By Scott E. Payne, Superintendent

The Wall of Fame luncheon and graduation ceremony that concluded the 2015-16 school year were events that underscored the excellence of our school community. Sharing the stage with our graduates and honorees was an especially gratifying moment. It reminded me that the Pine Valley School District is many things. It is a beautifully maintained campus that the community loves. There is a long, proud history of both athletic and academic tradition. The district has produced graduates who have proudly served their country, lead companies, are doctors, nurses, professors, teachers, professional athletes, farmers and private business owners. It is no secret that with sweeping reform in education (Common Core Learning Standards, assessments, technology and special education) Pine Valley has some work to do to return to the glory of years past. Add declining enrollment and a tax cap to the equation, and the work becomes a real challenge. This is not to say that most other districts in Chautauqua County haven't faced (or are facing) similar circumstances. But the experience has been especially palpable in Pine Valley. The district right-sized its faculty and staff during the 2014-15 school year. In addition, the district has undergone state-directed audits that include special education, finances, federal grant programs and food service as well as district-directed transportation and technology studies.

With the landscape of education changing, it is important to understand that status quo is not always the best choice. In fact, one could argue that doing things the way they have always been done may be the most irresponsible approach. The Board and administrative team set a vision and goals for the 2015-16 school year that are congruent with the realities we face today surrounding: *College and Career Ready Students, Engagement with the School and Community, Increase Student Achievement, Fiscal Responsibility and Feedback*. Our 2016-17 budget is one that preserves and enhances programs.

To achieve this it becomes increasingly vital for us to plan deliberately. In fact, a long-range financial planning committee comprised of school and community stakeholders began meeting in May 2016. The role of this group is to gain insight into the long-term financial health of Pine Valley Schools. We face new realities every year such as the shrinking population in Chautauqua County, home and land assessments going down and unfunded State Education Department mandates. In order to maintain solvency and the integrity of Pine Valley, we must think strategically WITH our stakeholders. This is a task that cannot be taken lightly nor in isolation. The very teachers, staff members, community members, taxpayers, etc. simply must partner with the Board and administrators in terms of setting and prioritizing our financial goals.

We believe that it is incumbent on us to ask questions about how we are doing things and base decisions on process and policy. The Board's Policy Committee has worked tirelessly to update our policy manual, and the administrative team is working to establish procedures for process that sits outside of policy. An example is the process that was recently discussed for access and use of our facilities. As we consider our goals, essential programs, and State Education Department mandates, the Board discussed the Summer Enrichment and Summer School programs at its June 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. It is important to be sure that everyone understands the context of the conversation. The following bullet points are intended to provide some perspective to the recent discussions.

- The District Title I program was reviewed by the State Education Department. Title I funding supports students who are not meeting with success on State Education Department and District assessments, students who are at risk of not meeting success on these same assessments and those who are economically disadvantaged. The State Education Department reviewers made it clear that the district Summer Enrichment Program (which is funded by Title I dollars) meet the standards of supplemental education services that address students who are at risk of not meeting academic success. The State Education Department made it especially clear that the summer enrichment swimming program may not be included in the Enrichment Program as it is recreational in nature, not academic.
- A summer swim program was not funded separately in the district budget. Understanding the importance of swimming to the community, the Superintendent met with the Elementary Principal and the Pool Manager to plan (and fund) a recreational summer swim program for our children. During the process it was identified that an instructional swim program would be necessary for primary-aged students as the district's school-year instructional swim program begins at grade 3. The cost of running a summer swim program was determined to be approximately \$1,500. The program was designed to have the appropriate number of lifeguards as safety is a priority.
- The district will closely monitor the swim program this summer and consider adjusting the program should concerns arise. Additionally, we welcome the opportunity to engage stakeholders in planning the program for next summer. Should anyone have interest in participating, please contact the Superintendent or the Elementary Principal.
- The Board discussed summer transportation which is not supplemented by State Aid. Given our recent transportation audit, looking closely at how we run programs efficiently, effectively and safely is important. We determined that centralized pick-up points vs. door-to-door for the Summer Enrichment Program is safe, cost-effective and meets our student and family needs.
- The Board also discussed the Regional Summer School program. This exists for high school students who need to attend such a program to earn course credit they did not obtain during the regular school year. The Board discussed transportation to and from the program. A canvass of districts that responded to a survey regarding Regional Summer School yielded 36% of the districts provide transportation (from the high school) and 64% of the districts do not provide transportation to Regional Summer School.

The Pine Valley Board of Education and the administrative team care deeply about the students and families we serve. We appreciate and strive for collaborative conversation that considers input from everyone. Efforts to meet established goals by providing quality programs that ensure safety and are fiscally responsible are paramount. The overriding objective is to build excellence in the district that matches the pride that exists in Pine Valley's traditions.