



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

## Community Survey Summary

### Overview

The following is a summary of the Community Survey sent to district residents by Dr. Timm via Blackboard on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The communication containing this survey was sent to all district parents and any district resident who signed up on the district website to receive notifications about the district. The link to receive these notifications was published in the New Pine Plains Herald. Additionally, this survey opportunity was directed to the town clerks within the district for their determination of how to share it with their residents. There was a total of 78 responses to the survey.

### Question 1: What current strengths of the District do we need to preserve as we consider "Right Sizing" the district?

#### Small Class Sizes and Personalized Attention

- Small class sizes repeatedly recognized as a strength
- Teacher-to-student ratios of around 1:9 allows for individualized support and extra help from support staff and creates stronger teacher-student relationships
- Enables tailored instruction to meet each student's needs

#### Age-Appropriate Separation of Students

- Elementary students kept separate from middle and high school students protects younger children from inappropriate behaviors and language of older students
- Allows younger students to maintain innocence and feel safe during their transition to school
- Creates a sense of "rite of passage" as students advance
- Provides developmentally appropriate environments for each age group

#### Dedicated and Caring Staff

- Teachers and administrators who genuinely care about students and staff members who know students well
- Strong leadership (particularly noted at Cold Spring Elementary)
- Inclusive school culture and support services including speech therapy, occupational/physical therapy, and social workers
- Bus drivers and monitors who are great with kids

#### Specialized Programs and Electives

- Wide variety of electives at the high school level including hands-on programs like building a race car and automotive classes
- Agricultural programs and FFA opportunities
- Arts and music programs, including STG
- Middle school students have access to recess



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

## **Community Connection and Involvement**

- Strong sense of community and small-town feel fosters personal relationships between school and families
- Good communication with families, especially at the elementary level
- Welcoming school environment for family involvement with community events like the Ag Fair
- District provides local employment opportunities

## **Practical Advantages of Current Structure**

- Separate bus systems for different age groups
- Elementary students on later bell schedule, making after-school childcare easier
- Multiple buildings in different geographic locations reduce travel burden for families
- Multiple gyms, cafeterias, and fields support community activities and events

## **Academic Quality and Support Services**

- Excellent special education department
- Attention to detail in student support
- Excellent extracurricular activities with something for every student
- Quality education and safety as top priorities
- Effective curriculum at the elementary level

## **Question 2: What current weaknesses of the District could be positively impacted if we were to realign our structure?**

### **Transportation and Bussing Inefficiencies**

- Long bus rides, especially for students living far from school
- Inefficient bus routes with some running nearly empty and buses passing each other on the same routes
- Potential to reduce number of buses and drivers needed could consolidate transportation costs
- Bus schedule communicated too late

### **Middle School Development and Structure Issues**

- Middle school has more of a high school feel, not supportive enough for younger middle schoolers
- 5th to 6th grade transition needs more support
- Middle school needs separate principal from high school and better communication with families



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

- Middle school needs improved curriculum and increased family involvement

## **Building and Facility Inefficiencies**

- Half-empty buildings wasting resources with inefficient use of teaching spaces and office resources
- Seymour Smith is an aging building requiring constant expensive repairs
- Multiple buildings create redundant costs (utilities, maintenance, insurance, janitorial staff)

## **Academic and Reputation Concerns**

- Low graduation rate and reading proficiency levels
- District spends more per student than other county districts but has lower academic ratings
- Need to improve curriculum and academic competitiveness to attract families as evidenced by "C" rating on Niche scale (website used by homebuyers)

## **Staffing and Resource Allocation**

- Too many teachers and aides for current needs
- Some teacher schedules are extremely light as some classes run with few students
- Salaries and benefits are the biggest expense
- Right-sizing could be an opportunity to reduce administrative overhead and redirect money to special education and other departments
- Lack of certified after school care

## **Safety and Facility Concerns**

- Main entrances at all schools need upgraded safety features
- Seymour Smith has water and sewage system issues and limited parking
- Multiple exits at Seymour Smith pose safety risks for young children
- Air pollution concerns at Seymour Smith location

## **Cross-Grade Collaboration Opportunities**

- Right-sizing could create opportunities for mentoring programs between older and younger students
- Right-sizing could increase collaboration between grade levels and cross-curricular learning
- There is potential for high school students to support younger students in clubs and sports



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

## **Question 3: In looking at all of our school buildings, how do you think the District could best lower its cost?**

### **Close or Consolidate Elementary Schools**

- Close Seymour Smith Elementary (most frequently mentioned)
- Consolidate all elementary grades into one building to reduce redundancy
- Move all elementary students to Cold Spring (newer building with better facilities)
- Move all elementary students to Seymour

### **Consolidate All Grades into One Building**

- Move all Pre-K through 12th grade to Stissing Mountain (the largest building)
- Requires retrofitting bathrooms, classrooms, and outdoor spaces for younger children
- Would reduce heating, maintenance, insurance, and overall operating costs
- Would eliminate redundant payroll (janitorial, cafeteria, etc.)

### **Two-Building Solution**

- Keep elementary students in one building (either Cold Spring or Seymour)
- Keep middle and high school at Stissing
- Reduces costs while maintaining some age separation
- Allows for different bell schedules for different age groups

### **Reduce Staffing and Administrative Costs**

- Right-size staffing to match current enrollment by reducing number of teachers and aides
- Cut administrative overhead by reducing number of principals
- Consider small pay cuts for all staff
- Re-evaluate retiree benefits (seen as a major cost driver)
- Lack of licensed before and after school childcare

### **Improve Building Efficiency and Maintenance**

- Focus on preventive maintenance to avoid expensive emergency repairs
- Upgrade to energy-efficient lighting and HVAC systems and install solar panels on rooftops
- Eliminate one kitchen and use food transportation instead
- Reduce utilities costs through efficiency improvements



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

## **Optimize Transportation**

- Consolidate bus routes to reduce number of buses needed
- Use smaller buses or vans (which don't require CDL licenses)
- Implement one bell schedule to reduce number of bus runs and stagger start times by 15 minutes to use single bus fleet
- Hire more mechanics to fix buses instead of replace them

## **Sell or Lease Unused Buildings**

- Sell Seymour Smith or lease it to other organizations
- Rent or lease space to educational organizations (Anderson School, Dutchess BOCES), daycare providers, or local businesses
- Apply for historical grants for Seymour Smith
- Hold onto land and property for future use rather than selling

## **Seek Alternative Funding**

- Apply for grants (renewable energy, capital improvement grants)
- Seek shared services with neighboring districts

## **Address Spending Priorities**

- Stop spending on unnecessary capital improvements such as new courtyard, unnecessary track and evaluate existing capital improvement plans
- Ensure cost savings don't reduce educational quality
- Investigate why per-pupil costs are higher than other districts

## **Concerns About Cost-Cutting Approaches**

- Consolidation should not compromise student safety or education quality
- Combining all grades risks long-term costs to student well-being
- Building modifications to accommodate all grades may be expensive and time-consuming
- Should not cut programs or staff that directly serve students
- Need to balance cost savings with maintaining small class sizes

## **Question 4: The District is 140 square miles and must maintain a bus fleet to serve it. What bussing concerns should we address during the "Right Sizing" process?**

### **Age Mixing on Buses (Major Concern)**

- Strong opposition to having elementary students on buses with teenagers due to exposure to inappropriate language and behaviors and risk of bullying
- Young children need safe, calm, age-appropriate transportation environment
- Safety and supervision concerns with mixed age groups



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

- Counterpoint: Other districts successfully manage mixed-age buses with proper monitoring

## **Bus Ride Duration**

- Many bus rides are too long making the school day longer, reducing family time, and leaving less time for homework, extracurricular activities, and sleep
- Especially problematic for young children who struggle with longer rides
- Recommendation: Keep bus rides to 40 minutes or less, especially for younger students

## **Bus Route Organization and Efficiency**

- Current system for communicating pickup and drop-off times is disorganized, not timely, and prone to revision, causing stress for working families
- Right-sizing presents opportunity to consolidate routes and reduce number of buses with potential to use single bus fleet with staggered start times

## **Bus Monitoring and Safety**

- Monitors should remain on all buses to ensure proper supervision of students
- May need multiple aides on buses with mixed age groups
- Concern about lack of drivers and monitors

## **Scheduling Concerns**

- Need to coordinate pickup and drop-off times with childcare availability
- Elementary students on later schedule helps with after-school childcare
- Concern about very early pickup times (6:30 AM)
- Neighboring districts use 8 AM start for middle/high school and 9 AM for elementary
- One bell schedule may not work due to parent concerns about mixed ages

## **Bus Fleet and Equipment**

- Concern over electric buses vs. hybrid or traditional fuel such as electric bus range and reliability
- Need for proper maintenance of existing buses to extend life of equipment through preventive maintenance
- May need to upgrade buses to accommodate different age groups

## **Practical Solutions and Alternatives**

- Keep separate elementary and high school bus runs and group students by grade level and neighborhoods when possible
- Combine stops where houses are close together
- Provide incentives for parents to use bus transportation



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

- Consider merging resources with neighboring districts
- Explore alternative transportation options

## **Concerns About Consolidation Impact**

- Consolidating to one school would reduce bus costs; however, combining all ages on buses creates safety and behavioral concerns
- Some parents are willing to drive rather than have children on mixed-age buses
- Need to balance cost savings with student safety and well-being

## **Question 5: Are there any concerns or other ideas about the "Future-Readiness" of the District for us to consider?**

### **Developmental and Safety Concerns with Consolidation**

- Combining Pre-K through 12th grade in one building risks exposing young children to inappropriate influences
- Young students would feel overwhelmed and unsafe around much older peers
- Counseling and intervention services would be stretched thin across all ages
- Difficult to provide age-specific support and services in one building
- Other districts that consolidated (like Taconic Hills) found one bell system didn't work

### **Classroom and Facility Capacity Issues**

- Stissing building may not have enough classrooms for all students (only 40 full-size classrooms for 14 grade levels) and would require an addition to maintain current class sizes and electives
- Larger class sizes would result from consolidation
- Significant modifications needed to accommodate elementary students (bathrooms, classrooms, recess areas)
- Taconic Hills spent years in construction during consolidation
- Parking, cafeteria, gym space, and specialist classrooms would be inadequate

### **Impact on Programs and Services**

- Risk of losing enrichment programs and electives (race car building, FFA, arts, music)
- Speech therapy, support services, and special education services could be compromised
- Loss of unique opportunities that make the district special

### **Community and Economic Impact**

- Closing schools would hurt the communities they serve



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

- Young families less likely to move to towns without schools
- Empty historic buildings decrease community value and aesthetics
- Loss of school jobs would hurt local economy
- Multiple buildings support community programming and events

## **Staffing and Employment Concerns**

- Risk of losing good, caring teachers and staff
- Younger teachers with less seniority may be laid off
- Concern about losing key administrators (like Mrs. Fischetti at Cold Spring)
- Staff should be involved in planning building realignment
- Potential need for buyouts for educators near retirement

## **Academic Performance and District Reputation**

- District has low graduation rate and low reading proficiency levels
- Need to improve academic performance to attract families
- Consolidation alone won't solve academic problems

## **Tax and Financial Concerns**

- Consolidation may not result in tax decreases because initial costs of retrofitting buildings could be substantial
- Long-term costs of student well-being and safety may outweigh short-term savings
- Families already experiencing rising taxes may move away
- Need to carefully evaluate capital improvement spending

## **Planning and Decision-Making Process**

- Need for more community engagement and input
- Decision timeline seems rushed (decision needed by January)
- Should involve staff in planning logistics of realignment
- Need for transparent communication and opportunities for input
- District leadership knew about problems for years but didn't address them
- Should consider putting major decisions to voter approval

## **Flexibility and Future Growth**

- Need to maintain flexibility as enrollment fluctuates
- Should keep property and buildings for future use
- District needs to be ready for unexpected events and changes

## **Alternative Approaches**

- Consider Pre-K through 4th at Cold Spring and 5th through 12th at Stissing



# Pine Plains Central School District

Excellence • Connection • Experience

- Discuss consolidation options and shared services with small districts
- Look at how other districts (like Webutuck) handled consolidation
- Build additions rather than consolidate into one building

## **Curriculum and Instruction Improvements**

- Emphasize basics: phonics, literature, math, social studies, science, art, music
- Reduce screen time and digital learning; emphasize analog learning
- Teach soft skills: collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking
- Provide more professional development and training for teachers
- Improve teacher collaboration with other districts
- Focus on career-oriented, engaging activities

## **Building and Environmental Improvements**

- Upgrade HVAC systems for student comfort and learning
- Install solar panels and pursue renewable energy
- Address air pollution concerns at Seymour Smith location
- Improve building efficiency
- Consider environmental impact of decisions

## **Specific Concerns About Seymour Smith**

- Historic building with unique character worth preserving
- Aging building with significant maintenance needs such as water and sewage system
- Limited parking
- Multiple exits pose safety risks
- Air pollution from nearby highway affects students

## **Concerns About Losing Elementary Schools**

- Should not close elementary schools
- Separate elementary buildings are essential for young children's development
- Raising taxes preferable to closing schools
- Need to preserve age-appropriate environments
- Should explore all other cost-cutting options first