

# Pine Bush tackles intolerance

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When Joan Carbone first took her position as superintendent of the Pine Bush Central School District less than a year ago, an action plan was put in place that include parent workshops such as "Keeping Pine Bush Bully Free." The first workshop is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Feb. 19 in the High School Auditorium, and is presented by N.Y.S. School Safety Council member Dr. Felicia Wilson. The second workshop, "Breaking Down Digital Walls," is planned for 6:30 p.m. Feb. 24 in the Circleville Middle School auditorium by Educational speaker Josh Gunderson. The workshops, though different, will both address bullying among other topics and the intended audience is parents of students. To further accommodate young families, childcare will be provided for young children on the evenings of the workshops. The intent is to educate parents about not only what to look for, but actions and steps that may be taught for children to take when confronted by or witness of bullying and cyber-bullying. In addition, Carbone has reactivated a task force to "allow the district to promote diversity," said Carbone in a recent phone interview following the first board meeting of the calendar year bracketed by negative press due to Gov. Cuomo's State of the State address and a New York Times article eluding to the belief that district authorities' actions or perceived lack thereof may merit further investigation regarding three lawsuits filed against the district citing anti-Semitic behavior among students and student bullying accompanied by alleged acts of violence and graffiti. The Dignity for All Students Act Policy states the District, "...will strive to create an environment free of bullying, discrimination and/or harassment and will foster civility in the schools...", as well as the complete policy and listing of the Dignity Act Coordinators can be found on the school's website at [www.pinebushschools.org](http://www.pinebushschools.org). This past Saturday, the New York Times reported that evidence collected in a lawsuit filed by three Jewish families against the Pine bush School District "is sufficient for a jury to find that the district failed to respond to pervasive anti-Semitic harassment in its schools" by taking required action under a civil rights law. The lawsuit alleged that the children's rights were being violated by "rampant anti-Semitic discrimination and harassment" and "deliberate indifference" by school administrators. Carbone would not comment directly about matters related to the lawsuits, although a formal prepared statement is expected to be released soon. However, she did state, "We are always enhancing our efforts to be exemplary," as plans, programs and workshops continue to not just address issues, but Carbone continued to "reinforce our efforts to enhance our culture." Staying focused on education, the board held their January meeting with a business as usual agenda which included Donna Geidel, sssistant superintendant for instruction presentation of the Pine Bush School's 2013 NYS Assessment Results for grades 3 - 8 in English Language Arts (ELA) and math with comparisons to the district versus county and state trends. The results are the first to reflect the implementation of Common Core learning and it was stressed numbers should not be compared to results from prior years. Data used was compiled and is continually analyzed by administrators and teachers. Scores range from 4 being the highest down to 1 being the lowest. ELA scores from grades 3 - 8 included less Level 1 and 2 scores than the county and state. Grades 3 - 5 trended more 3s and 4s than comparisons to the district versus county and state trends. The results are the first to reflect the implementation of Common Core learning and it was stressed numbers should not be compared to results from prior years. Data used was compiled and is continually analyzed by administrators and teachers. Scores range from 4 being the highest down to 1 being the lowest. ELA scores from grades 3 - 8 included less Level 1 and 2 scores than the county and state. Grades 3 - 5 trended more 3s and 4s than county and state while grades 6 - 8 were on par. Overall, math scores were not as high as ELA. Improvement initiatives include district-wide Math in Focus parent nights and a Road to Success after school program which is, "...targeted instruction for high 2's and low 3's" once a week for eight weeks. Geidel cited the length and rigor of the tests were significantly increased. Improvement initiatives also include Math in Focus parent nights, a Road to Success after school program, practice testing and full implementation of common core modules and Math in Focus. Assistant Superintendent for Business Michael Pacella presented both the Long Range Planning Report with demographics and 2014-15 budget "rollover" projections. Pacella's update utilized information collected by a Western Suffolk BOCES study and indicated a decrease is now projected by almost 14 percent in district enrollment over the next 10 years. Although the study referenced a decrease in area home sales, the impact of the 396-unit project in Bloomingburg could not be accurately identified. Superintendent, Joan Carbone did state separate calculations are being conducted to include the Bloomingburg development and Pacella also stated, "The impact will vary depending on the target buyers." The "rollover" budget was defined by Pacella as, "...the current year's cost to operate the district with all of its programs calculated into next year's dollars. It's not taking the current year's approved budget and just multiplying it by a 'good guess' figure to account for inflation and other factors." Though Pacella commended the district for "paying off some significant debt," the bottom line anticipates a need for 3.8 percent or approximate additional revenue of \$1.1 million. School board Vice-President Judy Pulver stressed, "These are very preliminary {findings}," and it still very early in the planning stages of the budget.

By SHARON MacGREGOR