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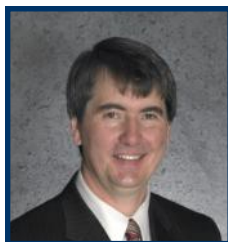


Pulse

of Palliser Regional Schools

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

Volume 2, Issue 5 • February 2010



We've now passed the half-way point in this school year, as the days gain more sunshine and the grip of winter starts to loosen. And we're just hours away from hearing details about the new provincial budget, in what is the earliest

budget release in recent memory.

For Palliser's board and administration, this sets off a busy few weeks of deliberations, contemplation and consultation. As part of its goal of being responsive and responsible, the board will be holding consultations with stakeholders and the public across Palliser, looking for input on what this division should be focusing on as we move forward, in light of whatever fate the budget holds.

Details will be coming to all of our schools

soon, and participants will be asked to preregister if they'd like to take part.

For now, just keep these evening dates in mind: March 1, Glenmore Christian Academy, Calgary; March 2, Dorothy Dalgliesh School, Picture Butte; March 4, County Central High School, Vulcan; and March 8, John Davidson School, Coaldale. These consultations will provide an excellent opportunity for the public to learn about Palliser and for trustees to hear ideas for what we should stop, start or continue doing as a school division.

What I hope will continue is the excellent teamwork we see all around Palliser. This issue of *The Pulse* speaks to collaborations of all sorts: relationships between mentors and students of all ages; co-operation between school divisions; and the creation of second families within a school community. We all know that what we can accomplish together is greater than what we manage alone.

— Kevin Gietz, Superintendent of Schools

HEIDY IS OUR HERO!



A school secretary who is an expert in diplomacy is this month's Palliser Unsung Hero.

Heidi Aviles, from Glenmore Christian School in Calgary, was nominated by Principal Rob Cowie for her kind manner, reliability and professional courtesy to the demands of 560 students, staff and parents.

"She has this tremendous way about her," says Cowie. "Her demeanour exudes confidence and tremendous caring. She's so incredibly faithful in service to GCA students and families. She sees it as a service to God."

She also regularly volunteers to organize school events.

Associate Superintendent of Alternative Programs and Technology Dale Backlin, former principal of GCA, also sang Heidi's praises.

"I had someone tell me once that whenever he called the school, it didn't matter what the call was about, Heidi left him with the feeling that she was genuinely appreciative of his call," Backlin says. "It didn't matter if there were five kids at the counter and three other calls on hold."

As this month's Unsung Hero, Heidi received a Palliser travel mug and gift certificate to Moxie's. Congratulations, Heidi!

To nominate a Palliser Unsung Hero, email pulse@pallisersd.ab.ca with the name of your nominee and why they deserve recognition.

Palliser duo part of an AISI first in Alberta

Two Palliser Regional Schools educators are one half of a team garnering attention across the province for not only their development of Social Studies resources but for the interjurisdictional co-operation they are pioneering.

Sherrie Nickel and Aaron Skretting have been seconded to Palliser's central office this year to an Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) project that will see their efforts benefitting teachers and students in Palliser and two other school divisions.

Working with Jill Aman at Horizon and Tricia Unreiner, of Prairie Rose, Nickel and Skretting are designing instructional resources aligned with the Social Studies curriculum. Skretting's efforts have been focused on high school level material; Nickel on upper elementary and middle school grades.

Their work hasn't just been grabbing the atten-



Aaron Skretting and Sherrie Nickel are part of an interjurisdictional team that is blazing a trail for other co-operative efforts.

tion of fellow Social Studies teachers. As the first interjurisdictional project of its kind, others in the province are also watching.

The team will present to an AISI Showcase in Edmonton Feb. 8. Their presentation will include best practices for future interjurisdictional projects which Nickel and Skretting say are an excellent way to capitalize on and share resources.

"We certainly have learned how important it is to keep lines of communication open," says Nickel, of their teamwork so far.

For this project, the team has been creating units in SMART Notebook, each with a consistent look, with common icons denoting videos, online links or suggested reading. The consistency means once a teacher has seen how one unit flows, they'll be familiar with all the others.

But don't think this is just some high-tech "bling" to show off technology in the classroom.

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Ocean-front property in Coalhurst?

Anyone who thinks landlocked southern Alberta is bereft of marine wildlife has never visited Coalhurst Elementary School.

The award-winning school is chock full of whales, even trout and swordfish.

The school has taken its motto "A Whale of a School" to new oceanic depths this year, thanks to the efforts of learning assistants Lori Walker and Timythy Ober and Vice-Principal Deryk Hamilton.

Hamilton, new to the school this year, started a fish-themed fitness program, promoting activity among 255 students and their families as well.

The program fishtails nicely with a pod initiative Walker and Ober started this year as well.

Ober and Walker, with the enthusiastic blessing of Principal Laurie Wilson, created a dozen "pods" at the school. Every student, from preschool to Grade 6, belongs to a pod named for a type of whale. Each group is led by an adult from the staff. Members of the pod support their "family" by earning points for demonstrating good manners, taking part in spirit days and other activities.

Walker says the idea is similar to the fictional houses at Hogwarts School of Magic from the Harry Potter books. By merging students of all ages, the pods are building a sense of community within the school.

Both the physical activity and pod themes have reignited the school's long ago established whale connection, which stems from the school's one-time adoption of a whale. This year, the school adopted not a single whale, but a dozen. Walker says the students raised more than \$600 for the Canadian organization called Grand Manan Whale and Seabird Research Station's Right Whale Adoption Program. The money supports education and conservation.

In April, the pods will "dive into sharing

and caring," and in June, the school will celebrate "A Whale of a Year."

The pods have been fantastic, says Principal Wilson, who tips her hat to Ober and Walker.

"It's built spirit, a lot of team spirit," says Wilson.

"What's really neat is there's an excitement for the whole community," says Ober.

During the Jan. 26th Sea of Literacy afternoon, that excitement was obvious. This Family Literacy Day event saw each pod move through a series of literacy-related activities ranging from word puzzles to making "Where the Wild Things Are" monster teeth out of apple slices and icing. To help students blow off some steam, there was an Olympic-themed obstacle course.

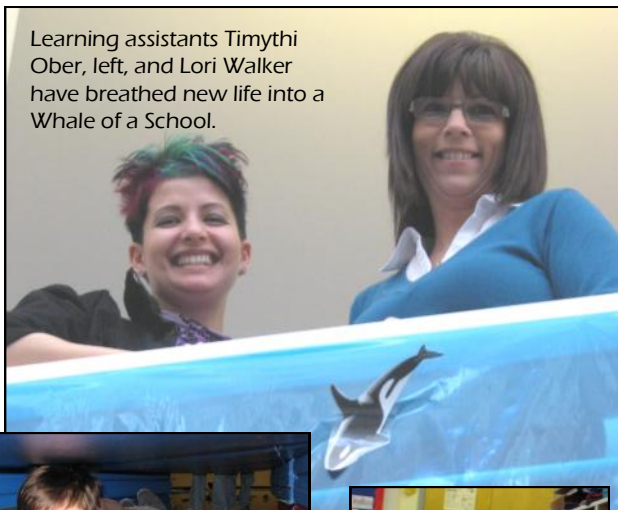
Membership of the pods was decided by random draw (siblings were kept together) and members will stick together throughout their time at CES.

"Same pod, same peers," says Ober. "We'll swap teachers so everyone gets to know more of these kids outside the classroom setting."

For Hamilton, the marine theme also fits well with the FISH! Philosophy, a workplace management system that emphasizes having fun, making someone's day, being there, and choosing your attitude.

In addition to motivating students to be active, the fitness challenge has made parents more aware of how active (or inactive)

Learning assistants Timythy Ober, left, and Lori Walker have breathed new life into a Whale of a School.



At left, Rhett Brunesci crawls his way through an obstacle course, while Meagan Neudorf, left, and Brooklyn Watmough create monster teeth out of apples during Sea of Literacy Day.



their child has been, he says.

Each student was sent

home with a form to fill out, keeping track of time spent each day being physically active. Twenty minutes is the minimum to be counted, and two hours daily is the maximum. As the minutes add up, the student moves up from the slow swimming trout to the speedy swordfish. Hamilton says with 70 per cent of students participating, "I have no doubt we will hit our goal," of logging the equivalent of 5,000 kilometres of exercise by the end of the school year.

The system puts "friendly pressure" on parents to be active, too. As a side benefit, when parents bring in their child's activity sheet, there's one more opportunity to keep lines of communication open between school and home, Hamilton says.

AN AISI FIRST

(Continued from page 1)

"For us, the pedagogy is always preceding the technology," says Nickel. "We're not sacrificing the curriculum for the sake of technology."

"We have really been trying to meet the needs of teachers."

Skretting says the typical Social Studies teacher in a smaller school doesn't have the time to devote to integrating technology throughout an entire course. They may be teaching five different grades of Social Studies, on top of other courses. The kind of

work the team is doing simply would not be possible for an individual teacher to accomplish while juggling classroom needs.

The units include SMART Board exercises that offer students immediate feedback and resources that can encourage classroom discussion and help reinforce what's being taught.

The resources can appeal to a variety of learning styles and support a variety of teaching styles, too.

"It's learner engagement," says Skretting. "We're using technology to engage learners."

The units aren't intended to be

the be-all-and-end-all. Teachers can pick and choose from units and add elements of their own as they see fit.

The whole unit plan and all the student exercises can be printed and used in paper format, making them accessible to teachers on Hutterian colonies or working with Low German Mennonite students who don't have computers in the classroom.

Since the start of the school year, Nickel and Skretting have been visiting schools across Palliser, testing out units and collecting as much feedback as possible, as they work and rework the

units. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

"We're consistently hearing from Palliser teachers and from people in the other jurisdictions about the quality of work Aaron and Sherrie are doing," says Superintendent Kevin Gietz. "We've heard this is one of the best investments Palliser has made in support of teachers. Aaron and Sherri are blazing a new trail for collaboration between divisions and are creating a body of work that will support learning for thousands of students. They have done Palliser incredibly proud."



Little song on the Prairie about to gain national audience

A song composed for and performed many times by the R.I. Baker Middle School choir in Coaldale will be sung this summer for a national audience, on what's likely to be a springboard for international exposure.

Choir conductor Alison Stewart says "A Prairie Song," written by legendary Canadian composer Howard Cable, will be performed by the Unisong Choir, a collection of some of the best choirs from every province in Canada, who raise their voices in unison at concerts on Parliament Hill on Canada Day.

"A Prairie Song" was written specifically for the R.I. Baker Choir, thanks to the mentorship Stewart enjoys with Cable.

Stewart says once the choirs from across Canada have "A Prairie Song," the music will travel like wildfire to other choirs around the world. But it will always be an R.I. Baker song first and foremost.

The choir will perform it in competition in next month's Lethbridge and District Kiwanis Music and Speech Arts Festival, March 16-18. The choir is entering the Provincial-National Competition for the first time this year.

"If the adjudicator thinks we're worthy, we'll be invited to provincials," says Stewart, who beams about the choir and how far it's come in a short time.

This is only the fourth year for the R.I. Baker choir. In that span, the choir has grown from 13 members to 48.

"I'm really proud of the sound they have," says Stewart, who started the choir at Coalhurst Elementary School during her time at that school.

"It's nice to see children who enjoy and learn and appreciate classical music."

The fact their song will be sung by

some of Canada's best choirs on Parliament Hill July 1 would only be made more exciting if the Coaldale choir could be there to sing it, too.

That's a goal, Stewart says, that she may pursue in another year. The conductor says she believes the choir is good enough to make it to this exclusive Unisong Festival. The event would take a major amount of fundraising and work, but she says her choir has proven it has no shortage of determination.

The choir holds regular practices once a week during lunch hour. With the Kiwanis festival coming up, they've been holding five-hour practices after school on Fridays the last few weeks.

"They learn discipline and commitment," she says. "They develop a sense of musicality, poise, confidence. They're well behaved, focused and driven. All these values will benefit them."

In addition, these singers get a workout.

"Singing is a very physical activity. It's a different type of exercise and it takes a different type of intelligence."

As a child, Stewart performed with Lethbridge's well known Anne Campbell Singers, performing on the steps of Parliament in 1987. She dreams of sharing such an experience with her students.

"What an awesome opportunity for children," she says.

As for her friendship with composer Cable, Stewart says she feels fortunate to have met him and to have such a talent say he believes in her. In turn, she's sharing that message with her students.

"They are my blessing, they are my dream, they are my gift," she says. "Palliser's motto is 'dream and believe, learn and achieve.' Well, I dream and believe in them and I know what we can achieve."

Help for Haiti

Students and staff across Palliser Regional Schools continue to raise money for Haiti, in a demonstration of the power of loose change and collective spirit.

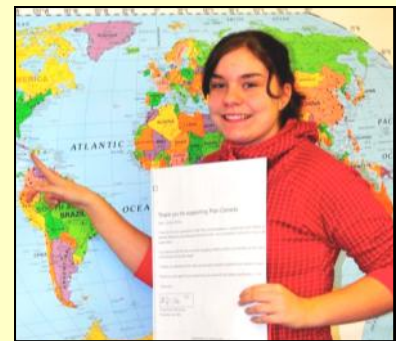
At Coalhurst Elementary, Darlene Hubber's class has a coffee can so full of change it takes two students to lift it. A video about the campaign can be viewed at www.coalhurstelementaryschool.ca/

Students are also holding three bake sales with cookies, cupcakes and other treats selling for just 25 cents a piece. The first sale raised \$118.

A few blocks away, Coalhurst High has raised more than \$500 in donations in a Hearts for Haiti campaign.

Meanwhile, Grade 8 County Central High School student, Carlie Brown, earned a letter of acknowledgment from Plan Canada for her work mobilizing students for that organization's Haiti relief efforts. So far, the school has raised \$2,136.

Students at Heritage Christian School in Calgary baked and decorated cakes and sold them, raising \$465 for Samaritan's Purse aid to Haiti. Glenmore Christian Academy held a benefit concert and Calgary Christian middle school students gave donations for the chance to wear their iPods at school one day. Menno Simons students had a similar deal to wear PJs to school. That school has raised \$3,000 so far for MCC clean water kits for Haiti.



Carlie Brown, County Central High School Grade 8 student, holds a letter of acknowledgment from Plan Canada.