



## SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE



Happy New Year!  
Hard to believe, but it's already been a decade since the great Y2K scare. Ten years ago, two out of five Palliser students were not yet born. Facebook, Twitter and MySpace didn't

exist yet either.

In 2000, Palliser Regional Schools had only been in existence for five years, created out of the merger of schools in the counties of Lethbridge and Vulcan. Today, Palliser is a very different system, with five alternative schools in Calgary, bringing more than 2,000 students to all the benefits of a public education from formerly private environments. Palliser has literally doubled

in size in its student population and the geography we cover.

Clearly, time goes by quickly and change happens even faster.

While we can't accurately predict the future, we can influence it in big and small ways through our actions. In this month's newsletter, you'll read about Janice Povey and Byron Thiessen, who make a difference through their individual hard work. You'll also learn about how collectively Palliser's Grade 9 students are doing their part to influence the future of education in Alberta.

At Palliser, we are in the business of ensuring children get the education they need to succeed in this rapidly changing world. I wish you all the best in 2010 as we work together to deliver on this promise.

— Kevin Gietz,  
Superintendent of Schools

## The survey says. . .

Southern Albertans have likely seen news coverage of Palliser students' excellent results on Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Exams. These results contribute to the Accountability Pillar, a tool used by Alberta Education to evaluate how well the education system is meeting parent and public expectations.

The Accountability Pillar uses a set of 16 indicators consisting of surveys of students, parents and teachers on various aspects of quality; student outcomes such as dropout and high school completion rates; and provincial assessments of student learning.

In January, parents of students in grades 4, 7 and 10 in larger schools and grades 4-12 in small schools will receive a survey from Alberta Education. In February, students in those grades and all teachers will be completing their surveys online at school.

Your participation in the survey is a vital part of this annual check-up on Alberta's education system.

Survey results will be reported publicly by jurisdictions as part of their 3-Year Education Plans and Annual Education Results Reports.

The latest AERR for Palliser is online at <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/docs/library/>

## Menno Simons Principal, students forge connections in Kenya

When Principal Byron Thiessen took a family vacation this fall, students at Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary got to share in the experience.

Thiessen, wife Kim and two adult daughters travelled to Kenya on a journey that expanded his world view and will help shape his students' world view as well.

While Kim, a talented singer, worked on her new CD with a Maasai choir, Byron connected with a primary school in the village of Najile, about a 3 1/2-hour drive from the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. He arrived bearing letters and friendship bracelets for each of the 470 kindergarten through Grade 8 stu-

dents from each of the 190 students at Menno Simons.

The trip was organized by the Mennonite Central Committee. The Najile connection was first forged by a volunteer at the Thiessen's church who hailed from the village.

This wasn't Byron's first trip to Africa. As a child, he spent six years in Nigeria where his parents were MCC workers. He left the country at age 11.

This time, Byron viewed the continent through the eyes of an experienced educator. He was struck by how much the students sacrificed to attend school and how little government support existed.

## HATS OFF TO JANICE POVEY!



This month's Unsung Hero is Janice Povey, the library tech and more at County Central High School in Vulcan. She was nominated by teacher Tracy Inaba.

"Without Jan, our school would not function nearly as well," Tracy says. "Jan is definitely an unsung hero who everyone – staff and students – at County Central have come to depend on."

In addition to her duties in the school library and as site-based manager, Janice manages the school website, publishes the CCHS newsletter, looks after the school's finances, lockers and supplies, serves as an adviser to the student council, serves on the sports council executive, relieves front office staff, organizes school ceremonies and volunteers for movie nights.

She is also responsible for school bookings and organizing events like the district-wide PD days.

One of the special events that Jan had a huge hand in was the Canadian Space Agency downlink event in September.

As Palliser's Unsung Hero, Janice receives a Palliser travel mug and a \$25 gift certificate to Moxies.

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



"The Kenyan government promised \$6 per child to the school, but the school hadn't received penny," Byron explains. That funding, if it ever arrived,

would amount to about one-thousandth of the funding per student the Alberta government provides per public school student.

Byron Thiessen gives students in Najile, Kenya, a rare commodity – paper.

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## Hundreds of Palliser students 'Speak Out'

In Grade 9 Social Studies, students learn about governance and rights. This year, across Palliser, those students are getting a real life exercise on the topic, as they're each given a say in matters that affect their own education.

Focus groups were held across the division the week before Christmas break and the first week after, giving nearly 500 Grade 9 students an opportunity to weigh in about what's right in their schools and what might be lacking.

Palliser central office staff visited these teens at their schools, putting on half-day workshops with resources developed by Alberta Education's Alberta Student Engagement Initiative and its Speak Out program.

While any Alberta student aged 14 or older can make his or her opinion known (visit [www.speakout.alberta.ca](http://www.speakout.alberta.ca) for details), Palliser is giving voice to hundreds of teens in the first division-wide rollout of the program.

Palliser Superintendent Kevin Gietz says feedback from Grade 9 students is particularly valuable because they are on the cusp of high school and about to make key decisions about their futures.

"They still have a few years of school ahead of them and will be in the system long enough to actually witness positive changes that flow from

their input," Gietz says.

Gietz says the results of these forums will be shared with Alberta Education, but more importantly to Palliser, this valuable student perspective will be considered in the division's own decision making.

Last year, a sampling of Grade 9 and 11 students were invited to participate in service area meetings that included feedback from parents and other stakeholders. This year's Speak Out forums give far more students the opportunity to be heard.

At a Speak Out session at Kate Andrews High School in Coaldale, some students expressed surprise at the quality of the discussions.

"I didn't think people would be open about what they wanted to talk about," said Timothy Hachkowski, one of the team leaders.

Brooklynn Gathercole said she found it surprising that some students were open not only with their ideas, but with their emotions about school.

In this particular session, students talked about



Above, clockwise from left, Colby Stone, David Ockerman, Shelby Barrus, Courtney Rickert, Dylan Nikkel sort through ideas from their brainstorming session at Kate Andrews. At left, Grant Dyck, left, and Nathan Parker take part in a team-work exercise.



the need for more technology in their classrooms, their desire for more interactivity in their learning and the value of a quiet classroom so they can focus on their work.

"I just hope it will actually make a difference (with the provincial government)," said Hunter Antal, another student. "It just seems like education is being put on a backburner now."

## There's no business like bus business for Susan

Susan Reid had only been on the job as Palliser's new Transportation Supervisor for a few days when a blizzard hit. Of course, the newcomer took the blame for the weather. While Lethbridge was shivering in -38 C cold, her old haunt of Red Deer was about 20 degrees warmer.



Susan Reid

Good natured ribbing aside, the weather is no laughing matter for hundreds of Palliser students who are bused to school every day. Just days after the board passed its new policy and administration adopted its new procedure on inclement weather, Reid was putting the new processes to the test.

"It all worked really well," she says of the 6 a.m. decision making.

The December blizzard also served as a good example of just how widely weather can vary across a division as large as Palliser's. Busing to south schools was cancelled because of -40 C temperatures, wind and snow. Conditions to the north that day weren't nearly as hazardous with temperatures a full six to eight degrees warmer. That difference can be huge to how the buses run and how safe it is for children to be on them, Reid says.

The size of Palliser is one of the major challenges in transportation, Reid says.

The average Palliser bus will travel 100 kilometres a day. Overall some 2,000 students rely on Palliser busing, collected from 70 routes by

one of 100 different drivers.

Reid, who was the parts and service co-ordinator and assistant transportation manager for Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools before joining Palliser in late November, says she loves the challenge of her new job, whether working with drivers, dealing with parents or coping with nasty weather. Along the way, she intends to analyze the efficiency of existing routes, rethink the size of the Palliser fleet (there are no new buses being purchased this year) and review the region's demographics to ensure routes, boundaries and populations are well aligned.

"Every day is different," she says. "I never get bored."

For Reid, joining Palliser marked a return to Lethbridge. Six years ago when she was the manager of a local restaurant.

She got into the busing business first as a driver before entering the administrative side.

Reid says she's looking forward to the end of this school year for her children, Danielle and Fredrick, to finish the semester in Red Deer before they join her in Lethbridge.

**Contact Transportation Supervisor Susan Reid for details on how your school can win \$1,000 if your Grade 7-12 students create a winning multimedia message on bus safety. Email [susan.reid@pallisersd.ab.ca](mailto:susan.reid@pallisersd.ab.ca) or call 403-328-4111 or toll-free 1-877-667-1234.**

## MENNO SIMONS

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The Najile school relies on student fees to operate, which may be more than impoverished families can bear.

He estimates about half of the students he met were being raised by grandparents, an indication of the toll HIV/AIDS has taken on families. While antiretroviral drugs are standard therapy for Canadians diagnosed with HIV, they are handed out sparingly in Kenya, making the virus a death sentence for many.

Byron says he was also struck by the lack of even basic supplies in the school where classes are crammed with 40 to 60 students..

"I didn't see paper at all there until I handed it out," he says.

Byron says he hopes learning about Najile will challenge his students' sense of entitlement and inspire them in knowing how much difference an individual can make globally.

Students at the Calgary school have already begun raising the resources needed to supply the Najile students with soccer, volleyballs and other balls, an idea the children came up with all on their own.

The Thiessens plan to return to Kenya in the summer of 2011. Meanwhile, Menno Simons students and staff are still working out a plan to help the Najile students with their fees.

Kim's CD, featuring Kenyan singers, is due for release this spring. CD sales will support the MCC's Generations at Risk campaign of testing, treatment, awareness and prevention education of HIV/AIDS in Africa.