

Palliser Regional Schools Leadership in Literacy

Summer 2015

Vol.2, Issue 1

Join our literacy journey

An invitation from the Board Chair and Superintendent

In May, Palliser Regional Schools invited about 200 of our stakeholders (students, staff, parents and community partners) to talk about student and school success.

The conversation was a continuation of a discussion we started in 2012, when our literacy program was in its infancy.

As our final question of the day, we shared information about the “summer slide,” literacy skills our students are at risk of losing if they stop reading over the summer.

Then we asked individuals at 25 table groups to brainstorm ways each of us could prevent the summer slide in our family or our community. You’ll see many of these suggestions later in this publication. Not only were there some excellent suggestions, but there was a demonstration of strong support among our stakeholders that literacy matters.

Literacy unites Palliser. Our



Colleen Deitz
Board Chair



Kevin Gietz
Superintendent

division is geographically large, demographically diverse and yet we can all see the benefits of strong literacy skills.

We couldn’t have imagined three years ago how literacy would transform our division, our classrooms and our students.

Literacy is critical thinking. Reading exposes us to new ideas. Writing is the way we express ourselves.

Thank you to our staff for their excellent work to teach literacy skills and to our stakeholders for joining us on this important journey.

Our goal for our students

In the past two years, we’ve seen how focused assessment and responsive teaching tailored to the individual student can produce positive results in student learning and literacy.

To that end, Palliser has identified an ambitious goal we believe is within our grasp over the next four years.

In March 2019, 95% of Grade 3 students will be reading at expected level using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment.

Essentially, every student who can physically and intellectually learn to read will be reading at level by the end of Grade 3.

Through this work, we will close the academic gap for students who struggle with reading and comprehension. With focused instruction and targeted interventions, we will create a generation of readers and critical thinkers.

This is our promise.

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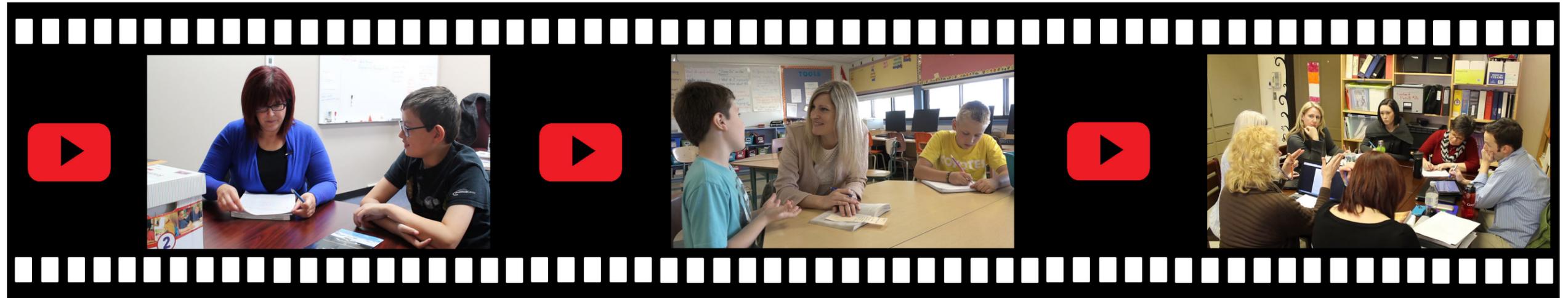
 Website
www.pallisersd.ab.ca

In this document, you’ll notice Quick Response Codes. Using a free QR Code reader on your mobile phone or tablet, you can be taken directly to additional content on our website.



Palliser Video Series takes you behind the scenes of our literacy program

These videos and more are found on our YouTube Channel or the literacy section of www.pallisersd.ab.ca



1 We start with a Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment

Twice a year, every student not yet reading at a Grade 7 level are assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment. The early fall assessment tells the teacher where the student is starting out, what skills have been mastered and what skills need to be taught next. The early spring assessment verifies that the student has made progress in reading and comprehension.

<https://goo.gl/mfCAVK>

2 Responsive teaching aligns instruction with individual need

Between those two benchmark assessments we devote time for students to read alone or in groups and provide opportunities to students to talk about what they're reading. Through a variety of classroom practices, teachers are assessing what literacy skills the students have mastered or need help with. They can then help the student practice those strategies and move them forward.

<https://goo.gl/Nqf5iZ>

3 What if the student isn't responding? Call the 'A Team'

What happens if a student isn't progressing or needs even more challenge in the classroom? The teacher and principal can call in the Academic Wrap-Around Team — Central Office staff with expertise in inclusive education, literacy and technology integration. The team works with school staff to brainstorm new strategies for teaching to the individual student's strengths.

<https://goo.gl/wwXgjj>

Student improved six levels

One Grade 3 teacher had one struggling student improve by six levels in one year. That's the kind of growth one might expect over the course of two years. The student said the fact she gets to choose where she can read in her classroom played a part in her success.

Where you read matters

One school converted a storage area into a junior high literacy room featuring couches, chairs and new books, creating a comfortable environment for young readers.

Highly engaging reading time

One elementary school created a one-hour options block for literacy engagement such as word games and student-led projects. They created cross-graded teams so older students could read with younger ones, promoting both leadership and literacy.

Dylan Purcell, a Lethbridge Herald editor who visited the school, wrote, following his visit, "I don't know how Coalhurst Elementary has a class of kids who all like to read."

Building up classroom libraries

One elementary school has at least 500 books in each classroom so students always have access to the types of books they want to read. Students had input into the kinds of books they wanted. Students also donated books from their personal collections.

Students created reading clubs

One school whose students are predominantly English as a second language learners held bi-monthly literacy celebrations. The school had a team of volunteer readers, student-driven reading clubs and growing student interest in genres of books they might not have considered before.

Stories from across Palliser

Each school in Palliser is unique so it's no surprise that each school has found unique ways to encourage a culture of reading. Here are a few samples and celebrations from across our diverse division.

One-on-one effort pays off

One junior high and high school has a program of staff working with students one-on-one every second day, reading books at their level. Students continue to read those books on their "off" days as well. The program has helped increase the percentage of students reading at grade level.

A community of writers

Students at one rural school created a poetry club and became the only rural school to compete in a poetry slam contest in Calgary. High school students from the school also earned scholarships to a summer camp for writers based on their interest and submitted written works. The camp organizer admitted it was unusual for three students from one school to receive sponsored admission to the camp.

Digital literacy a focus online

Palliser's online school offers a one-credit digital literacy and awareness program as part of its orientation course, e-Learning Management. Digital literacy is embedded in the school's growing list of high school courses it offers.

High schools adopt assessment tool

Two high schools have adopted the Ontario Comprehension Assessment resource to assess students at higher levels than covered by Fountas and Pinnell. Not only does the resource provide assessment tools, but it also provides resources to support reading instruction as well.

Community shows its support

In Vulcan, students at the elementary and high school have access to free library cards as the community joined in the literacy effort. A representative of the library made presentations to students and the library introduced a teen book club over the summer to encourage reading.



Don't let summer slide by

Research and teacher experience tell us students can lose reading skills over the summer break if they don't keep reading. Up to two months of reading achievement can be lost over the break, and teachers may spend a month re-teaching concepts.

For older students, reading just four to five books can prevent the "summer slide." For students up to Grade 3, just 15 minutes of reading a day will help.

Here are some suggestions from Palliser Literacy Coach Bev Smith, as well as ideas from a brainstorming session at "A Community Conversation 2015," a Palliser stakeholder meeting in late May. For more ideas, visit www.pallisersd.ab.ca/literacy

- Be a reading role model. Let your kids see you reading!
- Talk about what you and your children are reading.
- Have children write a travel journal this summer or send a letter to someone.
- Play word games. Have a family game night weekly.
- Partner with community libraries to provide library cards and information on summer programs.
- Organize a book swap to get new books in kids' hands.
- Provide book lists with a variety of genres, levels, interests, and when possible, books that are appropriate for particular cultures. This would not be a required list. Students should have choice in what they read.
- Create summer book clubs.
- Have teachers and students share what they are reading or will be reading over the summer. Create a visual display of these and/or use book talks.
- Create a Little Free Library in the community. <http://littlefreelibrary.org/>
- Take a picture with your book on summer holidays. Share your pictures. One way to do this is through Twitter using the hashtags #whereareyoureading and #SummerReading Challenge. These could also be used by the school in the fall in a visual display.
- Don't use reading as a punishment.
- Read the book before you see the movie.

By the numbers

5.5% — The overall increase the number of students across Palliser in Grades 1-6 reading at their grade level in Spring 2015 compared to Spring 2014.

2.5% — The overall decrease between Spring 2014 and Spring 2015 in the number of students, Grades 1-6, most "at-risk" or seriously behind grade level expectation in their reading.

120 — Number of Palliser administrators and teachers who attended a Calgary conference focused on how to support vulnerable, struggling readers.

\$115,000 — Palliser investment in substitute teachers to give classroom teachers time for one-on-one reading assessments.

55 — Number of students at 18 different schools who were the focus of the Academic Wrap-Around Team; 93% showed measurable improvement following intervention.

96 — Coaching sessions with individual teachers, administrators, entire school staff, learning groups or parent communities led by the division's literacy coach this year as she helps build expertise across Palliser.

Reading is the reward

Should students be given prizes for reading? Literacy Coach Bev Smith offers a word of caution. Reading should be the reward in and of itself. Lifelong readers don't read because they will get a prize at the end of it. Incentives can backfire. Research indicates when the reward is removed, reading behaviour actually decreases unless the reward is directly tied to reading. If incentives are offered, they should be in the form of another book or visit to the book store.