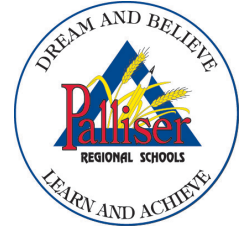


# Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

May 21, 2013



## \$81.6-million budget approved

The Board of Trustees unanimously approved a budget for 2013-2014 that projects a small surplus of \$19,706 on revenues of \$81.6 million.

The budget was based on initiatives and assumptions trustees approved at their April meeting (please refer to April Board [Highlights online](#)).

The budget was based on projected enrolments for this fall of 6,709 students Grade 1-12, and several hundred more children in early childhood learning programs.

The largest expense in the budget is salaries and benefits, at about \$65 million.

The budget includes three significant capital purchases: six school buses at \$550,000; \$30,000 for servers and equipment to meet the division's technology needs; and \$400,000 for the purchase, data conversion, implementation and staff training on new financial accounting software. The contract for the division's existing financial accounting software is coming to an end.

The budget reflects an anticipated decrease of 12.5 full-time equivalent teachers in 2013-2014, compared to 2012-2013, largely reflecting a reduction in teacher preparation time at the elementary and junior high level. Palliser has about 426 FTE teachers across the division.

The division expects to continue to meet Alberta Education's class size guidelines.

The budget includes an increased investment in Palliser's literacy focus with a second full-time literacy coach being added for 2013-2014, as well as investment in creation of more online programming options for Palliser students.

Palliser continues to waive the \$39 school fee from students in Grades 1-6. A \$49 fee for Grade 7-9 students and a \$59 fee for Grade 10-12 students will continue to be collected. The fees have not been increased for several years. A \$25 technology fee for all students is also unchanged.

Palliser's budget document can be reviewed [here](#).

The budget will be reviewed again this fall once actual student enrolment numbers are known.

## Noble Central shares response to review

The Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools

welcomed Broc Higginson, Principal of Noble Central School in Nobleford, to the meeting to share the response to a school review conducted of the school in October 2012.

Noble Central is a K-12 school in Nobleford, serving about 200 students.

Higginson said when he and his staff reviewed the data collected during the school review, they noted considerable improvement in the area of student pride. Increasing student appreciation for the school was one of Noble Central's school goals.

The review found many parents unaware of school goals. The goals are shared at school council meetings. The school plans to share school council minutes publicly and continues its work to encourage more parental involvement in school council, Higginson said. Three years ago, the school did not have a school council so that's been an area of growth.

Another area of concern raised in the school review was the condition of the school building and playground. The school features a number of levels accessible only by stairways, and the playground is not inclusive. Fundraising for a new playground is underway and a modernization of the school has been identified as a priority in Palliser's three-year capital plan.

Higginson said the staff is also focusing on math and creating greater engagement for students, in response to review data.

The review also found NCS's high school students feel there are too many disruptions during instructional time. The staff looked at what those interruptions are, and some occur because the K-12 school has different bell schedules elementary, junior and senior high, and there are an abundance of activities in the building for various grades. A review of how to address the activity level continues.

Higginson said the staff has also focused on teaching students what's acceptable behavior on social media and other online forums. The result has been quite positive with students understanding what is unacceptable online and bringing issues forward so they can be addressed.

"We're really proud of how that's been going," he said.

The review found the school has high expectations for learning, and that is reflected in a significant increase in the number of students making it to the honour roll. Higginson said students are motivated, "pushed and

supported” to achieve.

The supports include offering opportunities for students to get extra teacher help in a more structured way, with specific times for help in specific subjects.

Higginson said the school is also adding to the list of non-athletic options at the high school level. Drama proved especially popular.

The Board thanked Higginson for his presentation.

## **PBHS, Arrowwood school review data shared with Board**

The Board welcomed Director of Learning Dan Ryder to present data collected at the review of Picture Butte High School, conducted in March.

The review included surveys of stakeholder groups, as well as focus group meetings with students, staff and parents. Individual teachers were interviewed as well.

The review found the school’s strengths include its caring climate, strong athletics program, high academic performance and high expectations for learning.

Areas of improvement include a sense that the athletics program may be at the expense of other non-athletic programs, instruction that may not meet the needs of all learners, and communication with staff and parents.

Ryder said parents expressed feeling welcome at the school, and students said they felt safe there. That is noteworthy considering the school had been under construction for two years. The school celebrated the completion of its modernization in early May.

Ryder said the data collected during the school review will be presented to the staff in a workshop setting so they can begin to review the data and determine how to best respond.

Overall the school was found to be effective or very effective by the vast majority of parents, teachers, support staff and students.

Ryder next shared data collected during the school review of Arrowwood Community School April 15, 2013. The review had special guest observers from Upper Canada School Division in Ontario. Representatives from the school division in southern Ontario had expressed an interest in Palliser’s school review process.

Arrowwood Community School serves students from Grade 1-9. The school is also home to a privately run kindergarten. The kindergarten staff accepted an invitation to participate in the review process, and the resulting report will be shared with the society that operates this early childhood program.

Ryder said surveys, focus groups and observations at the school revealed the school’s strengths include its encouraging learning environment that expects and supports success for all and its welcoming, family

atmosphere and embrace of cultural diversity.

Areas of improvement identified through the review include more variety in gym activities and playground improvements. Normally the review process identifies three areas of improvement, but in Arrowwood Community School’s case, Ryder said, many participants said nothing could be improved.

“They have deep satisfaction in the school,” Ryder said. “They are happy to have such an excellent facility.”

The school was vandalized in April 2012, and the resulting fire forced closure of the building for several months. The students and staff celebrated a reopening of their restored building in January 2013.

Ryder said although Arrowwood is a small school, it offers a diverse range of programming options to students, including drama, music, foods, cosmetology, Scratch animation and mechanics.

The overall rating of the school by staff, students and parents is very effective or effective.

Chair Don Zech thanked Ryder for his presentations.

## **Literacy coach drives home importance of reading skills**

Palliser’s trustees were treated to a small taste of the uncomfortable feeling of not understanding written materials, as Literacy Coach Connie Adserballe opened her presentation in a unique way.

Trustees and administrators were presented random pieces of printed material and asked to review the words and pictures and then prepare to offer a summary.

As trustees looked quizzically at their assignment, Adserballe explained the depth of the literacy problem in Canada.

According to Statistics Canada, 40 per cent of adults in Canada struggle with language, literacy and numeracy. They may not have the basic literacy skills to read the instructions on a Tylenol bottle. Adserballe said that number reflects the average Canadian citizen, not new immigrants. Research also says every one per cent increase in literacy scores boosts national income by \$32 billion.

An Alberta Education survey of 278 teachers found 98 per cent of teachers noticed struggling readers in their classrooms, and 48 per cent said they felt they lacked the knowledge to help those students.

“Our goal is to help teachers help students at all levels,” Adserballe said. “We need all teachers to be teachers of literacy.”

That’s in contrast to a traditional approach that considers literacy the focus of teachers of kindergarten through Grade 3 only. Instead, students need supports well beyond Grade 3 as they continue to master new literacy skills and build comprehension.

“Teacher expertise matters,” Adserballe said. “We see that over and over in the research. It’s not going to be a program. It’s not going to be more support staff. It’s going to be effective, well trained teachers.”

Those teachers will need time for reading and writing in the classroom and they need to assess each student’s skill level and tailor instruction to the student’s needs, she said.

Palliser has adopted the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, a standardized reading assessment that can be used from kindergarten through Grade 8. The assessment takes about 40 to 45 minutes per student, as the teacher listens to the individual student read and records specifically the errors, omissions and substitutions the student makes.

Assessments are done early in the school year and then again in the spring, when there are still several weeks of school during which the teacher can adjust their instruction to meet the student’s needs.

Adserballe said she initially thought it would take three years for Palliser to train teachers on the assessment tool, but after one year, all but three schools have completed training.

“We’re really proud of how much we’ve done in a short time,” she said.

She said the Fountas and Pinnell resources are an industry standard, in part because the system includes a comprehension conversation that accompanies the reading. That conversation will reveal whether students are merely decoding words (sounding them out) or understanding them.

Through the assessment, the teacher can determine what level the student is reading at, with the scale following the alphabet from A to Z. At level Z, the student is reading independently and would be able to read and comprehend *The Hobbit*, for example.

Adserballe said the heart of Palliser’s balanced literacy program is the process of teachers that begins with them modelling reading strategies for students and gradually moving students to independent reading.

Adserballe shared the results of a summer reading project she and Director of Learning Donna Dalby organized last spring. Grade 3 students at Huntsville School, the majority of whom are learning English as a second language, were given the opportunity to select books to take home over the summer. The students were given 10 books in June, their reading level was assessed at that time, and then assessed again in September. All the students maintained or improved their reading skill level over the summer. A control group of students at another school, who weren’t encouraged to read all summer, were similarly tested and only 21 per cent maintained or improved over the summer.

Palliser’s literacy program had been funded through Alberta Initiative for School Improvement funding. That program was eliminated in this spring’s provincial budget.

The division will continue and expand the literacy focus within existing funding, adding a second full-time literacy coach for next year.

## **Scholarship to support Palliser students with passion for arts**

Calgary Christian Secondary School has created a special scholarship to encourage students across Palliser who have a passion for the arts.

The Marit McKenzie Memorial Scholarship is named for a graduate of Calgary Christian who passed away suddenly in January 2013 as a result of a pulmonary embolism.

The school held a staff-student hockey game in March in hopes of raising \$1,000 for the scholarship. The event was a huge success and raised about \$7,000.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin told the Board the McKenzie family supports opening the scholarship to Grade 12 applicants from across Palliser who will be attending a post-secondary institution in the arts.

Principal Jason Kupery has indicated the school plans to fundraise for the scholarship annually.

Marit was a talented artist, who also had a passion for raising awareness of the need for organ donors. The fundraiser also benefited the David Foster Foundation, which encourages organ donation. Marit’s own organs were donated, giving the gift of life to a number of others in need.

## **Calendar approval process continues**

The Board continued to review school calendars. For the 2013-2014 school year, calendars were approved for County Central High School, Milo School, R.I. Baker Middle School, Jennie Emery Elementary School, Kate Andrews High School, Hutterian Colony schools, Champion School and Vulcan Prairieview Elementary School. Calendars for both the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years were approved for John Davidson School, Coalhurst High School and Calgary Christian Secondary School.

## **Board prepares for trustee elections**

The Board passed four motions in preparation for school board elections which will be held Oct. 21, 2013.

Joanne Siljak, Palliser’s corporate secretary, was appointed returning officer for Palliser. A bylaw was passed so school board ballots can occur alongside municipal ballots. The Board passed a motion to enter agreements with municipalities to conduct joint elections where possible, and to conduct advance polls on the same dates

as the local municipality's advance polls.

Nomination packages are available at Palliser's Central Office in Lethbridge.

## **Staff recognition evening June 17**

Palliser's Board will honour staff who've been nominated for and/or received special recognition for their efforts this past year.

This year's staff recognition dinner will be held June 17th in Lethbridge in honour of:

- Danielle Groeneveld, Calgary Christian Elementary School, nominated for the Edwin Parr Award
- Natasha Quinton, Coalhurst High School, Palliser's nominee for the Edwin Parr Award in Zone 6
- Jennifer McInnes, Heritage Christian Academy, nominated for the Edwin Parr Award
- Stephen Ward, Heritage Christian Academy, nominated for the Edwin Parr Award
- Justin Harper, Noble Central School, nominated for the Edwin Parr Award
- Dawn Ronne, Coalhurst Elementary School principal, a semi-finalist for the Excellence in Teaching Award
- Terry Hanna, Kate Andrews High School teacher, inducted to the Lethbridge Sports Hall of Fame
- Sherrie Nickel, Huntsville School Principal, recipient of a Council of School Leadership Distinguished

Leadership Award

- Jodie Gateman, County Central High School parent council chair, recipient of the Alberta School Councils' Association Parent of Distinction Award
- Ken Van Cleave, Sunnyside School teacher, recipient of the 2012 APEGA Teacher Award
- Kathy Perley, support staff at Champion School, recipient of the Diamond Jubilee Medal
- Jadan Barthel, Calgary Christian Secondary School teacher, nominated Prime Minister's Award of Excellence
- Hank Beeksma, Calgary Christian Secondary School teacher, nominated Prime Minister's Award of Excellence
- Isabelle Plomp, Early Intervention Specialist, a finalist in Alberta Human Services' Early Learning and Child Care Professional Awards of Excellence
- Superintendent Kevin Gietz was nominated for both a Solution Tree (re)defining Excellence Awards and an Alberta Congress Board Distinguished Workplace Leader Award.
- County Central High School in Vulcan was nominated for a Betty Grigg Inclusive Education Award from the Lethbridge Association for Community Living.

**Next meeting June 18, 2013 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge**