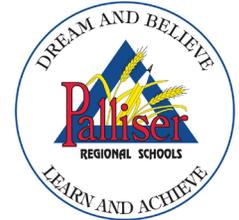


Highlights of the Board of Trustees meeting



Tuesday, January 17, 2011

Aloha, from the Vice-Chair

The Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools held its regular meeting at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge Jan. 17. Vice-Chair Colleen Deitz joined the meeting by Skype from a vacation resort in Maui. During the meeting, the temperature in Lethbridge hovered around -17 C with snow. Temperature in Kaanapali that day was reportedly 25 C and mainly sunny.



COLLEEN DEITZ

Board deliberations on 2012-13 school calendar continue

Associate Superintendent (Educational Services) Dale Backlin presented five revised calendar options based on the feedback heard at the December Board meeting. At that time, trustees shared feedback they gathered from their school communities about earlier drafts.

The new five draft calendars represented common themes raised in that feedback with one being a divisional calendar; one for the alternative, faith-based programs in Calgary; one offering modified Fridays in which students attend a full day Friday but students and staff have eight Fridays off through the year; one for Hutterian colony schools; and finally, one for Palliser's Low German Mennonite Schools. Both the Hutterian and LGM school calendars acknowledge religious holidays unique to those schools.

The latest drafts included four division-wide professional development days to be held in Vulcan, to encourage collaboration across Palliser, as well as time for site-based PD. The drafts show PD days occurring on Fridays.

The calendars and related instructional hours leave time for at least a 45-minute lunch and presume a school start time of no earlier than 8:30 a.m. The calendars include time for at least one 15-minute recess in the morning for elementary students. Many Palliser elementary schools also have recess in the afternoon, while others schedule physical education class in the afternoon and forgo a second recess, Backlin said. The

instructional hours also leave a minimum of two minutes for a break between classes for older students.

All the proposed calendars exceed Palliser's mandated instructional hour requirements of 480 hours for kindergarten; 960 hours for grades 1 to 9; and 1,010 hours for grades 10 to 12. The calendars all feature total operational days below the mandated maximum of 200.

Following a discussion of the latest drafts, the Board directed administration to develop a sixth option, providing a four-day school week for those schools that already have this calendar, Champion School, Brant Christian School and Milo School. For schools with a long tradition of the four-day school week, this option seems to have strong support in the communities. However, the four-day week option is being grandfathered for schools that already have this tradition, and will not be an option open to the rest of Palliser's schools.

The six drafts will be presented to Palliser administrators and school councils in the coming weeks in hopes they can choose the option that works best for their communities. The Board hopes to approve school calendars at its meeting Feb. 14. Any school council seeking a deviation from the six draft options provided will be given an opportunity to make a presentation to the board at the Feb. 14 meeting. Anyone wishing to make a presentation to the Board should contact Corporate Secretary Linda Poirier at 403-328-4111 or linda.poirier@pallisersd.ab.ca no later than end of business Feb. 8.

The discussion of the calendars and consideration of start times, end times and the provision of breaks between classes and through the day was prompted by a Board motion last year that called for a research-based review of the organization of the school day and school year. Trustees discussed the desire to reduce the number of different calendars across the division to facilitate collaborative efforts in Palliser, including the offering of courses by videoconferencing between schools. Trustees also expressed concern about comments students were providing through the school review process about the length of lunch hours and recesses.

The Board hopes to vote on school calendars in February to ensure it provides the required six-month's notice to the Alberta Teachers' Association.

The Board thanked the administration for the work done on the calendars.

School goals summary presented

Director of Learning Dan Ryder gave the Board an overview of school goals and the school goals process for 2011-12. Each fall, Superintendent Kevin Gietz travels the schools across Palliser to meet with school administrators to discuss the goals for the year and how they reflect the previous year's results. These meetings also review the strategies the school staff intend to use to advance their goals.

The summary of goals is a quick way to see which schools have identified similar goals and priorities, such as improved literacy skills, a focus on assessment for learning or a focus on safety and respect. The summary will be shared with administrators from across Palliser at an upcoming Administrators' Association meeting. The principals and vice-principals can then pair up with their colleagues whose schools share similar goals to discuss strategies and share best practices.

The Superintendent then goes back to the schools in late spring to review what measurable progress has been made at each school toward its goals.

Huntsville School review results presented

Director of Learning Dan Ryder also led the Board through the results of the school review of Huntsville School in Iron Springs. The review was conducted Nov. 20, 2011, by Central Office administrators and two principals of other Palliser schools.

Huntsville School offers early childhood services through Grade 9. The school has a large Low German Mennonite population.

As part of the review, parents, staff and students were surveyed, focus groups were held with students and parents, and observations were conducted in the classrooms.

What emerged was a picture of a school and staff "firing on all cylinders," said Ryder. Strengths include a caring staff and the creation of a caring, respectful atmosphere that supports learning and engagement. Areas of improvement include the provision of sports programming, more library resources and building upgrades.

Ryder said the review results found a focus on academics that is also reflected in the school's excellent results in the Accountability Pillar.

"This is the kind of stuff that books can be written

about," Ryder told trustees.

The school has created "family" groups in school, with students from various grades merged into groups that do activities together throughout the year. When students work on language arts, a student learning English at a Grade 2 level will join the Grade 2 class to ensure the student is learning the skills he/she needs. The other students are completely comfortable having older or younger students join them.

Although Huntsville is a small school just over 100 students, the school offers a band program. Students travel by bus to Picture Butte High School for band instruction. The program is well received and helps encourage the transition of junior high students to high school.

The trustees thanked Ryder for his report and commended the staff at Huntsville for the work they are doing at the school.

Stakeholder meetings on the agenda this spring

The Board discussed the importance of holding stakeholder meetings to give parents and others an opportunity to meet with trustees to discuss priorities and issues. Trustees suggested such meetings would be most productive after the provincial budget announcement in early February.

The Trustees said they'll be better positioned to discuss the timing of stakeholder meetings at its next regular meeting, Feb. 14.

Master's society serves notice

The society at Master's Academy and College has served notice of termination of the master agreement with Palliser Regional Schools. According to the terms of the master agreement, Master's Academy and College will cease to be programs within Palliser and will return to private school status, effective July 1, 2013. The Board directed administration to work with staff at Master's through this transition period.

Next meeting

The Board will hold its next regular meeting at 10 a.m., Feb. 14 at Calgary Christian Elementary School, 2839 49 Street SW, Calgary. This is one of four meetings this school year that will be held in schools.

Next meeting 10 am. In Calgary Christian Elementary.