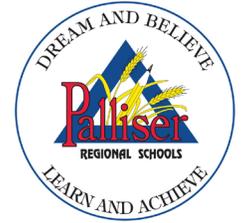


# Highlights of the Board of Trustees meeting



Tuesday, November 15, 2011

The Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools held its regular monthly meeting at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge on November 15.

## Restored education funding will add teachers to classrooms

The Board received a report from administration on how it proposes Palliser invest its share of the \$107 million of education funding being restored by the provincial government.

Palliser's share of this new money is \$1.19 million. About \$270,000 of that is enveloped funding that must be used within Palliser's AISI projects (Alberta Initiative for School Improvement). The other \$920,000 can be spent in the classroom.

In developing the plan, Palliser administrators looked for ways to best support student learning, analysed its class sizes across the division and identified "hot spots" or areas where class size was higher than provincial guidelines. Administrators were asked to provide input from their staff on what they considered priority areas for the spending. As well, trustees offered their ideas and they met with as many school councils as possible to collect parent feedback on how best to use the new funding.

Out of this input, the administration proposed a plan that will add nearly 18 full-time equivalent teachers to Palliser staff over the coming months. Of that number, 5.15 FTEs will be added to reduce class sizes from kindergarten through Grade 6, based on identification of "hot spots" in 10 of Palliser's schools. Another 12.5 FTE teachers will be added by increasing the allotment of teachers at every school across the division by 3.5 per cent of their existing FTE. This will give administrators at each school the opportunity to use the new teacher allotment in a way that best meets student needs. In some schools, that might mean creating collaboration time for teachers to work toward school goals. In others, it might create flexibility to focus resources in core courses.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said although the additional resources are welcome, he acknowledged that there will be challenges to adding staff in the middle of the school year. In high schools, for example, it may be best to leave staffing as is until the semester break to avoid a

disruption in the weeks before diploma exams. Additional staff can be added to elementary and middle schools sooner.

The additional funding in AISI will enable Palliser to add time to the existing part-time literacy coach who is working with teachers across the division. The division will also add an assessment for learning coach to work with teachers in the division. That assessment specialist position was cut at the end of the 2010-2011 school year when the AISI budget was reduced. The partially restored funding to AISI enables Palliser to continue its focus on assessment for learning as a key to improving student learning.

The Superintendent and Trustees also want to reintroduce the Board's Innovative Projects Initiative that has not been part of the budget since the 2008-2009 school year. These small grants were provided to support teachers in launching new projects in their classrooms. Some of those projects carry on to this day from the 2008-2009 school year. These projects would also support Palliser's focus on assessment for learning, literacy and numeracy.

The Board agreed with the proposal directions and priorities and directed administration to incorporate these changes to the 2011-2012 budget which will be presented to the Board at a special meeting Nov. 29.

## Work begins on school calendars

The trustees began work on its 2012-13 school calendars by hearing a presentation from Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin regarding existing research about how the organization of the school day can affect student learning.

This work was set into motion by a March 15, 2011 Board resolution which called for a "comprehensive study of the organization of times of school operations for implementation in September of 2012."

The Board directed that this review of school calendars and organization of the school day be research based; that school start and end times be considered, including the impact on busing students; that length of time between classes, recess and lunch breaks be considered; and that the school time table and calendars

be organized to promote programming options, including videoconferencing between school sites.

During school reviews the past two years, students participating in focus group discussions have raised the issue of shortened lunch hours and the lack of time for breaks or to get to classes on time.

In this first phase of the work, the Board has established its recommendations for calendars and organization of the school day, which can be shared with Palliser administration, staff, students, parents and the public. The trustees are collecting feedback on these drafts as they consider next year's calendar.

The Board discussed research that supports students' need for time to eat lunch, play/socialize and transition between classes during the school day, and trustees recommended that elementary children should have two 15-minute recesses a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. They also recommended that lunch hours should be at least 45 minutes in length. That is not the case at all Palliser schools today.

The Board also recommended school should start no earlier than 8:45 a.m. and end no later than 3:35 p.m. with some flexibility to accommodate busing.

Four draft calendars for 2012-13 have been created to help advance this discussion. One draft includes the option of a full day of instruction on Friday or a 2:30 p.m. dismissal. Another offers an opportunity for some Fridays off for staff and students. The drafts move professional development days to Fridays, rather than early in the week as is the practice now. One draft incorporates religious holidays unique to our Hutterian colonies and Low German Mennonite schools. Another was established to accommodate Christian teacher convention dates unique to our Calgary Christian alternative program schools.

By laying common ground rules for calendars and school day organization, the Board hopes to add more predictability to school calendars for parents and staff by introducing calendars in three-year cycles.

This year, there are about 20 different calendars across Palliser.

Trustees will be presenting the draft calendars and their recommendations to school councils and to their communities in coming weeks and collecting feedback for further discussion in the new year. To discuss the calendar and school day, the public is invited to contact their trustee. Their contact information can be found on the Palliser website at:

[www.pallisersd.ab.ca/Governance.php](http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/Governance.php)

## **A sample from the trustees' roundtable**

If you ever wonder what the life of a public school

board trustee is like, pop by Palliser Regional Schools' board meeting and listen to the Trustees' Roundtable.

A regular feature on the agenda, this part of the meeting sees each of the trustees give a brief summary of their school activities for the previous month.

At Tuesday's meeting, trustees talked about a diverse range of activities. Some joined Palliser staff at threat assessment training; some attended an Alberta School Boards' Association conference on legal matters affecting schools; others took in the Palliser Leadership Workshop on differentiated instruction that saw Palliser staff leading all the workshop sessions.

In addition, the trustees attended school council meetings, various Palliser committees, an array of Remembrance Day ceremonies at schools in Palliser and meetings of both the Alberta School Boards Association and Public School Boards' Association of Alberta.

## **Thank you to Colleen Deitz**

The Board thanked Palliser Vice-Chair Colleen Deitz for the outstanding job she's done over the past three years as chair of Zone 6 of the Alberta School Boards Association, representing 10 school jurisdictions in southern Alberta.

## **Committee renamed**

Trustee Joe Watson, who chairs the communications committee, brought forward a recommendation to rename the committee as a "Public Engagement Committee." The committee discussed the name change at its first meeting Oct. 20. Watson said the new name better reflects the work the committee is doing and Palliser's goals. The board supported the name change by resolution.

## **Meetings set**

The Board set aside the following dates for a number of committee meetings and other commitments:

- A special meeting of the Board will be held at 9 a.m. Nov. 29 for presentation of the final 2011-2012 budget and Palliser's combined Annual Education Results Report for 2010-2011 and the Three-Year Education Plan 2011-2014. A draft of the report was presented at the regular board meeting but it was not ready for final approval.
- The Board-Teacher Advisory Committee, made up of trustees and representatives of Palliser Alberta Teachers' Association Local No. 19 representatives, will hold the first of two meetings this year following the Dec. 20 board meeting.
- The Audit Committee will meet for the first time this year at 9 a.m. Nov. 24.
- The Public Engagement Committee (formerly the

Communications Committee), made up of three trustees, some Central Office staff and interested principals will meet at 1:30 p.m., Dec. 13.

- The Facilities Committee, made up of three trustees and representation from Central Office and school administration, will meet at 9 a.m. Dec. 13.

- The Wall of Fame Committee will hold its first meeting of the year at 2:30 p.m., Nov. 30.

**Next regular meeting: Dec. 20, 2011**