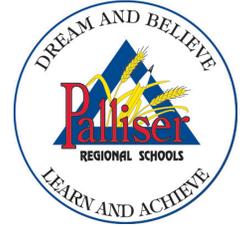


Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

August 20, 2013



Summer break over for trustees

The Board of Trustees held their first regular meeting of the new school year on Tuesday, Aug. 20 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge. Trustees commented on a number of summer activities involving Palliser schools, including participation by the County Central High School bands in the Town of Vulcan Centennial celebrations, efforts by Maintenance Services staff to prepare the grounds at both Vulcan schools for use during the community celebration; and an entry to Picture Butte Jamboree Days parade from Dorothy Dalglish and Picture Butte High schools.

A new playground was built Aug. 9-10 at Dorothy Dalglish School in Picture Butte, thanks to an outstanding parent-led fundraising effort and volunteers. Trustee Joe Watson, who was among volunteers building the playground, tipped his hat to a team of 17 people from Atco Gas who volunteered at the build on the first day, and a team of Picture Butte Volunteer Firefighters who helped all day on the second day of the build.

Flood fallout still being assessed

Superintendent Kevin Gietz thanked trustees and Palliser staff for their efforts in June to deal with flooding that closed Calgary and Brant schools and led to hardships for a number of staff and Palliser families in High River and Calgary.

"I want to thank everyone for their time and caring," Gietz said. "The flood affected probably half of your division."

The flood devastated parts of the Siksika First Nation and washed out a key bridge between Siksika and Arrowwood. Brant Christian School serves a number of families who live in High River and it remains to be seen how the flood will impact enrolment in these areas.

Concern about fate of lease funding

The Board received a letter from Education Minister Jeff Johnson notifying Palliser of a significant reduction to lease funding for privately owned school facilities at Brant Christian School, Heritage Christian School and Menno Simons Christian School.

The letter refers to "financial constraints in Budget

2013" and describes the 2013-2014 lease support as "one-time funding."

The three schools are receiving about 27 per cent less funding for their facilities this year compared to last.

Several other Palliser schools that operate from privately owned facilities —Calgary Christian Elementary and Secondary Schools, Master's Academy and College, Glenmore Christian Academy and Trinity Christian School —have never received lease funding.

Dale Backlin, Associate Superintendent (Education Services), says overall in the province, about half of the schools in a similar circumstance, operating from privately owned facilities, do not receive any lease funding from Alberta Education. Palliser's Board of Trustees has lobbied several successive Education Ministers and Alberta Education officials to resolve this inequity.

At Heritage Christian Academy, for example, the reduction in funding is a \$160,000 blow, announced in August, months after they completed their budgets.

Year-long effort focused on literacy

Communications Officer Dawn Sugimoto updated the Board on its participation in a pilot project offered through the Alberta School Boards Association. Palliser is one of eight boards across Alberta in the pilot program, with each school jurisdiction working with a professional marketing firm over the course of the year to develop experience and skills in comprehensive marketing and communications planning.

The boards will be working with an Edmonton marketing firm, called Incite. The focus on Palliser's effort will be a communications plan to support the division's literacy project.

Through the literacy project, Palliser will ensure that all students have the literacy skills they need for success in school and in life. The literacy effort meshes with Palliser's ongoing emphasis on assessment for learning, as each student from Grades 1 to 8 will be assessed to determine their reading skills in early fall. The teacher can then tailor instruction to the individual student's needs. A second assessment in the spring will demonstrate how the student's skills have improved, and give the teacher an opportunity to further hone instruction to ensure student

progress.

The plan will see Palliser staff lead a two-day workshop for administrators to further develop their skills in literacy instruction. Resources will be developed on Palliser's new website to help parents encourage their children's reading and writing skills.

Sugimoto said the plan will also see the creation of a Palliser News Bureau, to give students an outlet for their writing. Students from middle and high school will be able to apply to be part of the news bureau if they commit to sharing at least two stories over the course of the school year that showcase something or someone at their school. Their work, which could be written, video or photo storytelling, can be shared on Palliser's website and/or social media.

The division's literacy focus is reflected in Palliser's theme for the 2013-2014 school year: "Literacy: Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader."

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said a student's best chance of success, regardless what ambitions or dreams the student might have, is to be literate.

"They come out with the skills that give them a better chance of success in the world," Gietz said.

Review team visit the caring community of Dorothy Dalglish School

The Board welcomed Co-ordinating Principal of School Development, Cynthia Gietz, to the meeting to share the results of a review of Dorothy Dalglish School in Picture Butte. A review team of Central Office staff, two visiting principals from other Palliser schools, and several members of Palliser's lead teacher cohort, visited the elementary school on April 30 to meet with staff, students and parents and observe classroom instruction.

The review also collects data through surveys, with an overall response rate of 82 per cent among students, teachers, support staff and parents.

Gietz said the review found the school's strengths include a caring staff, an inclusive and supportive learning environment, and high expectations for all students. She said it's clear the students love their school.

Areas of growth include more parental involvement, a consistent approach to discipline, and communication with parents and support staff.

Overall, there was high agreement among key stakeholder groups that the school is effective or very effective.

New website to launch soon

Palliser Regional Schools is days away from launching a new division website which will feature responsive design, which adjusts content for optimal viewing on mobile

phones, tablets or computers, as well as up-to-the-minute status reports on Palliser buses. An iPhone app to give parents access to busing information, including whether the bus is running late or has been cancelled, is expected later this year.

Palliser schools, except Glenmore Christian Academy and Master's Academy and College, are also developing new websites which feature an eTeacher section through which teachers can communicate with students and parents.

The new website provider, Box Clever, was selected following presentations last fall and a review by a committee composed of Central Office staff, a principal and a parent.

Admin team set for the year

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Kevin Garinger led the Board through a number of changes in the administrative team in Palliser. One key change in Central Office was the retirement of Director of Learning Donna Dalby. The position was not replaced, with her responsibilities redistributed to the three remaining directors. A list of administrative changes can be found on Palliser's website, along with an organizational chart.

Board invests in development of international students program

The Board approved a request for \$30,000 to support the development of a program for international students. Palliser has a small number of international students, but the Board identified this as an area for growth.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin said a team from Palliser began investigating international student programs last year.

Backlin said an Alberta education is in demand around the world. For Palliser students, an international student program provides an opportunity to enrich their cultural and international understanding.

To build a successful international student program, Palliser will need to work on its administrative procedures, create online and print resources, build a home stay program and develop relationships with international agents.

Think of Us on the Bus safety campaign returns for second year

The Board was updated on the plan for the second annual Think of Us on the Bus campaign, a multi-pronged campaign of awareness, education and enforcement focused on school bus safety.

The four-week campaign includes a print and radio

advertising campaign, assemblies to talk to students about bus safety and lead them through a bus evacuation drill, and a week-long enforcement blitz supported by Commercial Vehicle Enforcement, RCMP and Alberta Sheriffs.

Communications Officer Dawn Sugimoto, who is organizing the campaign with Transportation Services Supervisor David Shaw, said one of the goals of last year's effort was to improve data collection about infractions involving other motorists and Palliser buses. Palliser created a new incident report form, in consultation with RCMP, and encouraged bus drivers to file a report on every incident, even if they lacked the level of detail needed to warrant enforcement action.

The result was that 77 incident reports were filed in 2012-2013, and 70 of those involved motorists passing the school bus when it was stopped with its red lights flashing for the loading or unloading of students. That amounts to about one report every three school days.

When a close call happens, the bus driver's attention is focused on the safety of the student, and they often can't capture a complete vehicle description or licence plate number. This year, Sugimoto said, the drivers will have a new tool to assist them. Exterior cameras are being installed on five Palliser buses this year. Not only does the system capture video, it documents the bus location, speed and status of the bus's amber and red lights. The system supports the culture of accountability for Palliser's professional drivers and all motorists.

This year's campaign received \$5,000 from the County of Lethbridge.

Sugimoto said Palliser has shared its designs with Westwind School Division to help that jurisdiction start its own Think of Us on the Bus campaign this fall.

Palliser pursues dual credit programs with Lethbridge College

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard updated the Board on two promising dual credit initiatives.

Palliser has reached an agreement with Lethbridge College to provide the division's high school students an opportunity to obtain a Health Care Aide Certificate upon completion of high school. The pilot program will

be offered to schools in the south with the possibility of expanding to Calgary next year.

In their Grade 11 and 12 years, students can enroll in the health care aid program. Over two years, the students learn about legislation, care and safety and will complete two practicums.

Rivard said the college is also initiating an application for funding of a dual credit program for welding. Palliser was one of several jurisdictions taking part in initial meetings about the program. He said local employers were quite supportive of the proposal and were interested in providing placements.

Regional service co-ordinator's office moves into Palliser Centre

Palliser Education Centre welcomed back a familiar face. Pat Rivard, Associate Superintendent (Education Services), reported that Margaret Vennard has accepted the position as regional director of Southwest Alberta Regional Collaborative Service Delivery, working to co-ordinate specialized services provided through Student Health Partnerships and Children and Youth with Complex Needs on behalf of Palliser and other school jurisdictions in the region. Vennard's office will be in Palliser Education Centre. Vennard spent the past 15 years as executive director of Chinook Regional Foundation for Career Transitions, which had been housed in Palliser Education Centre until one year ago.

Principal of new school begins work on non-traditional delivery of programming

The new principal of Palliser's still unnamed cyber school has begun work on a short-term plan for online delivery of courses. Alison Hancox, who led a number of online initiatives for Edmonton Public Schools, will work with a committee of Palliser high school principals as the initiative develops. Her office will be located in County Central High School in Vulcan, but the program will support students across Palliser.

Next meeting Sept. 17

The next regular meeting of the Board of Trustees is scheduled for 9 a.m., Sept. 17 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge.