

Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

June 10, 2014



Final meeting of this school year held

The Board of Trustees held its last regularly scheduled meeting of the year at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge on June 10. The board does not meet in July and resumes business for the 2014-15 school year in late August.

The next regular meeting of the Board of Trustees is scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 26 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge.

MLA visits Palliser for info sharing

The Board welcomed Ian Donovan, MLA for the Little Bow riding, to the meeting for an information sharing session. Chair Colleen Deitz shared a package of printed information with the MLA, including a report on the Palliser's [literacy program](#), latest [Accountability Pillar](#) report, and a [summary](#) of Palliser's most recent annual report.

The Board discussed a number of current issues, including the loss of Glenmore Christian Academy which reverts to private school status for the 2014-2015 school year and the lack of transition funding to help the division adjust to the resulting loss of about nine per cent of its students; and the loss of the diesel subsidy which helped Alberta school divisions cover the cost of busing. That grant was eliminated in Spring 2013 with an impact of more than \$300,000 a year on Palliser operations.

Dietz shared with Donovan that Alberta Education has helped Palliser on the Glenmore Christian matter by giving the division an exception to the school closure requirements which would have forced Palliser to hold school closure hearings for GCA. That process would have created confusion for parents in Calgary because the school is remaining open but just won't be part of Palliser in the fall.

The MLA and trustees also discussed the recent controversy over gay-straight student alliances and questions about discrimination at faith-based schools. The Board is in the process of revisiting its master agreements with societies at its faith-based schools to ensure all documents adhere to the letter and spirit of employment and rights legislation.

Donovan encouraged Palliser to continue sharing information about the division with him so he can

effectively advocate on Palliser's behalf.

Coalhurst High School review highlights a true success story

A school review of Coalhurst High School reveals a dramatic turnaround at the school from the days when the community feared for the future of the program which is located so close to Lethbridge.

Cynthia Gietz, co-ordinating principal of school development, said the data collected from students, staff and parents at the high school was overwhelmingly positive. For the first time in a Palliser school review students said they want to do well in school because they don't want to disappoint their teachers. The climate, she said, is trusting and supportive.

A review team of Palliser Central Office and school administrators visited the school on March 12, 2014 where they observed teachers in the classroom, held focus group discussions with support staff, parents and students, and conducted one-on-one interviews with teachers. Supplementing the day's observations are surveys of parents, staff and students.

Coalhurst High School serves about 150 students from Grades 7 through 12.

The review found key areas of strength are: teachers know their students and care about them and their learning; the school has a family-like atmosphere and high degree of trust; and teachers are welcoming and approachable by students and parents. Areas for refinement include the condition of the facilities, including the sports field; a desire for more non-athletic and fine arts opportunities such as choir and second language instruction; and more differentiated instruction for gifted students and those who are struggling.

Vice-Chair Don Zech, who has represented the community of Coalhurst for more than a dozen years, encouraged his fellow trustees to visit the school to get a first-hand view of its positive atmosphere. He said as a first-time trustee in 2001, he remembers people talking about how the school would fail once a new high school opened in West Lethbridge, just minutes away. Instead, Coalhurst High continues to provide outstanding results for students and a surprising diversity of options for a school of its size, such as sports medicine, music, multimedia and

trades training.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said he recently had a conversation with a parent of a student at CHS who talked about the positive difference the school has made to his child.

Board revisits off-site meeting schedule

Trustees tentatively set meeting dates for the 2014-2015 school year that will be finalized during the board's annual organizational meeting in October. The tentative dates are: Aug. 26; Sept. 16; Oct. 21; Nov. 18; Dec. 9; Jan. 13; Feb. 10; March 10; April 14; May 12; and June 9. These regular meetings will be held at Palliser Central Office in Lethbridge, a departure from recent practice of holding four board meetings a year in schools.

Board Chair Colleen Deitz said holding meetings in schools presents some logistical challenges and can be a significant disruption to school staff and students. Trustees discussed holding business meetings in Lethbridge but setting aside other dates to go to schools in order to meet with students, staff and community members. As it is, it's difficult to meet with stakeholders during meetings held in schools because the board has a full agenda to address.

Board expresses disappointment with cover of ATA publication

Trustees passed a motion to write a letter to the Alberta Teachers' Association to express concern over the appropriateness of the latest issue of the ATA News, a publication distributed to teachers through schools.

The edition focused on the Task Force on Teaching Excellence and the cover featured large colourful letters "WTF." The letters on the cover referred to "What the Task Force" means to teachers, but the letters have another commonly known vulgar connotation.

Trustees said they felt it was inappropriate to use "WTF" on a publication distributed to schools and seen by students.

Clarification on support staffing for fall

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger updated trustees on staffing for the fall. He said principals have been provided their full-time equivalent teacher allocations based on projected student enrolment, but staffing allocations for support staff, including educational assistants, had still not been shared with principals. That information was expected to be shared later in the week.

Some trustees said they were hearing rumours in their communities about support staffing decisions, but those rumours should be dispelled because the allocations had not yet been finalized.

Palliser to move to more efficient processing of support staff payroll

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger shared with the board a plan to move all Palliser support staff to a monthly payroll with mid-month advance. Currently support staff are paid bi-weekly. The change will align the support staff pay periods with those of teachers who are already paid monthly.

The change would take effect Jan. 1, 2015, with support staff receiving six months of notice to ensure their payment schedules and automatic bank withdrawals are adjusted as needed.

The move to a monthly support staff payroll with a mid-month advance of 45 per cent of net pay was part of the new collective agreement reached between Palliser and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which represents school caretakers. The change will improve efficiency in the payroll department, and is part of the move to "Lean" processes as recommended in a review of Central Office conducted early in 2014.

Job titles in schools are changing

Several job titles in Palliser are changing to better reflect the work and duties of the employees. School secretaries will now be known as administrative assistants; learning assistants will be education assistants; the positions of library clerk and library tech will now simply be known as librarians; and preschool educators will be called early learning educators.

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger said the new job titles and associated job descriptions were recommended by a committee that included Central Office staff and school administrators with input from school support staff. As part of the committee's work, the job descriptions of school support staff have been aligned with the practice competencies expected of school principals. This is a deepening of the alignment that begins with the board and superintendent's roles and extends through Central Office staff.

A new role for Palliser's outreach schools

Palliser's outreach schools in Picture Butte, Coaldale and Vulcan will have a change in administration and role as they become part of the Palliser Beyond Borders initiative. [Palliser Beyond Borders](#) is a new program offering online courses to high school students.

Teachers at the three outreach schools will have 75 per cent of their time devoted to outreach/Palliser Beyond Borders and 25 per cent with their local high school.

Previously, the outreach schools were led by the principal of the nearest high school. Under the new model,



the principal of the outreach will be Alison Hancox, who oversees the Beyond Borders initiative.

The outreach school teaching staff will teach students at the outreach as well as those accessing courses online. The close working relationship between the high schools and the outreach programs will be vital to meeting the needs of high school students, Superintendent Kevin Gietz said.

Palliser Beyond Borders has some staff working this summer to prepare more online courses. Nearly 100 courses are expected to be ready for Palliser students this fall.

Gietz reminded the board that Palliser only hired the principal of the new online school one year ago, and the progress being made on the new program has been remarkable.

Palliser supportive of many task force recommendations

The board and administration discussed the 25 recommendations emerging from the [Task Force for Teaching Excellence](#) and offered support for several of the reports ideas.

In particular, Palliser supports adopting practice standards for principals, mentorship programs for new teachers and administrators and creating a culture of collaboration for teachers. The division already devotes resources to its own induction and mentorship programs as well as division-wide collaboration opportunities for teacher professional development. The board and administration expressed deep concern with the idea of removing principals from the Alberta Teachers' Association, and concern with any recommendations that would return Palliser to a more site-based system of school operations largely being decided solely by the principal. Palliser adopted a more centralized approach with centralized budgeting, human resources and other functions, and the board says the flexibility that comes from this system has been critical to the division's excellent

results.

Palliser's response to the recommendations will be shared with the task force, which is seeking public input on the report.

Palliser's literacy program having a positive impact on students

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin presented an annual accountability report on Palliser's literacy efforts.

This year, Palliser continued its literacy focus, reflected in the division's theme for the year of "Literacy: Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader." The program employs two full-time literacy coaches who worked with teachers across the division to support the teaching of reading and writing skills and share best practices. The program is overseen by Backlin with support from Cynthia Gietz, co-ordinating principal of school development.

All students from grades 1-6 are assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment to determine each individual's reading and comprehension level. The first assessment in early fall gives the teacher information on the individual student's needs to move him/her to the next level. The students are reassessed in early spring to determine whether the instruction has been effective and to give teachers opportunity to refine their instruction to support the student's literacy needs. Students in Grade 7 and up were also assessed using the tool if the principal felt the student was behind in reading and comprehension.

The assessments found a significant reduction in the number of students most in need of intervention to help them with their reading and comprehension. One in four student assessed in early fall needed serious intervention, but that fell to nearly one in five by spring.

The literacy team's accomplishments included organizing a literacy symposium attended by Central Office administration and school principals and vice-principals in October 2013 led by Palliser experts; a presentation by internationally recognized literacy expert Dr. David Booth to all Palliser teachers that underscored the value of the work teachers here are already doing to support student literacy; development of a common assessment tool for kindergarten teachers so when children enter Grade 1, their teachers have valuable information about the individual child's pre-reading skills; and a public report on Palliser's literacy efforts distributed in February widely across the division.

The division's investment in literacy includes the allocation of about \$115,000 for substitute teachers to allow classroom teachers opportunity to meet one-on-one with students twice a year to assess reading and comprehension skills.

The report identified one challenge facing the program is that Connie Adserballe, one of the two literacy coaches, successfully applied to be principal of Sunnyside School for the 2014-15 school year, and replacing her expertise will be difficult. The position has remained open until a suitable candidate can be found.

The trustees thanked Backlin and his team for their work on literacy which supports student success in all aspects of school and life.

Last of school calendars approved

The board reviewed and approved school calendars for Jennie Emery Elementary, Huntsville School, Vulcan Prairieview Elementary, Coalhurst Elementary and Trinity Christian schools for the 2014-15 year.

Trustees expressed concern about the late date for approving calendars for the fall, particularly in light of how early the board approved the division calendar. Some of the calendars had been earlier rejected by the board when trustees identified issues with the length of lunch and recess breaks or other scheduling issues.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin said he would review the existing administrative procedures and board policy to determine if amendments are needed to ensure individual school calendars are submitted for approval in a timely fashion.

The board has begun setting its division calendar two years in advance to give parents significant notice about summer and Christmas breaks so they can plan their own vacation time.

High demand for dual credit program

Palliser students have responded positively to an opportunity to participate in a dual credit program offered in partnership with Lethbridge College.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin said 10 students applied for eight guaranteed openings in a Health Care Aide program. The students can receive high school credits toward their diploma while working toward a college certificate.

Backlin said he's hoping the college will be able to accommodate all 10 Palliser students.

Milo land sale still approved

A 2008 motion to sell 7.7 acres of Palliser-owned land in the Village of Milo to the municipality remains in effect and the sale can now proceed.

The board's motion recommits to selling the land for \$1, a deal which was approved by the board and the province in 2008 but was never processed due to staff changes in the Palliser business office at the time.

The land is east of the Milo School, and separated from the school by the community's arena.

Cost of modular installation escalating

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard updated the board on this summer's planned installation of two modular at Jennie Emery Elementary School in Coaldale.

Rivard said Palliser's facilities services staff have been working closely with Alberta Infrastructure on the project. Project consultants who have worked on similar installations in other school jurisdictions have warned Palliser to expect higher than anticipated costs for installation. Palliser had originally projected the installation would cost \$50,000 per modular.

At one time, the province provided funding for the installation costs of modular classrooms. Now the installation is the responsibility of the school board.

The modulares will alleviate crowding in the elementary school. The new classrooms should arrive in August.

Familiarization tour showcased the best of southern Alberta

A tour of southern Alberta by agents for international students made a stop at Picture Butte High School June 3, where students and staff served as excellent ambassadors for Palliser, said Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard.

The familiarization tour was organized by Alberta Education and included agents from Mexico, Korea and China who saw first-hand what southern Alberta schools can offer international students. Rivard said four students at Picture Butte High School spoke about their interest in learning from international students who might attend their school.