

Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

September 16, 2014



The Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools held its regular meeting Sept. 16, 2014 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge. The board's next regular meeting will be Oct. 21, 2014 at Palliser Centre. The meeting begins at 9 a.m. and is open to the public.

Palliser Beyond Borders living up to its name

Palliser's new online school is giving high school students across Palliser opportunities to explore online learning and managing their digital presence, skills they'll use throughout their lives.

[Palliser Beyond Borders](#) Principal Alison Hancox gave the board a demonstration of what it's like to be a student in an online course, how to be part of an online learning community and how to access a Palliser teacher.

The school started just a year ago, and with help from other divisions and work through the summer to prepare courses and resources, the school is offering students more than 100 courses. True to the school's name, some of the students this semester are from outside Palliser.

While Hancox was in Palliser Centre's board room with the trustees, Beyond Borders teacher Verena Roberts joined the meeting from Calgary, using the same interface she uses with students.

Hancox walked trustees through Moodle, Palliser's online course delivery tool where static content can be accessed by students anytime, 24 hours a day; she demonstrated Google Apps for Education tools that students use to share content with each other and teachers; and Roberts joined the meeting using Blackboard Collaborate, a platform designed for live, online course delivery. Some students also work through online courses in a traditional classroom setting with other students.

Hancox said a study she completed two years ago with Grade 12 students in another jurisdiction found the highest activity on Moodle, accessing online resources, was between midnight and 2 a.m.

Every student in Beyond Borders must complete a one-credit orientation course to learn how to navigate online courses and use the technology to support learning.

She said five pilot projects last year helped to

determine the best strategies for navigating online resources, and out of those pilots came a "Palliserized" model that all Beyond Borders courses follow.

Each course gives students a link to their course workplan, a document that helps keep them on track, shows them the many ways to contact their teacher, and a series of resources the student can use to master the course. In keeping with Palliser's literacy focus, each course has a built-in glossary of the language in that subject. There are hyperlinks to demonstrate how the courses are meeting Alberta Education's learning outcomes, and there's a discussion forum through which students can interact with their peers and teachers.

All of the resources online are attributed to the original author and students learn about Creative Commons licensing and where digital content comes from.

Hancox said lessons offered through Blackboard Collaborate are recorded, so if a student misses that day, he/she can always review the class they missed. The recordings also provide excellent material for students to review before exams.

"We're learning attendance is not presence," Hancox said. "Attendance is attendance to learning."

During the demonstration, Roberts shared student work. Using the collaborative tools, students could comment on the work, or open a discussion using a text tool.

In the first few days of the school year, students are learning to use technology, but that "usually flips quite dramatically" as students focus on using technology to support their learning, Hancox said.

The "skeleton" of the courses came from Learn Alberta digital resources, and have been supplemented with other materials, whether free to use and shared online, purchased from other sources, or developed by Palliser teachers. Roberts said Peace Wapiti, Aspen View, Rocky View and Black Gold school divisions have been highly supportive, sharing resources and advice. All four, like Palliser, are part of a Moodle Hub, an online community.

Overtime, as more resources are accumulated, teachers will have access to examples of excellent,



acceptable and not acceptable work, so students can see what they need to do to improve their own work.

“By Year 3, you have a very robust, stand-alone program,” Hancox said.

“What we’re creating is sort of in its infancy right now so we have to be, as a board, as parents, as students, we have to be a bit patient with the process.”

In first semester, students have registered for courses that could generate 1,147 credits if every student successfully completes every course.

The board congratulated Hancox and the Palliser Beyond Borders team for the work that’s been accomplished in the past year.

November board meeting rescheduled

Trustees voted to reschedule their November meeting to Nov. 25, from Nov. 18. The original meeting date conflicted with the Alberta School Boards Association fall meeting.

Organizational chart now online

The board reviewed the organizational chart for Palliser to reflect new personnel who have joined Central Office. The new chart is available online in PDF format at <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/download/321>

Enrolment numbers close to projection

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger presented the board early enrolment numbers. Palliser had projected enrolment of 6,818 for 2014-15, and schools are reporting 6,783 students now. That difference of 35 students represents about one half of a per cent variance between projection and actual. In particular, Palliser’s outreach schools are below projections, which is not unexpected this early in the school year.

Board Chair Colleen Dietz credited school staff for being so accurate on projections. Palliser establishes its budget in the spring based on enrolment projections from each of its schools. The actual budget is based on the number of students in schools on Sept. 30.

Palliser looking at new ways to best support up and coming teachers

Palliser has entered a discussion with both the University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge regarding support for students completing their teaching practicums.

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger said the process should ensure that aspiring teachers are paired with the best possible teachers in schools. He said the pairings should be directed through

Human Resources with input from the school principal.

He said Palliser and the U of C are discussing a pilot project in this regard, and the U of L has expressed interest as well.

Master agreements for faith-based programs approved in principle

Palliser’s board has approved in principle new master agreements with its partner societies at the division’s faith-based alternative programs.

The agreements came under fire in spring for controversial and discriminatory language. Since then, Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin has been working with representatives from six societies involved in Palliser’s eight faith-based programs to eliminate discriminatory language from the agreements and associated schedules and ensure all are aligned with human rights and employment law.

The documents need approval from the societies.

Backlin said all the master agreements will have an 18-month opt-out clause, meaning either Palliser or the society can serve notice of termination of the agreement with a year and a half of notice. That amount of time would give Palliser two hiring cycles to attend to the needs of Palliser staff at those schools.

Backlin said the review of master agreements began before the controversy erupted but has been delayed in some cases because of changes to society staff. At one school, Backlin has dealt with three different society directors in the past two years or so.

Planning continues for second annual Palliser literacy symposium

Palliser Regional Schools leaders will hold a second annual literacy symposium as the division deepens its work on supporting student reading and writing skills at all grades.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin invited trustees to attend all or part of “Leadership in Literacy Symposium 2.0,” Sept. 29-30 in Lethbridge.

The event will feature presentations by Palliser’s own experts in literacy, and school leaders will have time during the symposium to create literacy action plans specific to their schools. The evening will feature a celebration with individual principals and vice-principals invited to share a success story from their school.

The event will be attended by Central Office administrators and principals and vice-principals from across Palliser.

During the meeting, Backlin also shared Palliser’s “Developmental Milestones for Kindergarten Literacy.” Based on research by the Canadian Language and Literacy

Research Network, the milestones will help teachers near the end of the school year to identify kindergarten students who will need intervention early in Grade 1. The student's ability to identify most upper and lower case letters, briefly retell a story, and understand the direction of how to read printed words from top to bottom and left to right, are among the list of skills teachers will be looking for.

The information collected during this assessment will give Palliser teachers valuable information about each individual student as they enter Grade 1.

Facility Services focused on safety

Palliser's Facility Services department has made headway on several key fronts in the past year, including addressing a Richardson ground squirrel problem at four rural schools.

Facility Services Supervisor Darren Stocker, presenting his annual accountability report to the board, said the department continues to shift its culture to a service-oriented department. To that end, Stocker said administrators at Palliser-owned sites were consulted about facility conditions and needs as the department planned for projects.

Major projects have included addressing all immediate hazards identified in a 2012 audit of playgrounds; a move to an online Occupational Health and Safety training program; planning for the modernization of Noble Central School, a project announced in January 2014; and the delivery and installation of two modular units at Jennie Emery Elementary School in Coaldale.

Stocker said a "gopher" problem at Barons, Noble Central, Champion and Carmangay schools was addressed. In Barons, the number of gopher holes was a safety issue, and it took two dump trucks of dirt to fill the holes left behind.

The board thanked Stocker, his staff, and Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard, who oversees the department, for their efforts to ensure Palliser's schools are safe.

Delegation from China to visit Palliser

Palliser will organize a tour of southern Alberta for a delegation from China interested in students attending high school and post-secondary here.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard said the delegation is interested in visiting Palliser's high schools and seeing the University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge campuses in late October. The initial contact with the delegation was made by

Superintendent Kevin Gietz during his visit to China last winter.

Rivard said the delegation has also expressed interest in Palliser's online school.

Collaborative work focused on literacy and assessment for learning

Palliser teachers created 50 different small learning groups who will work together during the year's four division-wide professional development days, said Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard. The division's first collaboration day was Sept. 15.

Each of the groups engaged in literacy and assessment for learning conversations aimed at improving student learning in specific grades or courses.

One of the largest collaborative groups brings together 37 of 45 principals and vice-principals in Palliser focused on moving their schools forward in literacy and assessment. The administrators identified 12 different topics for collaborative work, and they could choose which groups they would attend.

First-year teachers work together in their own collaborative learning group during these division-wide PD days.

Effectiveness Model adopted to show how system supports student success

The board has adopted a new Effectiveness Model with minor tweaks based on feedback from the board and school leaders. The model of concentric circles puts the student and 10 competencies Alberta Education has identified for students at the centre, followed by the teacher, principal, superintendent and board. In addition to the teaching quality standard and practice competencies expected of principals, the model incorporates the six characteristics of highly effective schools, as identified through 30 years of Effective Schools research. The model demonstrates the alignment of the goals and roles of the division, principals, teachers and students with a focus on supporting student success.

Although the model does not list every type of job in Palliser, such as family school liaison counsellors or educational assistants, Superintendent Kevin Gietz said all employees can find their work reflected on the chart, whether through support of positive learning environments or creating inclusive schools.

The model is on Palliser's website and can be downloaded as a PDF [here](#).