

# Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

Tuesday, May 26, 2015



## Trustees share kudos to Palliser staff, students and parents

Trustees expressed kudos to Palliser staff and students as part of their monthly “roundtable,” during which they share their recent Palliser activities.

Trustee Craig Whitehead attended his first Picture Butte High School graduation since joining the board in January. He said students talked about how their school is a safe, caring, fun place to learn and those comments are a tribute to their teachers. He said three students who had dropped out of school, returned to the ACHIEVE specialized program, and graduated.

Coaldale Trustee Debbie Laternus applauded parents at John Davidson School in Coaldale for their commitment to the school and their support for Principal Janice Loitz. The school is an alternative program for Low German-speaking Mennonite students.

Vice-Chair Don Zech credited the staff, students, parents and community members in Nobleford for their outstanding work on a unique food drive. Students filled a tractor, donated from a local business, with donations to a local food bank.

## Caring staff, options for students among strengths of R.I. Baker Middle School

Director of Learning Cynthia Gietz presented data collected during a school review of R.I. Baker Middle School Dec. 4.

Data collection included an online survey made available to all parents, teachers, support staff and students, focus group interviews with students, parents and support staff and individual curriculum and instruction interviews with each teacher.

The review team found school strengths include a caring, approachable staff that connects with students; a great library and focus on literacy; and variety of exploratory options and extracurricular opportunities.

Areas for refinement include communication with all stakeholders; consistent and fair discipline and more respectful behaviour; and teaching in more ways to help students learn.

Gietz said students were brutally honest about their conduct. They said they know what is expected of them,

and acknowledge they’re not meeting those standards when it comes to respect for the facility, staff and each other.

The school will have a new principal and vice-principal this fall, and trustees discussed how valuable the review data will be to those leaders.

“This is amazing information to have as opposed to walking in cold,” said Trustee Esther Willms.

The review team consisted of a dozen Central Office staff and principals or vice-principals from other Palliser schools.

## Board accepts annual report on communications

The board received the annual Communications Accountability Report, as presented by Communications Officer Dawn Sugimoto.

Highlights include ongoing training on website content management provided to school staff on request. Calgary Christian School was the last Palliser school to transition to Palliser’s new website provider in August 2014. Only Master’s Academy and College is on a separate service. More than 200 items were uploaded to Palliser’s division website in the reporting period and the division has an active presence on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/PalliserRegionalSchools>) and Twitter (@PalliserSchools). Palliser introduced an Android version of its bus status app, which offers users real-time updates on whether Palliser bus routes are on time, delayed or cancelled.

Palliser continues to use video to share stories with nine projects completed this year and provides an electronic newsletter to all staff and public subscribers.

Sugimoto said she supports division initiatives such as Think of Us on the Bus, about to enter its fourth year of education and public awareness of school bus safety. The number of reported fly-bys (incidents of motorists passing Palliser buses when stopped with their red lights flashing) have been in decline since the campaign began.

## Report on workplace investigations

Director of Human Resources Mike Nightingale and Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger led a presentation on labour laws and workplace

investigations. They were joined by Vice-Chair Don Zech at a workshop on the subject earlier this year.

Nightingale referred to Palliser Administrative Procedure 171 on [Harassment of Students or Employees](#), which outlines procedures for reporting and responding to complaints of harassment.

The board and administration discussed ways to share information with staff about how to file a complaint and how allegations will be investigated in a manner fair and respectful of due process to both the complainant and the respondent.

## Staffing update offered

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger updated the board on staffing. His office has been notified of 10 retirements and six resignations to date. The deadline for teachers to announce their retirements is May 31.

## Palliser offers summer school

The board was updated on a plan to offer summer school to students and adult learners this year through Palliser's online school, Palliser Beyond Borders. Teacher support will be available from Vulcan Outreach, PASS+ in Coaldale and a site in Calgary. All core courses will be available, as well as Career and Life Management 20, which is a diploma requirement. Students currently in Grade 9 can get a jump on their high school credit needs as early as this summer. For more information on courses availability and fees, please visit Palliser Beyond Borders' website at <http://www.palliserbeyondborders.com/>

## Online registration process a big step forward for Palliser Beyond Borders

Palliser Beyond Borders Principal Alison Hancox and Director of Learning Tom Hamer joined the board to share an update on the division's international student program and online school.

Recently, the separate teams working on the international program and the online school met to discuss merging both initiatives under the banner of Palliser Beyond Borders. The overlap in potential market with an interest in international students studying online led to a decision to combine the initiatives.

Work is now underway to create a new website for Palliser Beyond Borders that will serve as a one-stop shop for students within Palliser interested in online course

delivery; Canadian students outside Palliser interested in online learning; and international students who either want to study online or study in Palliser.

Hamer said to ensure a seamless online registration process, Palliser is working with a number of existing services to create a system that provides a high quality, easy-to-use experience for all students.

A user will be able to register online, fill out all the required forms, and then shop for online courses all in one place, Hancox said.

Hamer said the process can be automated in parts, but will always provide a human touch to ensure students have the support they need. Information submitted through the system will populate Palliser's student information system to reduce data entry errors, and an authentication process is built in to identify any issues.

Once a student is registered, they'll have access to a "gated community," password-protected and individualized based on the courses they're taking.

The system will be tested during Palliser Beyond Borders' summer school offerings. So far, students have registered for 166 credits this summer.

Hamer, who recently attended an international agent fair in Montreal, said agents were quite interested in the possibility of students taking online courses from their home countries, to build confidence before travelling abroad for study.

Hancox said the key to Palliser's program is the quality support from teachers to online students. They're not just working through course materials

and submitting them for marks. They're working with a Palliser teacher.

"This is a teaching online program, not a marking online program" Hancox said.

## Palliser's literacy focus embraces new four-year goal for young readers

Palliser continues to invest in giving teachers time to individually assess student reading abilities and engage in professional development to support reading and writing.

Director of Learning Cynthia Gietz presented an annual accountability report on literacy showing all schools saw an overall increase in the number of students reading at grade level between Spring 2014 assessment and Spring 2015.

The Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments are conducted in fall and spring each year for all students in Grades 1 through 6 not yet reading at a level expected in Grade 6. In Grade 3, for example, there were 33 per cent more students reading at or above grade level expectation



this spring than there were in Fall 2014.

Gietz said Palliser has invested \$115,000 in substitute teacher costs, to allow classroom teachers opportunity to meet individually with students twice a year to assess reading and comprehension. Trustee Craig Whitehead applauded that investment to give teachers the time they need with students.

Gietz said administrators and teachers continue to grow expertise in literacy instruction. The team organized a second annual literacy symposium for principals and vice-principals in the fall to give them the tools and time needed to start to establish literacy action plans for their schools. About 120 Palliser staff attended a conference on vulnerable readers this fall to learn intervention strategies to support struggling readers, and Palliser's academic wrap-around team worked with the classroom teachers of 55 struggling students across the division to address their academic needs. All but four of the 55 students showed progress.

The team's goals for 2015-2016 include an emphasis on literacy support for early learners to ensure 95 per cent of Palliser students entering kindergarten in Fall 2015 will be reading at grade level by March 2019, when they are in Grade 3.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard, who oversees Palliser's literacy effort, thanked Gietz and Literacy Coach Bev Smith for their ongoing work to support every student's literacy needs.

## School calendars approved

School calendars for 2015-2016 were approved following a review by Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Stan Hielema to ensure appropriate times are provided for students to eat lunch and have breaks. He also reviewed the schedules to ensure requirements for instructional hours are met. Each school is asked to post their calendars for next year on their websites.

## Revenue from high school credits down from budget projection

Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun updated the board on budget assumptions for the 2015-2016 school year, based on funding projections aligned with the provincial budget announcement in March.

Although a new government was elected and has said changes to the budget are coming, the assumptions continue to be based on the conditions announced before the election.

Braun said Palliser will face a \$3-million shortfall in 2015-2016, based on projected revenues and the status quo for staffing and programs. That number is slightly higher than originally projected because revenue from high

school credits so far this year have fallen short of what was budgeted.

He said administration has been reviewing each department, program and service area to find efficiencies. A full budget report will be presented to the board in June.

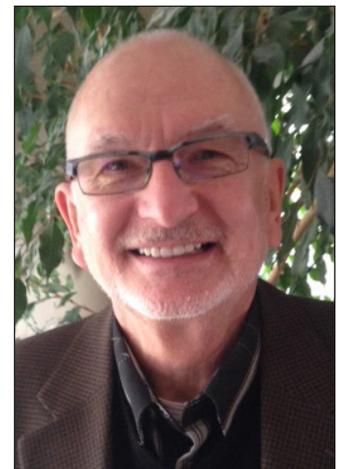
## Work continues on Noble Central plan

Work continues on planning the modernization of Noble Central School. Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun said detailed drawings were 60 per cent completed May 21 and submitted to cost consultants for costing update. That costing update and the drawings would then be submitted to Alberta Infrastructure for review in June.

Braun said as more detailed drawings occur, the cost projections become more accurate. He expects Alberta Infrastructure to complete its review of the latest detailed drawings by mid-June. The next step would then be to submit detailed drawings that are 90 per cent complete, with another review of plans and costs by mid-July.

If all goes well, the project could go to tender in late July or early August. That means the summer construction season will be lost, resulting in a need to shift the schedule of planned work to minimize impact on students at the school. During construction, the gym will be used to accommodate services such as the library, administrative office and classrooms, and students will use the community centre for indoor physical education.

The project has a budget of \$8 million and should be completed sometime in 2017.



Wayne Braun

## Palliser maintains outstanding results

Superintendent Kevin Gietz presented the latest [Accountability Pillar](#) overall summary for Palliser, congratulating the board on its sustained excellent results over time.

In category after category, Palliser continues to experience high support from parents, staff and students for the quality of education, diversity of programming and safe and caring environments offered. While some measures have dropped slightly from last year, the numbers remain quite high across the board. Maintaining such excellent results over several years is a challenge, Gietz said.

## **Board thanks retiring Dale Backlin for his service**

The board extended its thanks to Dale Backlin, Associate Superintendent (Education Services) as he attended his final board meeting before retirement.

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart,” said Chair Colleen Deitz, pointing out that Backlin stepped in to support Finance Services for several months before Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun joined the division.

Backlin was a long-time principal of Glenmore Christian Academy, joining Palliser with the school in 2008-2009.

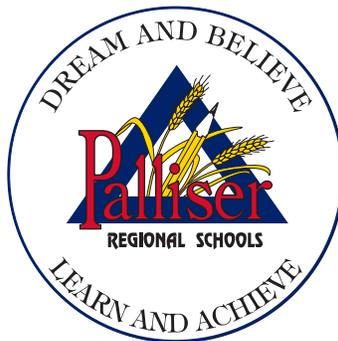


**Dale Backlin**

“I want to express my gratitude to my colleagues around the table here in senior administration and the trustees as well,” he said. “This has been a very enriching experience for me. . . It’s been a delight to be part of the highest performing school division in the province.”

A farewell for Backlin is scheduled June 1 at Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary.

“It’s been a real privilege to serve in this capacity and to see the servant heart that all of you have and the desire you have for providing the best educational opportunities for the students of Palliser,” Backlin said.



**Next meeting: 9 a.m., June 9, 2015 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge**