

# Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

November 25, 2014



## Deitz, Zech returned as chair, vice-chair

The Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools held its annual organizational meeting and its regular monthly meeting on Nov. 25, 2014 in Lethbridge.

Trustees Colleen Deitz and Don Zech were returned as chair and vice-chair of the board, respectively, for the coming year. Deitz, the trustee representing Ward 2, Subdivision 1, a rural area in Vulcan County including Arrowwood, Milo and Champion, was first elected to the chair in October 2013. She had served as vice-chair for 11 years prior. Zech, the trustee for Ward 1, Subdivision 3, in Lethbridge County, including Coalhurst, Nobleford and Barons, has served as vice-chair since October 2013. He had previously served nine years as chair.

As part of the organizational meeting, trustees named representatives to various committees and set meeting dates for the coming year. The board's regular meetings will be held at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge on:

- Tuesday, December 9, 2014
- Tuesday, January 20, 2015
- Tuesday, February 10, 2015
- Tuesday, March 10, 2015
- Tuesday, April 14, 2015
- Tuesday, May 19, 2015
- Tuesday, June 9, 2015
- Tuesday, August 25, 2015

The board voted to align trustee remuneration with Canada Revenue and the Alberta School Employee Benefit Program benchmarks.

## Coalhurst High students and staff living up to high expectations

Coalhurst High School Principal Chris McIntyre and Vice-Principal Shannon Collier presented their team's efforts to support student success, and respond to findings of a school review conducted in March 2014.

McIntyre began by thanking the board, particularly Vice-Chair Don Zech, and Central Office administration for its ongoing support of the school, including the school review process.

"The process has been affirming to what we've done," McIntyre said. "It was a solid validation of the work we're doing."



Colleen Deitz

Don Zech

McIntyre said he appreciated that the review process collects feedback from such a broad swath of stakeholders, including parents, students and staff.

During the review, parents commended the school for its student focus, students spoke of their respect for the school, staff and each other, and teachers shared that they appreciate the regular presence of the administrators in their classrooms, offering constructive feedback and opportunity for reflection.

The school offers a rigorous academic program of core subjects and options. Parents are involved in ensuring students take the courses appropriate for their career development and goals, said Collier.

Key to the school's success has been the setting of consistently high standards for staff and students that permeates the culture of Coalhurst High School.

"We're seeing it," McIntyre said. "Parents are seeing it and our students are seeing it. We're seeing students take ownership. They're staying after school. They're staying in at lunch time."

In keeping with Palliser's literacy focus, students are reading in school and at home, considerably more than in past, and literacy work is occurring in all courses.

The school is a caring and inclusive environment that supports learning needs of all students of all abilities, Collier said.

"I compliment our teachers on that," she said. "Our teachers are making it work for all students."

Board Chair Colleen Deitz and Superintendent Kevin

*Together we will ensure learning success for all students  
to develop their unique potential as caring citizens in a changing world.*

Gietz thanked McIntyre and Collier for their efforts.

## **Important work remains in assessing threats and preventing harm**

Palliser Regional Schools continues to support and promote the ground breaking and internationally respected work by violence threat risk assessment expert Kevin Cameron.

The board had approached the executive committee of the Alberta School Boards Association in Zone 6, representing boards in southern Alberta, about having a presentation by Cameron. A scheduling conflict kept Cameron from presenting at the November or January meetings. Instead, a presentation by another group was put on the Zone 6 agenda.

That presentation focused on a school shooting in Taber in 1999, rather than on research and best practices for preventing violence of all kinds in schools.

Vice-Chair Don Zech said he felt the presentation was exploitive, rather than helpful.

"I said I was uncomfortable with it at the time," he said. "I'm still uncomfortable with it."

Trustee Robert Strauss, a Palliser representative to ASBA Zone 6, said the presentation was booked with good intentions but showed the importance of pursuing a presentation by Cameron on assessing threats and preventing harm.

## **Board gives show of support to trustee**

The board voted to excuse Trustee Debbie Laturnus from meetings, as she continues to deal with an emergent family matter.

Laturnus missed both the October and November board meetings.

According to Board Policy 7, Board Operations, a trustee who is absent from three consecutive regular meetings must obtain authorization by board motion to do so. According to the policy, failure to attend may result in disqualification.

Although Laturnus has not missed three meetings, trustees discussed wanting to show their support for their colleague. The motion reads that "Trustee Laturnus be given the time required to deal with family matters."

## **County Central students share experiences from national conference**

The board welcomed a delegation from County Central High School to share their experiences at the Canadian Student Leadership Conference in Kelowna, B.C., Sept. 23-28.

Teacher Kim Wouters, who accompanied four students

to the conference, thanked the board for its support of the students attending the conference. She said her counterparts from across the country don't enjoy that level of support.

Students Ryan Gateman, Clarissa Losey and Garrett Rawleigh talked about the opportunity to meet students from across the country, the inspirational speakers and the abundance of ideas they brought home to try at County Central.

About 1,200 students attended the conference.

Wouters said the conference was also a valuable networking opportunity for her.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard said Palliser is planning a student leadership event, and he looked forward to drawing on the students' experiences in the planning process.

## **Organizational chart updated to reflect pending retirement from Central Office**

Palliser's board reviewed an updated organizational chart to reflect changes to responsibilities at the senior management level. The changes stem from a decision by Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin to transition to retirement by the end of 2014-2015.

As part of the change, responsibility for Transportation and Facilities Services will move to Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun and Palliser's literacy program will move to Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard. The new organizational chart can be found online at <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/about-us/our-division>

## **Palliser model for inclusive education paying dividends in student success**

Palliser's inclusive learning environments have led to a dramatic rise in achievement for students with severe needs.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard and Director of Learning Laurie Wilson presented data comparing Palliser's results in 2008-2009 to 2012-2013.

By 2008-2009, Palliser was changing its learning services model. Historically, learning support teachers assumed responsibility for the individual program plans for all students with special needs. By 2008-2009, learning support teacher hours were devoted to only students with severe needs, giving more responsibility to the classroom teacher for students with mild and moderate needs.

Educational assistants' role in the classroom was re-examined to ensure their support of students with identified needs was guided and directed by the teacher. A rubric to determine individual student needs helps ensure assistant hours are assigned consistently and based on

need, Wilson said. She said assistants continue to play a critical role in supporting students with special needs under the direction of the classroom teacher.

Palliser's efforts to maintain small class sizes, focus on assessment for learning, instructional leadership, literacy and high expectations for all students, all play a part in helping all students rise to the highest level of success possible. One indication of increased student success was the percentage of severely coded students who passed their English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test. In 2008-2009, 89.3 per cent of severely coded students passed. In 2012-2013, that rose to 100 per cent. In Grade 6, a similar increase of 78.1 to 90.6 per cent occurred. For Grade 9 students, 42.9 per cent passed in 2008-2009, compared to 71.9 per cent in 2012-2013.

Wilson said there was a shift in mindset in Palliser from "Can I teach them?" to "How can I teach them?" It's not a question of "Can they learn?" Instead, it's "How will they best learn?"

Rivard said the Palliser experience echoes research that found the classroom teacher is critical to the success of all students in the classroom.

"This is a story about making kids independent learners," he said.

## **Palliser devotes some surplus funds to capital reserve for first time in years**

Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun presented the audited financial statements for the year ended Aug. 31, 2014. The external audit was completed by KPMG.

Palliser's financial position was positive at the end of the 2013-2014 school year with a nearly \$2.5-million surplus, giving the board the option of transferring unrestricted surplus funds to a capital reserve, for the first time in recent memory, and to meet other needs. Grant revenue was higher than budgeted, as was revenue from field trips and other sales and services.

The board voted to transfer \$730,000 of unrestricted surplus funds to a capital reserve, with \$500,000 to financial, payroll and human resources software and \$230,000 to cover the anticipated cost of setting up future modular classrooms. This year, the board has requested four modulars, two each for Barons School and Coalhurst Elementary. The division has not received notice whether those requests have been approved.

About \$34,644 from the sale of used school buses was also transferred from unrestricted surplus funds to the capital reserve, to go toward purchasing new buses.

A transfer of \$448,705 was approved from unrestricted surplus funds to the operating reserve for facilities. The money would go toward facility support funding for

eligible alternative program schools, create a reserve for snow removal, utility price fluctuations and the purchase of student desks.

The audited financial statements were submitted to Alberta Education by Nov. 30 and are posted on Palliser's website at <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/board-of-trustees/planning-and-reporting>.

The board also lifted a freeze on school spending of board-allocated surplus funds. The board had ordered the freeze last spring over concern about the pending budget. The freeze affected only surpluses leftover from previous school budgets, money allocated to schools out of Palliser's funding from Alberta Education. The spending freeze did not apply to school generated funds (such as fundraising or fees for course materials).

The board and administration have been encouraging schools to spend their school-generated funds on current students, rather than carrying those funds over from year to year, and to ensure the funds they collect are specific to a planned use.

The board also reviewed and approved the fall budget update for 2014-2015, which reflects actual enrolment. The update is also posted on Palliser's website at <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/board-of-trustees/planning-and-reporting>

The fall budget update projects total revenue for 2014-2015 of \$79.9 million to support the education of 6,826 students. The budget includes the planned purchase of three school buses.

## **Noble Central modernization project could go to tender early in the new year**

Facilities Services Supervisor Darren Stocker joined the meeting to provide an update on the modernization of Noble Central School.

He said design meetings have been occurring since June and a schematic design was finalized in October.

A major goal of the modernization project is to make the building wheelchair accessible and inclusive to those with mobility issues, in a modernized learning environment.

A cost consultant reviewed the project and estimated the project was over its roughly \$7.2-million budget for construction and site costs. Palliser officials met with the cost consultant and architect to look for budget reductions that would maintain the intended outcome of the project.

The project will likely to go to tender by mid- to late-January with a ground breaking in spring. It's believed the project could be completed by September 2016.

The number of school projects under way in Alberta could affect the final cost of the work, Stocker said.