

Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

December 9, 2014



Board holds final meeting of 2014

The Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools held its final regular meeting of 2014 on Dec. 9 in Palliser Education Centre in Lethbridge. Trustee Debbie Laturnus was absent from the meeting.

Board-Teacher Advisory Committee shares its report

Trustees discussed the outcome of a Board-Teacher Advisory Committee meeting held Nov. 25. According to Board Policy 8, Committees of the Board, this advisory committee provides a permanent and ongoing mechanism for considering matters of concern and communicating the views of the respective parties. The committee is comprised of three trustees, the superintendent or designate and three representatives of Alberta Teachers' Association Local 19, which represents Palliser's teachers.

The committee meets twice a year.

Board Chair Colleen Deitz reported on an ATA request to assume responsibility for board-directed professional development funds allocated to each teacher each year. The trustees discussed the benefits of board control of the funds, to ensure accountability for the public dollars.

The committee discussed the recent decision by the Alberta School Boards Association seeking a change to the weight given to diploma exams. Currently, a diploma exam score is worth 50 per cent of a student's final mark. ASBA, of which Palliser is a member, voted to support reducing that to 30 per cent. Alberta Education has not committed to making the change.

Other topics were the frequency of fire drills and the volume of email notifications about planned drills; the timeliness of reimbursement for professional development-related expenses; and the ATA's [Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools](#).

Since the meeting, the volume of email notifications about fire drills has been reduced; a copy of the report on inclusive education has been shared with trustees; and Superintendent Kevin Gietz said he is still waiting for specific information about outstanding PD reimbursement, so he can further investigate.

Gietz said the ATA representatives sought an update on

the work of the [C2 Committee](#), which is examining teacher workload and efficacy issues. That committee already has teacher representatives named by the ATA bargaining unit who can update the ATA about that committee's work.

The committee discussed the staff barbecues held in Calgary in September and Lethbridge in June. Sponsored jointly by the board and ATA, the event has been poorly attended in Calgary. The committee discussed planning the event in Lethbridge and holding off a decision for now on a Calgary event.

Board commends principals for courage

The board and administration offered commendations to Heritage Christian Academy Ryan Brennan and Calgary Christian Secondary Principal Jason Kupery for their efforts to support all students, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or other differences.

In the wake of controversy over Bill 10 regarding gay-straight alliances, Brennan was interviewed by [CBC Radio](#) as he explained that his priority is a safe school and that he would support a gay-straight alliance if students sought to create one. A reporter also visited the Calgary Christian campus and spoke with students outside the school. The students expressed their opinion that their school would support creation of a gay-straight alliance if one was requested.

Vice-Chair Don Zech commended Palliser staff for their "comments and their courage" to reflect the board's stance in support of all students. Trustee Esther Williams said the legislation was also a topic of conversation at her school communities, as she shared Palliser's unequivocal policy stance supporting safe, inclusive environments for all students.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said Palliser's goal is to support student when and how they need it, whether that's through a gay-straight alliance or other means, and there is no one solution that will fit all.

"Every school is a little bit different," he said.

Zech referred to the mission of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta: "We believe public schools are the first choice of our communities, where all our children learn and live the values of democracy together, reflecting our hope and shaping the future of our communities."



Art by Chesley Baptiste from County Central High School is featured on Palliser's 2014 Christmas card.

Board looks for ways to promote and showcase student art

Palliser's board will pursue a program to showcase student art.

Chair Colleen Deitz sought the board's support for a program to display student art annually in Central Office and to secure pieces of student art to give as gifts to retiring trustees or guests to the division.

She said she raised the idea with County Central High School art teacher Mike Shain, as she visiting his art room to meet CCHS student Chesley Baptiste, whose art is featured on this year's Palliser Christmas card. Shain suggested the project might be of interest to his collaboration group of art teachers from across Palliser.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said administration would pursue the concept and report back to the board with a recommendation. He said this is an example of the power of teacher collaboration.

Milo School building up community partnerships and focusing on literacy

Milo School Principal Jason Neville shared his action plan for the school, based on his and his staff's analysis of data collected during a school review there in January.

Neville, who joined Milo School in August, said the review data has helped focus his team's work.

Milo is a small school serving 59 students up to Grade 9, where parents say they feel welcome and they feel their students are safe, according to review data.

Neville said stakeholders responded "I do not know" to several survey questions. He said he and his staff have discussed that response indicates a trust issue, something they're working to build.

This year there's been a concerted effort to have parent and school council involvement in all aspects of the school. The council discussed the school's goals and homework expectations, and school goals are on every council agenda, and parents took part in a visit to Millarville School to see an International Baccalaureate Primary Years. The school is in the early stages of pursuing an IB program.

The review raised questions about community partnerships and involvement so Neville said each class has identified community projects to complete.

"We're helping students light that fire," of community service, Neville said.

The staff are engaging in professional development related to literacy, which is not only a Palliser focus but an identified need for students. Two of three teachers attended a literacy conference in Calgary and the school has accessed Palliser's Literacy Coach Bev Smith three times this year already.

Neville said he has also accessed Palliser's academic wraparound team and behaviour specialist to help support individual students.

Feedback collected from students during the review indicated interruptions were a concern so the school has moved all announcements to the end of the day. Superintendent Kevin Gietz said in his meetings with students, they almost always raised interruptions as a barrier to learning, and they often were referring to the behaviour of students in the classroom. He suggested Neville also consider disruptions that are happening in the individual classrooms.

To give students more athletic and non-athletic opportunities, the school has or will be introducing a number of new clubs this year including knitting, drama and art. Student council has created a "culture club" in support of school beautification. Students participated in cross-country zones in Medicine Hat this fall, had a volleyball team and hosted a day-time volleyball tournament to give other small Palliser schools an opportunity to compete. A curling team is also starting soon, and some basketball games are in the works.

Neville said data from the school review, the Accountability Pillar and Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments of reading levels are all helping Milo School staff focus their efforts to meet students' needs.

Chair Colleen Deitz, who represents the Milo area, thanked Neville for his efforts this year and his visibility in the community.

Palliser teacher induction program focused on helping to improve practice

Director of Human Resources Mike Nightingale reported to the board on the ongoing evolution of Palliser's Teacher Induction Program for first- and second-year teachers.

First-year teachers begin their program with summer sessions of one evening and two full days of orientation and professional development. They also meet on the four division-wide collaboration days.

Topics of discussion include literacy, knowledge, skills and attributes (KSAs) of the interim teaching quality standard, assessment for learning, and differentiated instruction.

Each session includes opportunity to collaborate with other teachers and time to work on how they'll implement their learning into their classrooms.

"The time has to be spent on something that will move your practice forward," Nightingale said.

After each session, participants are asked for specific feedback about how they'll improve their practice as a result of what they've learned.

Nightingale shared his experience visiting a first-year teacher's classroom. The teacher's math class was literacy-focused with students writing poems based on the question: What number am I?

The second-year teachers meet three times a year, continuing work on literacy instruction and unit planning. The program also has an open spaces format so teachers can bring forward their own agenda items.

Nightingale said the program enjoys the support of the full Central Office team as literacy, assessment and inclusive education experts meet with the new teachers.

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger said collaboration is key to supporting Palliser's teachers. Recently nine substitute teachers participated in a professional development session with Alison Hancox, principal of Palliser Beyond Borders, a school offering online learning opportunities. The session was to familiarize substitute teachers with teaching in an online environment.

Chair Colleen Deitz said she was recently approached by a parent who thanked Palliser for its support of new teachers.

Palliser selected for tech grant

Palliser is one of a handful of Alberta school jurisdictions selected for a technology grant. The \$70,000 grant for Supporting Leaders to Implement the Learning and Technology Policy Framework will focus on how to



Mike Nightingale

use technology to support student-centred learning, said Director of Learning Tom Hamer.

A team of administrators representing a broad diversity of Palliser schools and key teachers will be working to build capacity in using technology to enrich learning opportunities. Already, Palliser has launched an online school offering synchronous and asynchronous program delivery, and this month, one of Palliser's division-wide collaboration days saw many teachers connecting with colleagues by Google Hangout, an online video chat. Hamer said the grant will begin by using technology to connect teacher to teacher and eventually student to student.

Literacy program helping teachers to be reading specialists to support students

Director of Learning Cynthia Gietz provided the board an update on literacy work in Palliser

This is the second year Palliser has administered Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments of elementary students. Grade 1 students were assessed in November, and that data is still being collected for presentation in the new year. Grade 2-6 students were assessed in October, as were students in Grade 7 and up who were considered at risk in terms of reading skills.

In a change this year from last, the literacy team adjusted the reading level at which young readers are considered at risk and in need of intervention. The data collected last year will be adjusted to the new standards so the two years of data is comparable, Gietz said.

Palliser provided literacy assessment training to all new staff in August. Release time of 40 minutes per student per year is budgeted to give the teacher time to work one-on-one with each student being assessed.

In this second year of division-wide data collection, results are already showing a decrease in the percentage of students at risk and a rise in the percentage of students at or above grade level.

Gietz said the data isn't good or bad, but it's telling a story of what students need.

"We are making reading specialists out of most of our teachers," she said. "We're seeing literacy in phys ed classes. . . Kids are talking about reading strategies. We wouldn't have heard that conversation even two years ago."

"We're breaking down barriers and talking about what's important and that's reading and writing."

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard, who oversees the literacy program, said discussions have already begun about literacy in kindergarten and what skills all children should have by the time they begin Grade 1. Private kindergarten operators in Palliser will be welcome to participate in this effort.

Gietz said through literacy skills, students will have the tools they need to be fully engaged citizens.

The board thanked the literacy team for its continued work to support literacy for all students.

Master agreements still in process of being approved by societies and signed

Superintendent Kevin Gietz is reviewing the status of Palliser's master agreements with society partners at the division's faith-based alternative programs in Calgary and Brant. Parts of the agreements were revised in late spring and early summer to address potentially discriminatory language in them. Although the changes were approved by Palliser's board this fall, the agreements still required approval by the society boards and signatures from both Palliser and the societies. Once signed, the documents can be posted on school websites and shared publicly.

Board approves plan for about \$2 million in infrastructure work in schools

Palliser's Infrastructure Renewal and Maintenance Plan for 2014-2015 will see about \$2 million of work at Palliser-owned schools with about \$150,000 set aside as a contingency fund, and about \$250,000 in internal labour costs for work done by division staff.

Major projects include changes to the heating system and conversion of a laundry to a kitchen at Barons School; ceiling work and parking lot and bus look upgrades at Coalhurst Elementary; ventilation upgrades at Jennie Emery Elementary in Coaldale; boiler replacement at John Davidson in Coaldale; and roof replacement at Noble Central School in Nobleford and Sunnyside School near Lethbridge. Almost all schools have some projects planned, except Arrowwood School, which was redone after a fire there in 2012, R.I. Baker Middle School in Coaldale,

and Picture Butte High School, where modernization was completed in 2013, and only \$2,500 in work is scheduled.

Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun said the Facilities Services team was consulted and agreed the plan was doable. The board accepted the plan.

Palliser Grade 3 teachers weigh in on Student Learner Assessments

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard shared results of a survey of Palliser teachers on the Grade 3 Student Learner Assessments (SLAs) conducted in Palliser this fall. The tests were part of a provincial pilot project of a potential replacement for Provincial Achievement Tests. The Palliser survey found a majority of teachers did not find the SLAs easy to administer or mark. Most also did not find the data collected through SLAs was effective or useful in impacting the teaching of literacy or numeracy.

The results collected in the Palliser survey will be shared with Alberta Education.

Planning begins on student leadership conference March 20-21

Palliser Regional Schools will host a student leadership conference March 20-21 at Calgary Christian's elementary and secondary campuses.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard said Sheldon Kennedy, a former professional hockey player who is now an advocate for mental health issues and support for young victims of sexual abuse, will be a keynote speaker.

Rivard said students will also have an opportunity to serve as an advisory committee to Superintendent Kevin Gietz.



Schools in Palliser will be closed the weeks of Dec. 22 and Dec. 29, with students returning to classes Jan. 5, 2015. We hope all students, staff and their families have a great two-week holiday! The next regular board meeting is Jan. 20.