

Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

January 20, 2015



Craig Whitehead sworn in as trustee

The six-member Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools is back to full strength, as Trustee Craig Whitehead was sworn in as the first order of business at the Jan. 20 meeting.

Whitehead joins the board by acclamation, representing Ward 1, Subdivision 4, an area in Lethbridge County that includes the communities of Picture Butte and Iron Springs.

Although his first official act as trustee was attending the board meeting, he's actually had an eventful time since nomination day on Jan. 5, when anyone interested in running in the Palliser byelection had to file nomination papers in person at Central Office in Lethbridge. The night before, he was travelling to southern Alberta from the United States when he encountered a blizzard. His vehicle wound up in a ditch north of Coutts. He hitched a ride and spent the night in Milk River. He made it to Lethbridge about 15 minutes before the deadline to submit his nomination papers.

Since then, he's attended a board and staff lunch at Huntsville School Jan. 14, and participated in interviews for the vice-principalship at Picture Butte High School. After spending the day in the board meeting, Whitehead was headed back to Picture Butte to attend school council meetings at both the high school and Dorothy Dalgliesh School.

To learn more about Palliser's newest trustee, please visit <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/board-of-trustees/meet-your-trustees>

Board is back in business for new year

The board welcomed back Trustee Debbie Laturnus,

who took a brief leave to deal with a family emergency. Laturnus reported on her work as a member of the Coaldale Community Connection Committee, which

brings together community agencies to share information about programming available in town, as well as the school council meeting at Kate Andrews High School.

Trustee Robert Strauss said last month he attended his first Christmas concert at Barons School, an alternative program for Low German-speaking Mennonite students. He filled in for Vice-Chair Don Zech, who represents the area. "It's pretty special," Strauss said of the Barons event and school community.

Strauss expressed appreciation for staff at Palliser Beyond Borders, which offers online programming to high school students across the division, after hearing from Brant Christian School about the PBB team's efforts to accommodate student needs.

Trustee Esther Willms passed along compliments to the Facilities Services staff from the school community at Sunnyside School, and Zech expressed appreciation to the staff at Huntsville School. During a board-staff lunch at Huntsville, each member of the staff had opportunity to share their success stories.

Support for school resource officers

With a change in policing coming to Coaldale, Palliser's board expressed strong support for maintaining the school resource officer role in the town's schools.

The Town of Coaldale will end its contract with the Lethbridge Regional Police Service and transition to RCMP policing on Jan. 1, 2016.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said having police officers



Board Chair Colleen Deitz congratulates Trustee Craig Whitehead following his swearing-in as the new trustee for Ward 1, Subdivision 4.

in schools can be incredibly positive when the officer is committed to connecting with students.

At a signing ceremony of the Southwest Regional Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocol Jan. 19, Kevin Cameron, an internationally recognized expert in threat assessment, spoke highly of the value of having police officers in schools. He said at-risk students will gravitate to the police if the right personality is involved, helping those students stay out of trouble.

Jennie Emery review finds literacy focus, caring staff among school strengths

A review of Jennie Emery Elementary School found strong support for the school's literacy focus.

Director of Learning Cynthia Gietz presented the findings of the review conducted Oct. 30.

The review found other school strengths include a caring staff and strong sense of team.

Areas of refinement include meeting all learner's needs, a desire for additional supports for some learners, and need for another playground.

Grade 3-4 students identified disruptions in the classroom as an issue, a common theme from students in reviews and other surveys. Gietz said it will be up to the school team to learn more about what those distractions are and how that issue might be remedied.

As part of the review, students, staff and parents are surveyed and groups of students, parents and support staff participate in focus group meetings. Teachers are interviewed one-on-one.

The data is presented to the school leadership and staff which can then celebrate strengths, dig deeper into what the results mean and formulate an action plan to address areas of refinement.

The school principal then presents a follow-up report to the board, roughly six months after the review data is received.

Review data a great resource to new principal at Champion School

School review data is a gold mine for a school's incoming principal, said Greg Rollingson, new principal at Champion School.

Although he wasn't at the school when the review was conducted in October 2013, the collected information has helped drive the school team's direction this year.

Rollingson, providing his follow-up report to the school review, told the board he sees great value in the review process, having experienced a school review twice as a teacher, once as member of Palliser's lead teacher cohort for up and coming school leaders, and once since becoming a principal, as a member of a review team.

"I do like how appreciative it is," he said, as the review team goes in looking for evidence of school strengths. "The more data I get, the more informed I am about the things we need at the Champion School."

The review identified outdated resources as a concern, so this year modernized technology and literacy resources have been a priority, using current budget and previous surpluses.

The school has increased communication home, using text notification software, letters, phone calls and a weekly newsletter. Communication among staff has been boosted through a Monday morning meeting, frequent emails, collaboration time and team input on decisions.

The review celebrated the strong community and welcoming atmosphere at the school, something visitors to the school immediately notice. The school's focus on student success was also a strength, particularly in literacy. Students are progressing based on assessment data and regular check-ins with each student. Staff professional development has been literacy focused.

Rollingson said he's also working on building a school identity based on the Champion Charger (the war horse, not the cell phone power cord), and making improvements to the stage lighting for better Christmas and band productions, which are highly valued in the community.

Palliser staff to present at national conference on rural education

Palliser Central Office administrators will offer two sessions at the National Congress on Rural Education in Canada, being held in Saskatoon March 29 -31. Two proposals were submitted to conference organizers and both were accepted. One will share Palliser's experience in offering a three-year induction program for beginning teachers. The other will share the division's model for inclusive education and the improved achievement for students with even the most severe needs.

Board plans regional meetings

Now that the board is back to full strength, it will hold regional meetings with stakeholders to share information about Palliser in advance of a planned late May divisionwide gathering.

The first and only divisionwide gathering of staff, students, parents and public was held in May 2012 in Vulcan, with stakeholders from across the division working in small groups to share their thoughts on school success. The format was well received by participants.

The February meetings would be to provide participants a deeper understanding of the significant change in Palliser over the past decade. That information of how the division got to where it is today would serve as

a basis for a May gathering to discuss where the division should move from here in its ongoing development.

More details about the stakeholder meetings will be shared shortly, once dates, times and sites are finalized.

Virtual meeting option for PD well received by Palliser teachers

A Palliser effort to reduce teacher travel time to divisionwide professional development days was well received, according to survey results of the division's professional staff.

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger, who oversees Technology Services, said a survey sent to teachers following the Dec. 1 collaboration day received 214 responses, with 82 per cent of respondents expressing satisfaction with having a choice of three sites (Coaldale, Calgary and Vulcan) where they could meet with colleagues and connect with their professional learning groups using technology.

Based on the results, Palliser will be changing its four divisionwide collaboration days. The first and last of the four days will be held face-to-face with all teachers meeting in Vulcan. The two collaboration days in the middle will be held using technology, to reduce travel.

The travel to collaboration days was raised by Palliser's C2 Committee of trustees, teachers and Central Office administration which is examining teacher workload and efficacy.

Palliser continues work to establish partnership for students from China

Palliser officials will travel to China, at the invitation of Bela Education Group, to further investigate a partnership program that would see students studying in English in China for two years of high school, before travelling to southern Alberta to complete their third year. This "2+1" program has more of the study occurring in China than the original "1+2" program originally discussed. The trip would be an opportunity for Palliser to review the English language program being offered in China and assess whether the program would support student success during a year of study in Canada. A delegation from Bela toured several Palliser schools in October.

Shortage of spare bus drivers an issue

The board received an annual accountability report from Transportation Services Supervisor David Shaw documenting achievements from the past year.

The division owns 88 schools buses, with an average age of 10 years and the oldest of the fleet now 20 years

old. This year, Palliser purchased three new buses. The department has noted a decline in replacement part costs as a result of the addition of new buses.

The division transports nearly 1,800 students daily, travelling 1.8 million kilometres each year over 59 routes.

Shaw said the department ended 2013-2014 with a \$132,000 surplus, representing higher than expected provincial funding and revenue from field trips.

All regular route drivers have completed S endorsement (defensive driving and safety) training, and all have first-aid training. Drivers were also provided Supporting Individuals through Valued Attachments (SIVA) training this year.

The Think of Us on the Bus safety campaign continued for a third year.

The purchase of five more camera systems capable of recording inside and outside the bus continues to ensure accountability by Palliser drivers and the motoring public.

Shaw identified the shortage of certified Class 2 spare drivers as a key issue being experienced across the province. Application information to become a spare driver can be found on Palliser's website at <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/services/transportation-services>

Online system tracking safety training

The board received its first accountability report on occupational health and safety work in the division.

Facilities Services Supervisor Darren Stocker said the division has implemented a Public School Works system, an online information and accountability tool to ensure workplace safety. Using the system, the division can set up tasks for each school and individual employee that includes timelines, reminders and compliance reports for fire and safety drills; distribute a monthly safety checklist sent to all caretakers and a task list to be completed and recorded in the system; ensure monthly safety committee meetings are held and tracked; and offered two rounds of training for all Palliser employees, the first to be completed at the start of the school year, the second to be done by the end of February.

A third round of training on hazard assessment will be released in mid-February, with staff being given four weeks to complete the courses online.

Stocker said a second round of hazard assessments will be conducted at all Palliser-owned sites as a follow up to the initial assessments conducted in Spring 2013.

The division is compliant with all building and transportation inspections.

Next regular meeting: Feb. 10, 2015 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge