

Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

February 10, 2015



Barons, Carmangay balancing diverse needs of LGM community

The families served by Palliser schools at Barons and Carmangay — all Low German-speaking Mennonites — don't have a tradition of education in their culture, but they've embraced and supported these schools.

Principal Nathan Sillito said school council meetings routinely attract 40 or more parents, and there are parent volunteers active in the school daily.

This year, three students are expected to graduate from Carmangay's outreach high school, matching the three who have graduated since the school opened in 2010-2011, he said.

The numbers may sound small, but every graduation is a celebration given the number of students who leave school early for work.

In presenting his team's response to the school review conducted in April 2014, Sillito painted a picture of two schools whose staff are deeply caring and respectful of the Low German-speaking Mennonite culture and who are rising to the challenge of balancing different views of what parents want for their children.

For example, the review found parents want more German instruction and more options, including music and computers. Generally, parents who want more German religious and language instruction don't want music or computers.

To meet those diverse wants, Barons School now has a computer club as an extracurricular activity for Grade 5-6 students at lunch. It's strictly voluntary and parents must provide consent for a student to participate. Some of the students have never touched a computer before.

German instruction was increased as well. The time is largely devoted to catechism and hymns, with some handwriting in High German. All other instruction in the school is conducted in English.

There are 200 students between the two campuses, with Barons serving early learning through Grade 6 and Carmangay for Grade 7-12.

The review found a need for more books to support the school's focus on literacy, and identified an issue of student respect for adults, each other and school property. The condition of the school yard and parking lot was also identified as an area for improvement.

In response, Sillito said the library collection, including resources for teachers, is being beefed up, teachers are focusing on the Seven Habits of Highly Successful People to address respect issues and have a healthy living initiative to build personal responsibility, and a campaign last spring to address the Richardson ground squirrel (aka gopher) population significantly improved the school grounds.

Sillito said he is using Google tools to improve communications internally with all staff.

He said he is exploring options with Palliser Human Resources to improve support for English as a Second Language instruction.

Palliser Beyond Borders catering to student needs for anytime learning

Statistics from the first semester this year at Palliser Beyond Borders shows about a third of learners are operating on a semester system, completing courses by the end of January, while the remainder take more time through the school year.

Palliser Beyond Borders Principal Alison Hancox, presenting to the Board of Trustees, said this information demonstrates the online school needs a continuous intake model, to give students the flexibility they need, with some courses offered over a single semester while others need a full-year registration.

Between students enrolled only with Beyond Borders and those registered through Picture Butte Outreach, PASS+ Outreach in Coaldale and Vulcan Outreach, there were 421 students in 786 courses in first semester, Hancox said.

To ensure student success, Hancox said the school needs to break a bias about online learning, that students can delay their work until just before a deadline. Instead, students should maintain a steady pace, with regular assessment of their learning over time. Beyond Borders staff have created semester or full-year work plans for students to follow. They can work faster or slower, but the plan encourages them to work regularly to ensure they complete courses over time.

This year, Palliser staff have been building literacy assessment into courses, in keeping with the division focus on literacy development. In August, 139 online courses had the literacy component built, and as time goes on,

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

more course are being enhanced for literacy. Over time, exemplars of student work will be collected, so other students can assess how their own work can be improved.

New 30-level high school courses are now being piloted, and Music 10, 20 and 30 courses are in development.

A review of analytics of traffic to the [Palliser Beyond Borders website](#) shows most traffic comes from Canada, but there is also regular traffic from Brazil. The analytics from Palliser's Moodle website, where students access courses, finds 655 students across Palliser are using Moodle throughout the week and weekends, and even during school holidays. Peak usage between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. indicates Palliser blended learning model — some students are timetabled for online learning, while others are logging in over their lunch breaks to access learning.

Palliser Beyond Borders uses Blackboard Collaborate to record instruction and to connect teachers to students in real time. So far this year, 986 students have logged into live sessions with a teacher, and more than 300 have accessed recordings of sessions, taking advantage of the technology to review lessons as they need.

Hancox said the completion rate was 81 per cent in the first semester. If a student registers for a course and doesn't start within the first three weeks, staff intervene to help keep students on track.

Board Chair Colleen Deitz said the Vulcan Adult Education council has expressed interest in having adult learners access courses through Palliser Beyond Borders, something Palliser administration will investigate.

'Best-case' budget assumptions include zero increase in instruction grants

Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun laid out preliminary budget assumptions for the board, a series of best-case scenario guesses, pending the announcement of the provincial budget. The budget announcement is expected in the third week of March.

The assumptions include:

- Infrastructure, Maintenance and Renewal (IMR) funding will be reduced back to preliminary 2014/15 levels, and adjusted for enrolment (estimated at \$1.0 million, down from \$2.15 million). Project expenditures would be reduced accordingly.
- Plant Operations and Maintenance (PO & M) funding will be reduced based on the full impact of the loss of Glenmore Christian Academy. Glenmore returned to private school status for the 2014-2015 school year and the PO & M funding formula uses enrolment figures from the previous year. The change in enrolment will reduce PO & M to \$6.1 million, from this year's \$6.4 million. Expenditures

would be adjusted accordingly.

- Transportation funding rates to remain the same. Possibly one additional route required.
- All instructional funding rates to remain the same (best case scenario versus a cut).
- Impact of Provincial ATA Framework Agreement for teachers (two per cent increase Sept. 1, 2015 and one per cent lump sum in November 2015). Estimated cost impact of \$1.17 million, with no funding increase.
- Class size funding and guidelines maintained in kindergarten to Grade 3.
- Palliser's \$1.6 million 2014/15 structural deficit to be partially or fully mitigated through expenditure reductions.
- Enrolment projections are currently being provided by school administration. Early indications are that enrolments will be down slightly. HR and Finance Services will be meeting with school administrators to discuss school budgets beginning in March.
- In order to balance the budget, school fees, staffing formulas, facility rental rates, department budgets and tuition fees charged to international students are being reviewed.
- Every part of the organization is being evaluated for efficiency improvements and possible cost savings.
- Any new initiatives would have to be offset by an equivalent cost reduction in another area.

Braun said the board's policy on student transportation will have to be reviewed in light of coming changes to provincial legislation and regulations. Alberta's new Education Act and a draft regulation on student transportation removes the 2.4-kilometre walk regulation. Currently students living within 2.4 km of their school are not eligible for funding to ride the bus.

Third bus route to be added to Sunnyside starting March 1

The Board of Trustees adjusted the budget for this year's Transportation Services to allow an additional expenditure of about \$9,000 to add a third bus to serve Sunnyside School. The school, which serves early learners through Grade 6 students, has two bus routes, both running full. The first on and last off the bus have ride times of about 80 minutes twice a day.

The new route will reduce the \$20,000 surplus projected for Transportation Services in 2014-2015. The projected cost of the route for a full year is estimated at \$22,500, including wages, fuel, repairs and amortization of the fleet.

The new route will take effect March 1. Sunnyside School is located just minutes from Noth Lethbridge.

ASEBP offers Early Intervention Program to help employees return to work

Palliser employees eligible for benefits through Alberta School Employee Benefits Plan will now have access to an Early Intervention Program. The program can assist employees facing more than a casual illness and whose return to work may temporarily require reduced hours or modified duties due to illness or injury.

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger said the addition of the plan comes at no additional cost to the board and with no increase to premiums.

If eligible for early intervention and if both the employer and employee agree to participate in the program, someone from ASEBP can be assigned to the employee's case to help expedite assessments from medical experts and ensure information about the employee's abilities and restrictions is provided to develop an appropriate return to work plan.

Draft school calendar for 2016-2017 to be circulated to schools for input

As schools work on their own 2015-2016 school calendars, the Board of Trustees clarified some of its expectations.

As part of the calendar process, school administrators are creating their schedules for instruction. The trustees reiterated that students need a lunch break of no less than 40 minutes. Recess breaks should be no less than 15 minutes. The board discussed the difficulty of schools offering clubs and extracurricular activities in a lunch break

shorter than 40 minutes. Less than 15 minutes for recess is problematic for young students who may struggle to get boots and coats on and still have time to play outside.

The board also decided on a draft school calendar for 2016-2017 which will now be distributed to school administrators for input from staff and school councils. In recent years, the board has begun adopting its division calendars two years in advance in hopes of giving parents more time to plan their own schedules.

Individual school calendars may vary from the division calendar, but key dates in common across Palliser should include the first and last days of school, the Christmas break and the four division-wide collaboration days, during which teachers from across the division meet for professional development. Key differences from school to school may include site-based professional development days and Easter break. Schools in the City of Calgary, for example, take a week-long break at the end of March, aligning with the practice of the Calgary Board of Education, and then take a long weekend at Easter.

To view the draft, download the PDF [here](#).

The draft calendar for 2016-2017 has staff returning on Monday, Aug. 29, 2016, and students returning on Tuesday, Sept. 6, 2016, after the Labour Day long weekend. It suggests a Christmas break beginning Monday, Dec. 19, 2016, with students returning on Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2017. The last day of school for students would be Wednesday, June 28, 2017.

Schools that share Palliser bus service are expected to co-ordinate their school calendars accordingly.

Parent and staff feedback on this draft calendar may be submitted through the school principal or school council.

Next meeting: 9 a.m., March 17 at Palliser Centre, Lethbridge

