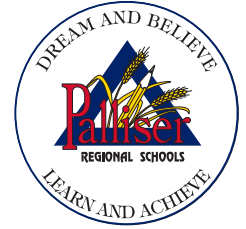


# Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

November 25, 2015



## R.I. Baker's literacy focus includes improving classroom libraries

The Board of Trustees welcomed the leadership team from R.I. Baker Middle School, Coaldale, sharing its response to a school review conducted there in December 2014.

Principal Jason Prebushewski, who was a vice-principal when the review was conducted, and Lindsey Hagen, who joined the school as VP this fall, discussed the review findings and their team's response.

R.I. Baker serves about 350 students in Grades 5 through 8 in Coaldale.

School strengths included a caring, approachable staff, a wide variety of exploratories available to students, a focus on literacy and excellent library, as well as many clubs, activities and athletics. Prebushewski said the school team is using annual Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment data to continue to improve instruction for individual student needs.

Hagen said staff have focused on improving classroom libraries to ensure students are in an environment rich in literacy resources. As someone new to the school, she began by exploring each classroom, talking with teachers about the classroom libraries, taking pictures and compiling a report on whether the books aligned with both the subjects taught in the room and the student's reading levels.

"We noticed across the board, classroom libraries were at high levels, but we have students in the classroom who aren't yet reading at the level of the books in the library in the room," she said. "We need students to find books they can be successful with."

The staff talked about what they needed for space and books, whether music books for the band room or blueprints for construction class. In one classroom, there was an identified need for books featuring strong female characters. The reading resources purchased were specific and intentional to the students' needs.

Prebushewski said he and Hagen incorporate individual student literacy data in their instructional supervision plans so they can have conversations with the teacher about differentiated instruction specific to individual students.

He said not only are staff highly familiar with student

data, but the school held a data analysis night with parents to discuss everything from provincial achievement test results, to literacy assessments and Accountability Pillar survey results. The goal was to reflect on the data to find ways to improve.

The school is also working on a communication plan, incorporating social media and other tools to reach parents and other stakeholders. Staff receive a weekly information bulletin, and teachers have increased communication with parents.

Some of that increased communication has been focused on student respect and discipline to ensure everyone understands expectations for behaviour. There's an emphasis on consistent and firm responses to issues of disrespect.

Board Chair Colleen Deitz thanked Prebushewski and Hagen for their presentation and their ongoing work at R.I. Baker Middle School.

## Annual report highlights include increased collaboration efforts

The board approved in principle its combined Annual Education Results Report 2014-2015 and Three-Year Education Plan for 2015-2018. The combined report offers a highlight reel of accomplishments last year and strategies for continuing to improve in coming years.

The plan reflects a continued focus on literacy, assessment for learning and ensuring safe and caring schools, said Superintendent Kevin Gietz.

The report was approved in principle because required elements such as budget information were scheduled for board approval later in the meeting. Also, a technical glitch in Alberta Education reporting wasn't including Palliser's newest schools, Calgary Islamic School Akram Jomaa Campus and Omar Bin Al-Khattab Campus, in class size reports. It was expected that missing data would be resolved within days.

The full report is expected to be back for final approval at the board's Dec. 8 meeting.

This year's annual report highlights include an increased focus on collaboration. Based on the success of the division's academic wrap-around team which brings together Central Office literacy, technology and inclusive

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

education experts with a school-based team of teachers to support the learning needs of a struggling or gifted student, Palliser is starting similar teams in other areas. A principal wrap-around team will see Central Office administrators sharing their expertise with school leaders to tackle site-specific needs. Associate Superintendent Human Resources Ken Garinger said at one principal wrap-around there were more than 120 years of principal experience at the table joining in the discussion.

The model will further be expanding this year with the work of a wrap-around team of Technology Services experts who will work with school staff to improve how technology supports student learning.

The report showcases Palliser's outstanding student achievement results, sustained strong stakeholder satisfaction rates, and growth in 2015-2016 with 8,170 students and more than 1,000 staff.

The full report can be downloaded in PDF format from Palliser's website at: <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/download/38522>

A two-page summary is also online at <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/download/39043>

## Board seeks input from council chairs

Trustees expressed appreciation to school council representatives and staff who attended a gathering of school councils Nov. 23. This was the first such gathering in a few years in Palliser, and was one of the recommendations to emerge from a division-wide stakeholders meeting in May 2015. Because of the division's size, participants met at three locations in Lethbridge, Vulcan and Calgary. The three sites were united using Google Hangout technology.

Trustees said they heard positive comments from participants who had an opportunity to talk about the great work school councils are doing across Palliser.

Participants were asked to consider future gatherings of school council representatives and whether they want to pursue professional development together. A survey will be sent to school council chairs and gathering participants to collect information on whether a PD opportunity is wanted and what type of schedule would work best for parents.

## Palliser keen to support refugees

Palliser Regional Schools is interested in helping Syrian refugees coming to Alberta within weeks. Superintendent Kevin Gietz and Board Chair Colleen Deitz had a brief conversation with Minister of Education David Eggen recently on the topic. Several hundred school-aged children are expected among the refugees being settled in Calgary where Palliser has Christian and Islamic schools.

Classroom space is a major challenge in the city.

## New Calgary outreach program to start

Palliser has received all the necessary approvals and has signed a lease on space in northeast Calgary for the new Palliser Alternative Outreach School. The outreach high school located near both Heritage Christian Academy and Calgary Islamic School Akram Jomaa campus will provide a flexible learning environment to high school students.

Associate Superintendent Education Services Stan Hielema said work will begin shortly on preparing the space for students for use starting in second semester.

This will be the first of Palliser's Calgary schools that is started by the division. The other programs were former private schools who joined the school division as alternative programs.



David Usher served as a keynote speaker at the Student Leadership Conference. Here he performs with a student from Picture Butte High School.

## Student leadership event a hit

Associate Superintendent Education Services Pat Rivard thanked the planning committee behind the Student Leadership Conference Nov. 20, co-chaired by Calgary Christian Secondary School Principal Jason Kupery and R.I. Baker Middle School Principal Jason Prebushewski. Membership included several other staff members, students from several Palliser high schools, and executive assistant Barb Erler, who was "the glue that put the pieces together."

Rivard said feedback from the student participants was being gathered and early comments were positive and powerful.

One student said the conference was highly motivating. “When myself and other school fellows had first been invited to this conference, some of us felt a little uneasy because we thought that we’ll be a minority at the conference and being from an Islamic School, some of us thought we would be treated and viewed the way the world portrayed us but I guess that we generally had at all wrong,” the student wrote. “Everyone was so busy having fun and learning that no one really payed attention to who was who.” The board discussed submitting a presentation proposal to the National Congress on Rural Education to have student leaders talk about the conference.

“There were adults around but they were not leading the show,” Rivard said.

The event included students from across Palliser. About 50 of about 500 participants earned credits for their work as mentors and leaders. That revenue generation coupled with donations helped with the cost of the event.

## **Growing number of students reading at or above grade level**

The percentage of students in Grades 2-6 reading at or above expected level continues to grow across Palliser.

Director of Learning Cynthia Gietz presented results of this fall’s Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments.

About six per cent more students in Grades 2-6 are reading at expected level than in Fall 2014. The data doesn’t not include students who were already reading at a Grade 7 level and weren’t tested this fall. The numbers also don’t include students at Calgary Islamic School, which is new to the Palliser literacy program.

The division continues to support teachers gain expertise in literacy instruction, Gietz said. This year, about 30 new teachers were training in conducting reading assessments, in addition to 70 staff at the two campuses of Calgary Islamic School.

The academic wrap-around team also continues to work with teachers across the division to better serve students who are struggling or need enrichment. The team of Central Office experts in literacy, technology integration and inclusive education have consulted with school-based teams to support 39 students so far this year and has another 23 booked through the end of January.

The statistics only reflect data from students who were tested this fall, and doesn’t include the many students who already attained Grade 7 reading level. Assessments are also not conducted on students with severe disabilities. About three per cent of Grade 4 students are already reading at a Grade 7 level this fall, Gietz said. By Spring 2019, Palliser expects 95 per cent of Grade 3 students will be reading at grade level.

## **Updated budget set at \$92.3 million**

The board passed its fall budget update and audited financial statement.

The fall budget is significantly changed from the spring projections with the addition of Calgary Islamic School. With the new schools and additional staff, Palliser now expects to have revenue of \$92.355 million in 2015-2016 and expenses to match.

The board approved the purchase of five school buses and an additional vehicle for use by itinerant staff travelling between schools. The budget also includes the completion of a planned upgrade to software used by human resources, payroll and finance departments.

The fall budget update can be found online [here](#).

## **Audit shows strengthened financial position thanks to cost cutting effort**

The board received the results of their annual independent audit, conducted by KPMG LLP. The auditors stated “the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position” of the division at Aug. 31, 2015, in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards.

The audit shows Palliser ended the 2014-2015 fiscal year in a stronger financial position than projected in its budget, said Secretary-Treasurer Wayne Braun.

In Spring 2014, the division budgeted for a \$1.5 million shortfall, to be covered from reserves. Thanks to higher than projected revenue and cost cutting measures in Central Office and schools, the shortfall was reduced to \$341,000. This deficit was covered from operating reserves.

With that \$341,000 draw down on reserves, the division’s has an unrestricted surplus of \$351,000; operating reserves of nearly \$4.2 million and capital reserves of \$368,000. Palliser’s accumulated operating surplus stands at just shy of \$9.1 million, down from \$9.4 million on Aug. 31, 2014. The \$9.1 million accumulated operating surplus includes \$4.1 million, representing the value of the Central Office building and land in Lethbridge, school buses and other vehicles and equipment.

Of the \$4.2 million operating reserves, the board set aside \$3.3 million in a fiscal stability reserve to buffer the division from enrolment and funding fluctuations. That fiscal stability reserve represents about nine days of the cost of operating Palliser.

In 2014-2015, Palliser spent \$914,000 of capital funding on provincially approved building projects. Major work included purchase, installation and servicing of two modular classrooms at Jennie Emery Elementary School, Coaldale, and architect fees related to design of the Noble Central School modernization project.



Administration expenses in 2014-2015 totalled \$2.9 million or 3.59 per cent of the total budget, slightly under the allowable spending cap of 3.6 per cent.

Transportation Services had a small surplus of \$40,000, thanks to revenues generated by external field trips.

Facilities Services oversaw and undertook \$1.2 million in infrastructure maintenance renewal projects. Major projects included boiler replacement at Barons School and John Davidson School in Coaldale and roof replacement at Sunnyside School, just outside Lethbridge.

Schools reduced their board-allocated fund surpluses in 2014-2015 by about \$294,000, primarily spent on literacy and technology resources for students. There remains about \$770,000 in school surpluses. This is money the board allocated in previous years to schools from provincial funding.

Schools continue to hold \$929,000 in school-generated funds, raised through fundraisers, fees, gifts or donations. That's down from \$1.1 million in August 2014. The Board continues to encourage schools to reduce school-generated surpluses and ensure that money from fees or fundraisers is spent in the year they're collected. Fees or fundraisers should have a clearly stated purpose and be spent accordingly.

Instruction in Early Childhood Services and Grades 1-12 cost \$64.1 million of \$81 million in expenditures. That translates to 79 per cent of Palliser's 2014-2015 budget going into classrooms.

Board Chair Colleen Deitz thanked Secretary-Treasurer Wayne Braun and his staff in Financial Services for their work with the auditors and throughout the year.

A copy of the audited financial statement is found on the Palliser website [here](#).

## **Modernization prep work continues**

Secretary Treasurer Wayne Braun, who oversees Facility Services, said Palliser met recently with representatives of the Village of Nobleford to visit the community centre and discuss its use for physical education classes once construction begins. The Village of Nobleford is seeking standard rental rates for use of the community centre during the school's modernization. The board discussed

investigating the cost of busing students to Barons School to use that gym for basketball, and to use the outdoor area at Nobleford to physical education classes, weather permitting, to save rental costs of the community centre.

The modernization project at Noble Central School will go to tender shortly.

The board passed a motion as recommended by Alberta Infrastructure to delegate some authority over tendering recommendations to the superintendent. The recommendation is intended to expedite the tendering process and avoid the cost of calling a special board meeting to consider tenders. If all tenders come in over the preapproved budget, the tenders would come back to the board. In the past, the board has not approved building tenders.

## **Huntsville School becomes top priority in updated three-year capital plan**

The board amended its three-year capital plan, switching the top two priorities. Alberta Education officials visited Barons and Huntsville schools this fall and recommended work at the school in Iron Springs is more urgent than what's needed in Barons. Barons School had its boiler system replaced this summer. A decline in enrolment there was also a factor in the decision to move Barons to second spot on the priority list. Huntsville School, built in 1941 with an addition in 1958, is prone to flooding.

The other priorities on the plan are unchanged: Coalhurst High School mini-modernization; Kate Andrews High School modernization; and John Davidson School.

## **Subcommittee to review Master's deal**

The board voted to strike a subcommittee to meet with representatives from Master's Academy Educational Society to discuss revising the master agreement between them. That agreement sets out the partnership that makes Master's Academy and College alternative programs in Palliser. The board approved amending Clause 12.3 of the agreement to reduce the termination notice period from 18 months to 15 months for 2015-2016 only. That would give either party until March 31 to serve notice to end the agreement for the 2017-2018 school year.

**Next regular meeting will be held Dec. 8, 2015 at Palliser Centre, Lethbridge**