

Highlights of a Special Meeting of the Board

January 26, 2016



Board discusses LGBTQ guidelines, expects drafts tabled Feb. 9 for input

The Board of Trustees convened a special meeting Jan. 26 to discuss Alberta Education's "Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions."

The guidelines were released by the department Jan. 13, the day after the last regular board meeting, sparking considerable discussion across the province about practices to protect students and staff who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ).

Several trustees and administrators from Palliser joined a conference call offered by Alberta Education on Jan. 15 to hear more information on the guidelines for best practices.

Acting Chair Robert Strauss said the purpose of the special meeting was to provide trustees additional information on the issue. School boards have until March 31 to submit policy and procedure to demonstrate compliance with new legislation aimed at protecting students and staff from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Associate Superintendents Education Services Stan Hielema and Pat Rivard led the trustees through Palliser's existing foundational statements, board policy and administrative procedures that address the provision of a safe, caring and respectful environment for students and staff. The division's foundational statements refer to educating all students in an equitable manner, fostering positive self-esteem in students, and ensuring schools are safe and supportive learning environments.

Director of Learning Laurie Wilson shared the 12 guidelines. She said the guidelines ([found here](#)) emphasize collaborative solutions to support students, and during the conference call, Alberta Education stressed the need to address issues on a case by case basis.

Elements in the best practices that have raised considerable controversy are related to washrooms and change rooms, and ensuring students can use the washroom/change room congruent with the gender they identify as. One best practice would be to provide gender neutral, single-stalled washrooms for any student needing additional privacy, something that may require costly

remodelling in some schools.

Rivard said many schools already have single-stalled washrooms that can provide privacy for students for any number of reasons. In each case, the process and discussion regarding use of the private washroom "respects their dignity and accommodates accordingly."

He said Palliser already has students who have self-identified as LGBTQ, and staff find practical solutions that protect and respect all students.

Wilson said many of the students who have self-identified would not choose some of the practices outlined in the guidelines because they would shine a spotlight on individuals who may not want it. By addressing student needs case by case, school staff can ensure the solution best meets individual needs.

Should the school and administration's proposed solution not be agreeable to the student or family, decisions can be appealed to the board, Superintendent Kevin Gietz said.

The board expects to receive a draft of amended or new board policy and administrative procedures at its regular meeting scheduled for Feb. 9. Once tabled with the board, those drafts will be distributed to school councils, Palliser principals and vice-principals, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and shared publicly on the division's website and social media so stakeholders can provide input.

Feedback on the drafts will be considered at the board's regular meeting March 8. Input can be provided to Palliser in writing. Individuals or groups wishing to present their feedback to the board in person at the March 8 meeting are asked to contact the Superintendent's office in advance so time can be set aside on the agenda to hear submissions. Strauss said he expects the board will need a special board meeting in late March in order to finalize new or amended policy and procedures in time to submit to Alberta Education by the March 31 deadline.

Once the changes to policy or procedures are submitted to Alberta Education, it's expected the department will take time to review documents to ensure they are in keeping with provincial legislation.

Moment of silence for La Loche

The board held a moment of silence in honour of the victims of the shooting in La Loche, Sask. Jan. 22.