

Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

January 12, 2016



Urgent item added to agenda — request for independent review

The regular meeting of the Board of Trustees began with an urgent addition to the agenda, dealt with at the start of the meeting.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz presented the board a letter addressing allegations being raised online that “while not verified as true, have become a distraction from daily operations in Palliser.” He requested the board order an independent external review of operations to put to rest the allegations.

The board agreed with the need for a review and submitted a request to the Minister of Education for his office to provide oversight to the process to ensure confidence in the independence and integrity of the review.

The board’s motion was passed unanimously.

Heritage increasing engagement efforts, communication with home

In its 10th year as part of Palliser Regional Schools, Heritage Christian Academy is celebrating its strengths as a school with a caring, respectful environment, effective leadership and a focus on continuous improvement.

Those strengths emerged from a school review conducted last year. Heritage Christian Academy is a kindergarten through Grade 12 school serving about 650 students in northeast Calgary.

Principal Ryan Brennan and Vice-Principals Leslie Olson and Dan Magnan shared with the board their team’s response to the findings of the school review.

The review found areas of refinement included getting more parents engaged in school council and increasing communication with home.

To address these needs, the school often features speakers at school council meetings and those speakers have attracted additional parents. To improve communication with parents, all teachers now maintain their own web pages and share information consistently, Brennan said.

The school has implemented flex time to support literacy, is expanding both the school and classroom libraries, and is adding vocabulary development strategies

across subject areas.

The board thanked the Heritage Christian team for its ongoing efforts to provide a safe and caring environment and outstanding results for students.

Facility support to be available to Palliser’s 17 Hutterite colony schools

The board passed a motion to provide facility support funding to its 17 Hutterite colony schools. The division receives about \$85 per student to support facility upkeep. For colonies, that amounts to about \$30,000. The money can be used to ensure colony classrooms, which are owned by the colony, are safe, comfortable learning spaces. The facility support will be provided for the 2015-2016 school year.

Palliser’s recent trip to China fruitful

Director of Learning Tom Hamer provided the board a report on an international recruiting mission he and Associate Superintendent Education Services Pat Rivard took recently to China.

The 10-day trip saw Palliser visit six major cities, meeting with an Alberta Education representatives there, visits with several groups in Guangzhou, a city of 17 million people, and regional education representatives and schools.

The Palliser duo had an opportunity to visit schools in China and meet with other recruitment agencies.

Bela Education Group, a consulting firm promoting international education in China that has met with Palliser officials several times, is facilitating the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Palliser and the Guangzhou government, which operates the education system in the city.

A delegation from Guangzhou was scheduled to travel to Canada in January with the possibility of signing a memorandum of understanding with Palliser. The non-binding MOU was being vetted by Palliser’s legal counsel in preparation for a possible signing.

Secretary-Treasurer Wayne Braun said the international student program pays for the travel, as the program is already running at a small surplus.

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

Board thankful for RCSD support for creation of child advocacy centre

The board will send a letter of thanks to the Southeast Regional Collaborative Service Delivery organization based in Medicine Hat. The regional group has been supportive of the creation of a child advocacy centre, to support and serve young victims of sexual abuse in southern Alberta.

The centre would be modelled after the Sheldon Kennedy Advocacy Centre in Calgary. That centre brings together law enforcement, health and other human services to provide a one-stop shop for families coping with abuse of a child or youth.

The Southeast RCSD sent a letter of appreciation to Palliser which was presented to the board.

Tender closes on Noble Central modernization project

Trustee Don Zech and Secretary-Treasurer Wayne Braun briefly excused themselves from the board meeting to participate in another important event – the opening of bids from firms vying to serve as the general contractor for the modernization of Noble Central School.

Braun, who oversees Facilities Services in Palliser, said it's hoped a recommendation on the contractor could be submitted to Alberta Infrastructure for approval, paving the way for work to start Feb. 1. It's hoped the modernization work will be complete in August 2017.

The primary goal of the modernization is to make the school accessible to students and staff who have mobility issues.

Agreement with auditor renewed

The board voted to renew its agreement with KPMG in Lethbridge to continue as Palliser's independent auditor for the next three years. Trustee Don Zech recused himself from the discussion as he has business dealings with the firm.

The board commended Secretary-Treasurer Wayne Braun and Palliser's finance department for its thorough work preparing for the audit this fall.

Occupational Health and Safety program continues to expand in Palliser

The board welcomed Darren Stocker, supervisor of Palliser Facilities Services, to share his annual accountability report on the department's Occupational Health and Safety efforts for all staff in Palliser.

Highlights include continued and expanded use of Public School Works, an online training system. The system is being used to track fire and lockdown drills, and monitor compliance that 1,000 Palliser staff have completed safety

training as required. Recently the Crisis Response Digest was added to the Public School Works site.

The department completes safety audits of schools every two years, and recently conducted audits at the two Calgary Islamic School campuses which joined Palliser this fall.

Secretary-Treasurer Wayne Braun, who oversees Facilities Services, and the Board thanked Stocker and his staff for their efforts to ensure Palliser buildings and sites are safe.



Vulcan Prairieview's road to outstanding results began with change in culture

The board welcomed Vulcan Prairieview Elementary School Principal Shane Cranston to report on the transformation of his school and its results.

Cranston, in his 15th year in Palliser and seventh year as principal, said the school's transformation began in 2009 with changes in culture to put students first, establish consistently high expectations for students and staff and create a collaborative environment.

The following year the school implemented combined grades and adopted a literacy focus.

Cranston said he committed 50 per cent of teaching time school wide to language arts, in support of student literacy.

A school review was conducted in 2012, and based on review data, staff identified respect for students as a top priority. The following year, Prairieview implemented a Leader in Me program, which has made a noticeable difference in student behaviour. "It's been fabulous," he said.

Cranston credited Palliser Central Office for its accountability processes, including annual school goals meetings and review process, the high expectations maintained by the Superintendent, and provision of support services including literacy coach, academic wrap-around services and focused professional development. Cranston said Palliser's needs-based funding model has been beneficial to the small school because if the school can demonstrate a need, the resources are made available to meet them.

While the school has improved significantly since 2009, school demographics have been challenging. The kindergarten through Grade 6 school has experienced enrolment decline, losing about 10 students per year as the small town struggles to retain young families.

The community has also experienced a number of traumatic events in recent years, shaking the community, but bringing it together as well.

Cranston said about 30 per cent of the school's roughly 190 students have health and learning challenges, with the degree of need growing among those entering the early learning program.

The school's move to split grades (Grade 1 and 2 students learn in the same classroom, for example) was a matter of choice, not of necessity, and was part of changing the school's culture, Cranston said.

The school's focus on achievement and analyzing the learning needs of each individual student has helped propel rising achievement. Staff are focused on Palliser's Effectiveness Model, which outlines key expectations for students, teachers and principals within areas of priority for the superintendent and board, Cranston said.

The school's academic results are stellar. In 2014-2015, every single Grade 6 student passed the English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies provincial achievement tests. Two-in-three students achieved the standard of excellence in Science and Social. All but one student passed the Grade 6 Math PAT, and 28 per cent achieved the standard of excellence.

Compare that to 2008-2009, when overall 80 per cent of students achieved the acceptable standard (passed), and seven per cent achieved the standard of excellence on Grade 3 and 6 PATs.

The PAT results are echoed in the school's own literacy assessments. In June 2011, 52 per cent of Grade 1-6 students were reading at or above grade level. That number has risen steadily, reaching 90 per cent in June 2015.

Parent, staff and student satisfaction has also gone up, according to provincial surveys.

Board Chair Colleen Deitz congratulated Cranston and his team.

"You and your staff deserve kudos," she said. "You did tough things and you took a lot of heat when you changed to split grades, and you've proved your reasons. . . Good for you and your staff."

Loyal bus drivers, great staff recipe for success in Transportation Services

The board received its annual accountability report from Transportation Services, prompting praise for the

department's leadership and its staff.

Supervisor David Shaw said Palliser is "extremely lucky" to have loyal bus drivers, dedicated mechanics and a strong dispatcher, in administrative assistant Sherrie Shears. Fifty of the division's 58 daily routes have not changed drivers since Shaw joined Palliser in 2012, with one driver having devoted more than 45 years to his route.

Trustees said they appreciated Shaw and his team's work across the division.

Palliser has 90 buses in its fleet and serves nearly 1,800 students per day.

The department also services 10 vans used by facilities staff and a fleet of staff vehicles, which are cheaper to operate and maintain than to pay staff a per-kilometre rate while travelling the large division.

All buses are inspected twice a year, and all drivers receive S endorsement training, a defensive driving course.

There was one collision involving a Palliser bus this fall. The bus driver was not at fault and no students were injured, but a passenger in the other vehicle was killed.

Shaw said one of the highlights of his year is each September when he leads bus safety assemblies in Palliser schools as part of Think of Us on the Bus, a safety program now in its fourth year.

The safety effort receives fantastic support from Commercial Vehicle Enforcement. The system has 20 camera units aboard buses on high traffic routes, helping to capture licence plate information of vehicles that pass buses when stopped for students. The photo evidence and incident reports are sent to law enforcement, who can issue a \$544 ticket for passing a bus stopped with its red lights flashing.

The department ended 2014-2015 with a \$40,000 surplus, due to higher than budgeted government funding and revenue from field trips. Trips booked by community groups outside Palliser often require every bus in the fleet and every available driver.

Board amends membership on subcommittee on Master's agreement

The board voted to change the membership on its subcommittee which will work with Master's Educational Society to propose amendments to the current master agreement. Trustees Esther Willms and Debbie Laturnus will join Craig Whitehead on the subcommittee. The board had passed a motion in November supporting establishment of a subcommittee to work with Master's Society to ensure a new agreement is in place by March 31, 2016. Willms and Laturnus replace Trustees Robert Strauss and Don Zech on the subcommittee.

Next regular meeting: Feb. 9, 2016