

Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

March 15, 2016



The Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools held its regular board meeting March 15 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge. Esther Willms was absent from the meeting.

Committee provides update on the review panel selection process

The committee of trustees has narrowed down its search for candidates for a three-member panel to carry out an independent, external operational review of the school system.

The selection committee consists of Vice-Chair Robert Strauss and Trustees Craig Whitehead and Debbie Laturnus. Strauss provided an update on the committee's work.

In a special meeting of the board on March 10, trustees voted to accept the offer from Alberta Education to provide an educational representative to provide guidance and direction on the implementation and the use of appropriate policy and protocol to support the work of the selection committee.

It was noted that representative is not from the Minister of Education's office, but the administrative arm of Alberta Education. That representative will fill an administrative support role on the committee, a position originally held by Palliser's secretary-treasurer. This will ensure all Palliser staff can remain at arm's length from the process.

A number of potential candidates for the review panel were considered and selection committee chair Strauss said they have narrowed the search down to three individuals for further reference checks and interviews. Once the review panel has been selected the identities of the individuals will be made public.

The review process will be held entirely off-site, said Strauss, and the goal is to have the review finished by the end of June if not sooner. The panel will present its findings to the board once complete.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz had asked the board in January to hold an independent investigation to clear the air in light of online allegations and to allow the staff to focus on students and student learning.

The panel selected to conduct the review must be free to determine the terms of reference to ensure its independence. It was noted at Tuesday's meeting that all

requests and submissions to the board in relation to the review, other than the panel selection process itself, will be forwarded to the review panel to ensure the matter is entirely independent.

In addition to the three trustees and the Alberta Education representative, three school council chairs have been asked to provide input and advice as to the selection process of selecting a panel. Their role is also to observe and ensure transparency and public confidence in the process.

The board passed a motion to seek a meeting with Palliser legal counsel and the deputy or assistant deputy minister regarding the department's current or proposed involvement in the organization review process.

Palliser will request extension to March deadline on safe and caring policy

Palliser will ask the province for an extension of the March deadline to submit its policy in relation to provincial legislation which adds sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression to the Alberta Bill of Rights.

The board also passed motions to seek further legal advice on incorporating parental and religious rights in the draft policy. There were concerns any possible revisions and subsequent requests for public feedback might not be complete before Alberta Education's March 31st deadline for submitting policies related to the legislation.

The board introduced its draft policy, "Safe and Caring Learning Environments," at its February meeting and invited input from stakeholders including school councils and public.

The draft policy is designed to protect students and staff against discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender and physical or mental disability.

Pat Rivard, Associate Superintendent Education Services, provided the board with a review of the feedback received since the draft was tabled.

He said of the 50 letters which were received, there was general support of the draft "Safe and Caring Learning Environments" policy but many individuals expressed concern with the province's published guidelines, which are not part of the legislation. The majority of the concerns received by Palliser revolved around the issue of parental rights, he said.

The board discussed the importance of working with parents to support students, while acknowledging there may be rare instances when the situation at home could put the child's safety at risk.

In addition to the 50 letters, Rivard said Central Office received four phone calls on the draft policy. He also spoke personally with a group of student leaders on their thoughts about the policy. Another 200 letters received by one trustee were shared with the board Tuesday as well.

To view the draft policy go to <http://goo.gl/O8mdui>

Board adds FNMI targets to ed plan

The board approved a change to Palliser's Annual Education Results Report and Three-Year Education Plan to incorporate achievement targets for First Nations, Metis and Inuit students. The change was requested by Alberta Education.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said Palliser has a relatively small First Nations population of about 100, about half of whom live on Siksika First Nation. According to the agreement between Palliser and Siksika, students can only attend Palliser schools up to Grade 9. With such a small population, results can vary widely from one year to the next.

Trustees reviewed the targets, found on Page 35 of the report, and said they seem achievable. The updated report can be found online [here](#).

Grade reconfiguration may be needed to address Jennie Emery crowding

Trustees received a report of utilization rates at its Coaldale schools. The rates reflect the square footage considered available for instruction and student enrolment.

Jennie Emery Elementary has a utilization rate of 92 per cent and the school grounds have no more space for more modular classrooms. R.I. Baker Middle School, for Grade 5 to 8, is at 68 per cent utilization. Kate Andrews High School, for Grade 9-12, is at 61 per cent. John Davidson School, an alternative program serving Low German-speaking Mennonite students, is at 39 per cent.

Secretary-Treasurer Wayne Braun, who oversees Palliser facilities, said the division may need to consider grade reconfiguration to address the crowding at Jennie Emery.

The board passed a resolution asking administration to consider utilization options and report on them in April.

Students have opportunity to present at national conference on education

The board commended the administration for inviting

students to present at the National Congress on Rural Education in Saskatoon March 21. Four students who helped plan and put on the Discover U Palliser Student Leadership Conference in November will share their experiences with a national audience of educators and trustees.

"It's a wonderful thing for kids to experience," said Trustee Don Zech.

Palliser has been invited to make three presentations at the conference. In addition to student leadership, Palliser will present on the division's accountability processes and its literacy focus.

Palliser has two student leadership opportunities planned in April.

The first is a follow-up to the Discover U leadership conference in November for students in Grades 7-12. Students who attended that conference will be invited to share the projects they worked on in their own school communities. The celebration will be held at Heritage Christian Academy in Calgary.

The second is an elementary student leadership day, called Planting the Seed for the Future. This event is for students in Grades 4-6 and will be held April 28 at Vulcan Prairieview Elementary School.

Tech Services working to update hardware and improve integration

Palliser's Technology Services team is finding efficiencies, improving service to schools and supporting teachers to integrate technology in support of student learning, according to the department's annual accountability report.

Director of Learning Tom Hamer provided the board the department's annual report.

Key improvements to infrastructure and hardware include an evergreening of staff cell phones; reinstatement of a ticketing system to ensure service calls and issues are resolved on a priority basis; installation of a backup server system; replacement of 35 projectors in schools; classroom computer installation at Calgary Islamic School and the new outreach school in Calgary. Akram Jomaa Campus has double the band width for Internet access, new firewall security and better wireless access since joining Palliser in August.

In preparation for the Noble Central modernization work, the tech team set up technology services into five temporary classrooms. Five 70-inch LED displays replaced projectors and SMART boards which couldn't be installed in those temporary learning spaces.

In other schools, technology staff have offered support to principals, vice-principals and individual teachers to integrate technology in teaching, providing training on

using Google Apps for Education or other programs or devices.

Hamer said thanks to a provincial Learning and Technology Policy Framework grant, the department has been able to work in schools, assess what technology is available in an individual school, and how that infrastructure can be better used to support the school's goals.

He said the team has supported a variety of division-wide events, connecting the public and staff from multiple sites.

One significant upcoming change involving technology is a move to a new student records system, after Palliser's existing provider opted not to continue to comply with provincial requirements for data. Hamer said Palliser worked with other neighbouring jurisdictions to review presentations by other service providers. Palliser will be moving its data to PowerSchool this spring.

The board and Associate Superintendent Human Resources Ken Garinger, who oversees technology, thanked Hamer and the entire technology team for their support of staff and students.

"The team I have is outstanding and I love it every day," said Hamer.

Three-year capital plan updated

The board established its Three-Year Capital Plan, identifying four priority projects for 2017-2020.

Topping the priority list is a modernization of Huntsville School in Iron Springs. Alberta Education and stakeholders will be invited to an assessment of the site in May. The project would include eliminating the basement, replacing classrooms, enlarging the gymnasium and improving washroom accessibility.

The second priority is Barons School modernization to address accessibility challenges. The school has stairs and no elevator. The main building was built in 1929, with an addition in 1960.

Third on the list is Kate Andrews High School. That school was built in 1959 with four additions between 1964

and 2004.

Last on the list is Coalhurst High School modernization. The school was building in 1957 and had additions in 1973 and 1975.

Initial budget planning assumes no major funding increases

In advance of the provincial budget announcement, Secretary-Treasurer Wayne Braun provided his preliminary budget assumptions. He said he's basing his initial planning on the likelihood that there will be no increase in funding rates for transportation, instruction or compensation. Enrolment projections from Palliser principals suggest enrolment may be down slightly in 2016-2017. This year's enrolment is about 8,170.

The provincial budget announcement is expected April 14.

Given the timing of the budget, the board voted to move its next regular board meeting to April 19.

Board approves SuperNet service for Calgary Islamic schools

The board voted to use money from capital reserves to connect Calgary Islamic School Akram Jomaa Campus and Omar Bin Al-Khattab Campus to SuperNet service. The SuperNet is a broadband, high speed network giving schools reliable and affordable Internet access.

Public questions regarding policy referred to policy committee

Questions posed by members of the public during the meeting regarding policy will be forwarded to the board's policy committee. Trustees also voted that questions regarding administration would be prepared and shared with the chair and distributed to all trustees. The board received questions from three individuals in attendance at the meeting and received a submission from a fourth person who was not in attendance.

Next regular meeting: April 19, 2016

