

# Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

November 24, 2016



## Work begins on addressing review report recommendations

Palliser’s Board of Trustees has begun the process of addressing the 21 recommendations made by the organizational review panel.

The agenda of the board meeting was sent to trustees a week in advance, in keeping with Recommendation 17. The agenda identifies items which are for information purposes only, and gives trustees an opportunity to move those items for discussion or clarification if they wish.

Since receiving the review report and recommendations Nov. 3, the board held special meetings Nov. 8 and Nov. 23, where they reviewed the full report in detail and accepted all 21 recommendations in principle.

Board Chair Robert Strauss said legal counsel had reviewed the detailed report and redacted portions to comply with provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation. The board passed a motion to release the redacted full report and post it on the website. It can be downloaded as a PDF [here](#).

Strauss said the board would be sharing a tracking

tool online to keep the public updated on the progress made on each of the recommendations and would be encouraging public input and feedback on the process.

The board also passed a motion to make its policy review part of the organizational review response. Before receiving the review report, the board had committed to a systematic review of policies with input from staff, school council and stakeholders. Several of the organizational review recommendations refer to policy review.

Acting Superintendent Dr. Garry Andrews said some of the recommendations can be acted on quickly, such as the change to the board agenda process, while others are more complex and will take more time.

The board passed a motion to issue a request for proposals for a facilitator to work with Palliser from Jan. 9, 2017 to June 30, 2017 to help oversee the co-ordination and implementation of the organizational review recommendations. The request for proposals closes at 2 p.m., Dec. 12. [Details on the request for proposals](#) can be downloaded from Palliser’s website.

## Audited financial statements show 2015-2016 ended with small surplus

The board commended Secretary Treasurer Wayne Braun and his staff for their work on the annual audit, which showed Palliser ending 2015-2016 in a strong financial position.

Palliser ended the year, at Aug. 31, 2016, with a surplus of \$280,000 on revenues of \$93.7 million. Braun said he had anticipated a small deficit, but the division’s revenues were bolstered by higher than budgeted high school credit funding. Much of this increase in revenue was thanks to Palliser Beyond Borders, the division’s online school and umbrella to outreach high schools in Coaldale, Vulcan, Picture Butte and Calgary. Provincial funding for students learning English as a Second Language was also significantly more than the budget projected with nearly double the number of ESL students receiving funding in

Expenditures by Department 2015-2016	\$93,507,474	% of total
Instruction Grades 1-12	\$68,314,524	73.06%
Instruction ECS	\$4,451,785	4.76%
School-Generated Funds	\$2,736,623	2.93%
System-Based Administration	\$3,278,370	3.51%
Maintenance	\$9,754,896	10.43%
Transportation	\$3,913,289	4.18%
External Services	\$1,057,988	1.13%

2015-2016, compared to 2014-2015.

The [audited financial statements](#) show non-financial assets, also known as non-cash assets, went up by about \$3 million. That’s largely related to Noble Central School modernization work last year. Other changes included enhancements to computer equipment in schools, the

creation of a secondary data centre to backup Palliser digital information and the purchase of new servers.

Palliser's accumulated surplus stood at \$10.1 million, up from \$9.8 million at the end of 2014-2015. About half of this amount is tied up in capital assets, including the Palliser administration building, buses, vehicles and equipment. About \$4.1 million is held in operating reserves, and another \$400,000 in unrestricted surplus. That combined \$4.5 million could cover about 12 days of Palliser operating expenses. The surplus also includes nearly \$408,000 in capital reserves and \$86,000 in endowments, held in trust by Palliser for various scholarships.

Other highlights:

- The statements reflect a change to provincial reporting requirements of fees, including for busing, instructional supplies, options, extracurricular and alternative program fees. Palliser and its schools collected \$2.2 million in fees in 2015-2016.
- The reported fees include tuition for international and out-of-province students. In 2014-2015, Palliser collected about \$70,000 in fees from international students. In 2015-2016, that jumped to \$272,000. Braun said Palliser's international program has generated positive cash flow to the division, more than covering the cost of recruitment efforts.
- This year's audited financial statements include a more detailed schedule showing funding for various program areas, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit, Early Childhood Services program unit funding, English as a Second Language, inclusive education and small schools by necessity grants. Inclusive education funding revenue was \$5.4 million, but expenses to support students with special needs was \$5.6 million. Braun said because Palliser has a needs-based budgeting approach, additional resources are committed to students with special needs, beyond what's provided by the province.
- Schedule 10 is also new to this year's report. It breaks down administrative spending, including board governance, human resources and information technology. Palliser's administrative spending of \$3.2 million was about \$80,000 under the provincial cap. School jurisdictions of Palliser's size are not allowed to spend more than 3.6 per cent of budget on administration.
- Note 17 in the financial statements show that Palliser schools spent some of school-generated funds. This is money collected by the school through various fees or fundraising. At Aug.

30, 2015, Palliser schools had about \$929,000 in school-generated funds. A year later, that number was down to \$637,000. Palliser has been encouraging principals to only collect fees or fundraise for specific needs and to spend the money they collect to benefit current students, rather than collecting more money than they need.

The board adopted four recommendations from its audit committee. It approved adoption of the 2015-2016 audited financial statements as presented for submission to Alberta Education by Nov. 30 and to be posted on Palliser's website.

The board approved the transfer of \$39,024 from unrestricted net assets to restricted capital reserves. That transfer is required to reflect the sale of board owned assets, in this case, used buses.

The board also passed a motion to transfer \$211,362 from restricted school operating reserves to unrestricted net assets to reflect purchases made by schools from their surplus funds, as identified in their school spending plans.

Finally, the board approved the transfer of \$165,000 from unrestricted net assets to restricted maintenance operating reserves, to cover a portion of the cost of replacing one rooftop air handling unit at Palliser's central office. The unit is 38 years old.

The board continued its review of division finances with a review and approval of the [2016-2017 fall budget update](#). The update revises budget figures adopted in Spring 2016 and adjusts for actual enrolment figures.

Palliser's 2016-2017 budget projects balanced revenues and expenditures of \$93.5 million. That reflects a slight increase in enrolment.

The budget update projects 474.9 full-time equivalent teachers on staff, up 2.8 from the spring projections. A more significant change is shown in non-certificated support staff, with 424.7 FTE employees, compared to 463.9 FTE in the spring budget. This is a change on paper only. In the spring document, bus drivers were counted as full-time. The fall update now counts those same bus drivers as part-time, to more accurately reflect their hours.

## **Board commends Arvid Thompson for his response to bus collision**

The board commended bus driver Arvid Thompson and other staff who responded to a collision Oct. 7 that sent a bus off the highway and into the ditch on its side.

Eight students were on board, travelling home from schools in Vulcan, when the collision occurred. Secretary Treasurer Wayne Braun said Thompson was travelling slowly because the roads were covered with ice and slush at the time. A second vehicle approached the bus and attempted to pass on eastbound Highway 542.

Thompson attended to the students who were taken to hospital by ambulance. A few were kept in hospital overnight and all were released by the next day.

Trustee Colleen Deitz, who represents the Milo area, said she was shocked to see the condition of the bus and she's grateful to the experienced bus driver and to all first responders for their work.

Acting Superintendent Dr. Garry Andrews said staff followed up on the incident, reviewing how the incident was handled. He said the response was a true team effort.

## **Annual results report adopted in principle; strong results continue**

The board reviewed a draft of Palliser's Annual Education Results Report and Three-Year Education Plan, and accepted the document in principle, pending finalization of Palliser's class size reports.

Acting Superintendent Dr. Garry Andrews said in reviewing the document, he thought about whether the Palliser mission statement is reflected in the budget. He said the focus on students is reflected as about \$75 million of Palliser's \$93.5 million budget is connected directly to students and instruction.

He said the report includes trends, issues and strategies for moving forward. Uncertainty in Palliser has been a trend, and as Palliser moves forward this year, some strategies will have to change as the division addresses issues raised in the review report.

Alberta Education Manager Dan Ferguson, who was attending the meeting, said Palliser continues to achieve outstanding results. He said it can be difficult to maintain results at the level Palliser has year after year. In a division as large as Palliser, even small fluctuations from one year to another can have a dramatic impact on the improvement column of the Accountability Pillar. He said the more telling column on the pillar is the achievement column, which remains very strong.

Palliser's Accountability Pillar is online, and the annual report and summary will be posted online once the class size report is complete. All reports are found in the [Trustees section](#) of the website.

## **Board looking for new ways to engage with community stakeholders**

The board is looking for new ways to engage with stakeholders in the community, perhaps with informal meetings at schools.

One opportunity trustees discussed was the "lunch on the board" dates at four schools a year. The four schools

are selected by draw with the lunch winners announced at the division's opening day celebrations. This year's winners were PASS+ outreach school in Coaldale, Sunnyside School near Lethbridge, Calgary Islamic School Akram Jomaa campus and R.I. Baker Middle School in Coaldale.

Trustees suggested they could have lunch with staff and then invite community stakeholders to meet informally with trustees.

No dates have been announced for the lunches.

In October, trustees discussed holding Dec. 12 and 13 for potential meetings with school council chairs and the public, but some trustees said the feedback they received was that mid-December is already too busy for people.

Trustees said the organizational review facilitator may be able to suggest other opportunities for stakeholder meetings.

## **Palliser Beyond Borders continues to build brand at outreach schools**

Palliser Beyond Borders rebranding continues to take shape, with board approval of a new naming protocol for outreach schools.

Palliser Beyond Borders is the division's online school, as well as the umbrella for Palliser's international student program and outreach schools at Coaldale, Vulcan, Picture Butte and Calgary.

To bring consistency to the outreach campuses, the board approved seeking Alberta Education approval for renaming Palliser Alternative Outreach School – the division's newest outreach program in Calgary – as Palliser Beyond Borders at Calgary. The outreach campuses in the other communities would be similarly named.

Palliser Beyond Borders was created in 2013-2014 as an online school. It was merged last year with the international program and has had an international student complete a high school credit program online from another country.

In 2015-2016, 671 students took classes at Palliser Beyond Borders.

To learn more about the flexible learning options available through Palliser Beyond Borders, visit its website at <http://www.palliserbeyondborders.com/>



**Next regular board meeting: December 20, 2016**