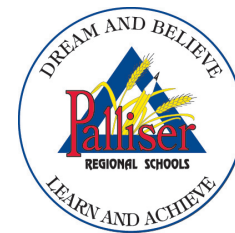


# Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting



January 15, 2013

## First meeting of the new year

The Board of Trustees of Palliser Regional Schools held its first regular meeting of 2013 on Jan. 15<sup>th</sup> at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge. Trustees Colleen Deitz and Jean Mrak were absent from the meeting.

## Introduction to VTRA training to be offered to area law enforcement

Palliser Regional Schools, in conjunction with nationally recognized trauma and assessment expert Kevin Cameron, will offer an exclusive one-hour information and training session on Violence Threat Risk Assessment to representatives of various police agencies within the area served by Palliser Regional Schools.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard said, on the heels of the recent tragedy in Connecticut, continued emphasis on building partnerships with our police services is critical to the overall safety of Palliser students. Cameron, the founder of the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response, provides training and supports to schools across Canada.

The information session will be held at 10 a.m., Feb. 11, 2013 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge.

## Grant supports new position focused on supporting healthy schools initiatives

Kevin Garinger, Associate Superintendent (Human Resources), gave the Board information about Palliser's new Healthy Schools Coach. The division recently hired Andrea Boras with the task of supporting the division's Healthy Schools initiative. The position is funded through a Wellness Fund grant from Alberta Health Services.

Boras is a recent graduate of the University of Lethbridge with a bachelor's degree in Health Sciences and has various training in public health, tobacco reduction and cessation, and non-violent crisis intervention. The position began January 7, 2013 and will continue until June



Kevin Garinger

30, 2013.

She will work to support comprehensive school health throughout Palliser schools in three areas: active living; healthy eating; and positive social environments. Boras will also help promote communications within and between school communities about best practices in promoting comprehensive school health.

## Coalhurst Elementary School review results presented

Director of Learning Dan Ryder was welcomed to the meeting to report on the school review of Coalhurst Elementary conducted on Nov. 22.

Wayne Hulley, president of Canadian Effective Schools and director of the Hulley Centre, attended this review to see how Palliser is putting 30 years of effective schools research into practice.



Dan Ryder

Out of the review emerged school strengths: caring staff in an inclusive environment; child-focused programming; and a safe environment with strong relationships and sense of team.

Areas of improvement include communication within the school; communication from the school to parents/guardians; and school materials, resources and technology.

Ryder said students clearly love their school, and more than 80 per cent of students in kindergarten through Grade 2 and grades 3-6 rate their school as effective or very effective.

The inclusive nature of the school and the strength of relationships there made this the first review that did not have bullying raised as an issue or concern.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz, who takes part in the student and parent focus groups that are part of the review process, said he's "never seen a group of young people so in love with their school and in love with the staff . . . They had ideas about how to make their school even better, too."

The data collected in the school review is shared with school staff in a workshop format as they identify areas to

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

celebrate and areas that could use improvement.

## **Assessment for learning promotes accountability for student learning**

A team of Palliser administrators were welcomed to the Board meeting to present on the controversial topic of giving students a zero for their work.

Director of Learning Dan Ryder, County Central High School Principal Ken Garinger and Barons School/Carmangay Outreach School Principal Nathan Sillito shared their perspectives on grading and assessment for learning practices.

Some public debate has come up about whether schools are coddling students by not giving zeroes to those who refuse to do their work. However, the Palliser administrators said a zero is giving students the permission to quit, and there's more to be gained by refusing to give the zero and demanding that students complete assignments and demonstrate their learning.

Garinger said at County Central High in Vulcan, teachers are working to ensure students receive descriptive feedback about their work, rather than an arbitrary measure, such as three out of five. Descriptive feedback gives students an understanding of what they could do differently to reach a higher level of achievement. Students not only receive feedback from the teacher, but feedback from their peers.

"Through deep discussion between students, the expectation is students will achieve at a higher level for themselves," Garinger says. "The students take ownership of their learning."

He shared a story from four years ago, when a teacher gave a student a zero for failing to complete an assignment. Garinger talked to both the teacher and the student. The student said he'd be happy to take the zero. Instead the teacher offered to work with the student at lunch breaks and, in the end, the work was done and the student demonstrated learning.

Sillito said some of the debate about zeroes relates to a false comparison people may make in comparing schools to the world of work. Students come to school and produce work, but the grades they receive aren't currency. The work they produce isn't for the teacher's benefit. It's to demonstrate their understanding and learning.

Schools do have a role in teaching work ethic and responsibility, and giving students the opportunity to do the work and then assessing it fairly is helping to teach them accountability, he said.

"Assessment for learning works," Sillito said. "If you use those strategies carefully and wisely, you can move even those kids that are a little bit stubborn."

The Board discussed whether people appreciate

how much work the school does to teach citizenship, punctuality, and strong work habits in addition to academics.

Sillito said educators could do a better job of explaining that timeliness, citizenship and other character-building skills are embedded in the subject matter.

"It's easy to give a zero," said Superintendent Kevin Gietz. "It's easy for a kid to earn a zero, but it's just not good enough."

## **School calendar approvals continue**

The Board of Trustees reviewed the 2013-2014 school calendar proposed for Heritage Christian Academy, as well as drafts from Menno Simons Christian School for 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. The Board approved the drafts from both schools. The adopted calendars will be posted on the Palliser website under the "Schools" tab.

This is the first time Palliser has adopted calendars for a two-year cycle, giving families extra time to plan vacations and child care.

## **Board supports investigating possibility of a Calgary outreach program**

The Board of Trustees voted in favour of pursuing the possibility of opening an outreach program in Calgary.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin said Palliser does not have a location in mind but the division would like to discuss the possibility with Alberta Education. The Board had earlier identified the possibility of a Calgary outreach program as a priority for this year.



**Dale Backlin**

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said some of Palliser's families in Calgary have suggested they would like that option. Palliser operates nine Christian-based alternative programs in Calgary. The families attending these schools have made a choice to attend a faith-based program. In the event of a student being expelled from school, Palliser now doesn't have an option of sending the student to an outreach program that offers a faith-based program. Such a program could also benefit students such as young moms who need a flexible high school program.

## **Financial projection report presented**

Corporate Treasurer Michelle Gibb presented a 2012-2013 financial projection report to the Board.

She cautioned trustees that the information is drawn

from actuals to Dec. 31, 2012, and projections of expenses for January through August 2013. Some grants have not yet been approved so some revenue is based on projections. As of December 31, 2012, revenues overall were lower than what the budget projected.

Gibb reiterated that Palliser has moved to a needs-based budgeting system, with meetings held with all departments to review projected expenditures line by line. The budget projected staffing costs on the assumption there will be no salary increases.

Based on actuals from the first four months of the

year, the report projects a surplus of \$497,000, which represents about one half of one per cent on Palliser's \$83 million budget. The updated budget submitted to Alberta Education in November projected essentially a balanced budget, with a surplus of just \$13,000.

### **Next meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Board of Trustees will begin at 9 a.m., Tuesday, Feb. 26 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge.