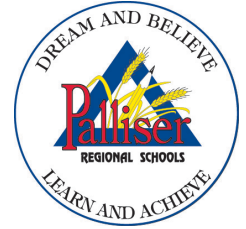


Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

December 10, 2013



Congratulations to Don Zech, recipient of Public School Boards' Association award

The Board congratulated Palliser Vice-Chair Don Zech, who received the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta Award for Advancing Association Business and Initiatives at the PSBAA fall general meeting in Edmonton Nov. 15.

"Public education is what it's all about, and universal accessibility for all children," Zech said. "Every kid has a right to an education."

Zech has been a long-time supporter of the association, having served as a director of the provincial organization as well as being involved in the establishment of the Public School Boards Council.

Sunnyside School builds on great school climate and support for student learning

The Board welcomed Sunnyside School Principal Les Greeno to the meeting to share the staff's response to the school review. A review team of Palliser Central Office and other school administrators conducted a site visit in October 2012.

Sunnyside School serves about 100 students, offering an early learning program for preschool-age children, kindergarten through Grade 6. The school is located in a rural area about a five-minute drive from North Lethbridge.

The review team identified the school's core strengths as a school climate of respect, high academic expectations and strong communication between teachers, students and parents. Greeno said the school has excellent support from parents and the community, and many families have a long connection to the school, which opened in 1953.

Greeno said areas of growth include clearer communication of learner outcomes to students and parents. The school is working on using its website to help communicate additional information.

Other communication tools include automated phone calls home, digital signs, monthly newsletter, student agendas, and a commitment for each parent/guardian to receive a phone call home twice a year between report cards.

Students expressed interest in more gym and non-

athletic activities. In response, the school has introduced more clubs including choir and drama. A robotics club will be starting soon as well.

Greeno said he is reviewing what resources the school has available for gifted students and those with special learning needs and he believes the school is well resourced, but some stakeholders may not be aware of what resources are available.

The review also found a desire for increased enrolment, but balancing that growth to ensure the school retains its character, individual attention and small class sizes.

Greeno said the school's goals this year focus on improving student achievement through understanding math vocabulary, a balanced literacy program and maintaining the school's safe and caring environment. Fundraising for a new playground has been identified as a longer-term goal.

The Board thanked Greeno and his staff for their efforts to continue to build on the school's strengths.

Champion School review reveals a strong school-community connection

The Board welcomed Cynthia Gietz, Co-ordinating Principal of School Development, who provided trustees a report on data collected during a review of Champion School. Champion School serves about 100 students up to Grade 9.

A review team of Central Office administrators and a visiting principal from another Palliser school visited Champion Oct. 1 to tour the facility, interview staff and hold focus groups with students, parents and support staff. In addition, data is collected through online surveys of students, staff and parents. Gietz said a number of families at the school are Low German-speak Mennonites who don't use computers so Palliser Low German Mennonite Liaison Worker Dan Doerksen offered translation services and collected survey responses in person from several families.

Overall the surveys had an 85 per cent return rate of all students, parents/guardians and staff.

The review revealed the school's strengths include a family supportive atmosphere and community-minded school, a helpful, supportive staff who are focused



Special performance

Members of the Kate Andrews High School Choral Ensemble, accompanied by teacher Kade Hogg, performed for the Board of Trustees, administration and staff from Palliser Central Office and building tenants during the board's final meeting of 2013.

on students, and a strong school spirit and sense of community.

Areas of improvement include communication with staff and parents and consistency in student discipline.

Comments also indicated a parent desire for more options for students.

The review data, once presented to the Board, is shared with the school principal and his staff. The review findings are shared during a staff workshop, giving the team an opportunity to interpret data and determine next steps to address areas of improvement.

Board will continue to keep schools open for safety even in inclement weather

In light of Dec. 3 blizzard, the Board reviewed its policy and discussed practices in Palliser for cancelling busing but keeping schools open.

Feedback provided to Palliser through social media, phone calls and emails was shared with trustees, as well as attendance numbers from that day across the division. Despite the blizzard, there were more than 2,200 students at school on Dec. 3.

Vice-Chair Don Zech shared a story from the Vulcan area years ago when schools were closed due to weather.

Although there were staff inside, they didn't realize two students were huddled outside the locked front door in -30 C temperatures. He said the Board's current policy of keeping schools open reflects Palliser's emphasis on student safety.

"That's rule No. 1. . . Those doors have to be open," he said.

He said the Palliser Board respects the parent as the child's first educator, and parents ultimately decide what's best for the well-being of the child. Any parent on Dec. 3rd could have decided to keep their child at home, regardless of whether the school was open.

Trustees and administration also discussed the number of Palliser parents who don't use technology. They may not have the Internet, radio or television in the home and may be unaware of a school closure. Additionally, many parents and guardians leave for work before their children leave for school.

Trustees also discussed the wisdom of individual schools having perfect attendance awards or programs that give students an option of skipping their final exam if they have perfect attendance. Chair Colleen Deitz said those programs encourage students to show up at school even if they are sick with highly contagious viruses, such as pink eye, or when weather makes travel unsafe.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said he would revisit the safety policies and procedures with principals to ensure in-town billeting arrangements are made, that individuals in the community with proximity to the school are identified to check on the school in the event of the worst weather conditions, and that exceptions are made in extreme weather events to any perfect attendance programs.

He said the principal has the responsibility to ensure someone is at the school in case a student shows up for school in extreme weather conditions.

The Board and administration discussed the wording of [Board Policy 19](#), Inclement Weather, in particular the wording “school bus service shall be suspended by the Superintendent/designate when a temperature of -40 C has been reached.” Gietz said the committee that consulted on that policy a few years ago had talked about a combination of temperature and wind chill of -40 C. Trustees who were on the Board at the time of the policy’s writing agreed the intent was to include wind chill. The wording of the policy will be revised and brought back to the Board for adoption.

Audited statements reflect change to public sector accounting standards

The Board adopted the audited financial statement for the school year ending Aug. 31, 2013, as presented by the independent auditor, KPMG LLP of Lethbridge.

According to the audited financial statements, Palliser had revenue of about \$82.5 million in the year ended Aug. 31, 2013, and expenses of about \$82.4 million, leaving an operating surplus of about \$108,000. Palliser’s accumulated surplus stands at \$6.9 million. The audited financial statements will be posted to Palliser’s website and key information will be included in Palliser’s Annual Education Results Report and Three-Year Education Plan.

The audited financial statements were prepared in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards. This is the first year Palliser has moved to this new reporting framework, a change that re. The new standards are intended to improving transparency and accountability for public sector bodies.

The Board plans to hold a special meeting Jan. 7 for an in-depth review of both the financial statements and the education plan.

The audited financial statements for the year ended Aug. 31, 2013 are posted on Palliser’s website [here](#).

Tweaks to school calendars made

The Board approved minor changes to school calendars. For the divisional calendar for 2014-2015, two division-wide professional development days were moved

to Monday, Sept. 15, from Friday, Sept. 26, and Monday, Oct. 27 to Tuesday, Oct. 14. The October change will give parents an extended Thanksgiving long weekend.

The rest of the 2014-2015 divisional calendar is unchanged from the version approved more than a year ago. The new 2014-2015 calendar is posted on the Palliser website under the Schools tab.

The Board also approved changes to Milo School calendar for this year. The original Milo calendar had the students and staff off school on Friday, June 20. Students need to be in school that day because there are provincial achievement tests scheduled.

Kudos to Palliser’s Finance Services staff

Dale Backlin, Associate Superintendent (Education Services), publicly acknowledged staff in Palliser’s Finance Services Department for their commitment to Palliser. Backlin has been overseeing the finance department since the resignation of the Corporate Treasurer this fall. Backlin has a background in in school business from his previous position leading a faith-based private school. In the absence of a Corporate Treasurer, Kevin Garinger, Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) has assumed responsibility for the payroll staff.

Backlin said the staff have been hugely helpful, positive and supportive.

Palliser’s investment in supporting student literacy continues

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin said schools across Palliser have purchased about \$110,000 in literacy materials this year to support instruction in reading and writing. Through the division-wide use of benchmark assessment tools, teachers in elementary and middle school grades know what reading level their individual students are at and that helps them determine what skills they need to build next. The resources will support this individualized approach to teaching reading, Superintendent Kevin Gietz said.

Early learning program fees unchanged

Palliser will maintain its early learning program fees at the current rate of \$80 per month for two half-days a week of programming. The Board was presented information about the fees charged by neighbouring jurisdictions before deciding to maintain rates at current levels for 2014-2015. Pat Rivard, Associate Superintendent (Education Services) says the program continues to provide exceptional service to young learners with the current fee structure.

Next regular meeting: Jan. 14, Champion School