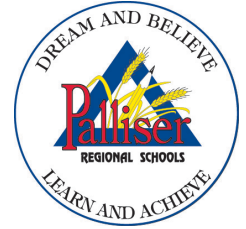


# Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

February 11, 2014



The Board of Palliser Regional Schools held its regular meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 11 at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge. Trustee Robert Strauss was absent from the meeting.

## A call for inclusion of all faiths

Palliser Vice-Chair Don Zech, who attended the Public School Boards Council earlier this month, sought the Board's support in taking exception to a document found on Alberta Education's website. The document is a parent's guide to the Alberta curriculum. The guide singles out the Catholic Catechism, without mention of the educational options available to students of other faiths. The Board voted to submit a letter to Education Minister Jeff Johnson asking that the guide be more inclusive in its approach to religious education.

Palliser Regional Schools is home to 10 Christian alternative programs in the hamlet of Brant and the City of Calgary.

## The Board, CUPE celebrate positive negotiation process

Trustees welcomed Jack Simpson, national representative of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, to the meeting to observe the Board's ratification of a tentative agreement reached between Palliser and CUPE Local 290. The local represents a number of school caretakers in Palliser.

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Kevin Garinger said Palliser and CUPE's negotiations were completed in just four hours as both sides focused on an agreement that was good for both sides, and ultimately, good for students.

"It's always a pleasure especially when it comes to negotiating with Palliser, that we have a really smooth and honest table," Simpson agreed. "We have a great conversation. . . we always finish early."

He said negotiations go smoothly because the negotiations are being handled by local people who understand the agreement and local issues.

Palliser Vice-Chair Don Zech asked Simpson to extend the Board's thanks to Palliser employees who are members of the local.

"Sometimes it appears as thankless work but it's not," Zech said, adding students and staff alike appreciate the care and attention paid to the upkeep of our schools.

The tentative agreement still needs to be taken to CUPE members for ratification.

## Arrowwood School rises from ashes and builds on positive school review

Principal Jody Beagle of Arrowwood Community School joined to Board to share the school's response to its school review.

The review team visited Arrowwood in April 2013, just

a few months after students and staff moved back in the building after being displaced by a fire that gutted the school a year earlier.

"After the fire and everything else we went through, things went from very low to very high," Beagle said. "So it was a very positive review."

The review identified concerns such as dissatisfaction with physical activities inside and outside the school, more support in the exploration of learning, and internal and external communication. Teacher retention was also raised as a concern.

To address concerns about physical activities, the community and school council are looking at improvements to the play space outside the school. In Physical Education class, more of the classes are skill specific, except on "Fun Fridays."

To give students more hands-on learning, the science lab is scheduled to give younger grades access. Teachers in their professional learning communities are focusing on activities that appeal to a variety of learning styles and projects that give students opportunity to demonstrate what they've learned.

Beagle said the staff are working on educating parents about the new teaching methods. For example, language



arts no longer involves giving kids spelling lists at the start of the week and a quiz at the end. Instead, students learn how words are constructed so they can spell many words, not just the ones they've memorized.

For communication, the school is using its new website to communicate with students and parents, and a new format of agendas for junior high students has been well received.

The school has added a number of clubs at lunch, including one that sees 22 students learning how to knit. Some of the learning opportunities are led by students themselves.

While the students are in their monthly assemblies, most of the staff hold response to intervention meetings, talking about not only struggling students, but "what are we doing to support those strong kids," Beagle said.

She said supports from Central Office, in literacy, technology and behaviour, have proven valuable in supporting teachers as they work with individual students. Supports and strategies shared with teachers are making a difference to student success.

To address communication issues, Beagle holds staff meetings at noon hour to ensure all staff can attend, there are daily announcements, weekly meetings with support staff, and learning assistant involvement in collaborative practice efforts. Duplicate note pads help track communication between the teacher and home.

The Board thanked Beagle for her team's efforts following the April 2012 fire that led to closure of the building for roughly seven months. The students only missed two days, with classes resuming in the community hall before portable classrooms arrived.

## **PBHS balances excellence in athletics, academics and arts**

Picture Butte High School Principal Sterling Paiha joined the meeting to share his school's response to a school review conducted on March 13, 2013.

Paiha credited Superintendent Kevin Gietz for the school review process developed by Palliser.

"It's stressful, but it's the right kind of stress to move us forward," he said. "It's a very good process. It comes from a very positive point of view. It gathers some very important information."

Paiha said the review data celebrated strong support for the school vision, high expectations for students and staff, leadership opportunities for staff and commitment to school goals. The staff feels equipped and trained to meet the

diverse learning needs of students, he said. Behaviour expectations for students are clearly established, students feel cared for and the building feels safe. Technology is used to enhance learning.

Areas for improvement included better informing parents about school goals, reducing disruptions to instructional time, and improved communication home.

He said the school council is reinvigorated this year, Google docs are supporting communication between students and staff, and staff maintain a home communication journal to ensure families are regularly receiving calls from the school. The school maintains three Twitter accounts, a website and a YouTube channel, and has found the automated phone system offered through Synrevoice (SchoolConnects) has been quite positive. People can also subscribe to a variety of Google calendars to keep up with school events.

The school regularly issues progress reports to all students between report cards to ensure there are no surprises for parents about how their children are faring. Weekly grade team meetings keep the principal apprised of students who are struggling and he reviews the comments on every report card to ensure comments are appropriate and communicate in a meaningful way about the student's work.

"We have a really intimate environment at PBHS," Paiha said. "We know our kids."

He said students at Picture Butte are well behaved, respectful and good citizens, as evidenced by the fact most students don't bother with locks on their lockers.

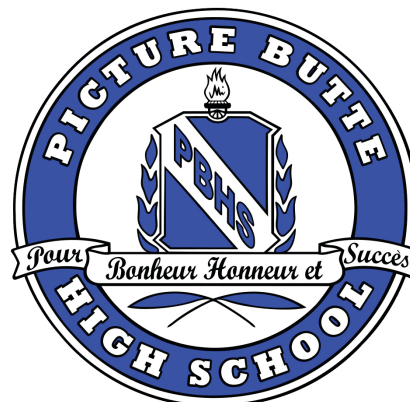
Paiha said the school is known for its athletics and academics and the effort is on maintaining that reputation, while building up the profile of the arts.

Arts events are now drawing up to 200 people.

"When the Board brought band back into our schools, I couldn't really have envisioned it advancing so quickly," he said. "It's so important to the kids"

The school's literacy program continues to grow, unfolding in all grades and in all subjects. Assessment of students' reading proved eye-opening, Paiha said, as staff realized some students were struggling with tests because of their reading level.

The staff meet regularly to talk about individual student progress and what strategies might help.



## **Items tabled to later date**

The Board tabled two issues for discussion at a later date. The first was the matter of membership in the Vulcan

Recreation Board, tabled due to the absence of Trustee Robert Strauss, who represents the community of Vulcan. The other item was discussion of the Trinity Christian School master agreement, pending additional information.

## **Budget factors presented in advance of provincial budget announcement**

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin presented the Board information to consider in advance of the 2014-15 budget. The provincial budget announcement is expected in early March.

Factors affecting next year include: Glenmore Christian Academy leaving Palliser and returning to private school status, reducing Palliser enrolment by about 650 students, affecting the student grant and infrastructure, maintenance and renewal funding; employee benefits costs are expected to increase three to four per cent in 2015; and school fees have not been increased in several years and are waived for students Grade 1-6.

## **Work continues on Palliser's international program**

The Board approved a fee schedule for Palliser's new international program. For 2014-15, students from outside Canada may attend Palliser for one year for tuition of \$12,150. To attend one of Palliser's faith-based alternative programs in Calgary, tuition is \$13,350. The premium was added because students won't pay standard society fees charged to other students in these programs. There are administrative fees, mandatory medical insurance and homestay fees as well.

The mission of the international student program is to "provide its students an education enriched with opportunities to engage with learners from other countries and cultural backgrounds." Backlin said the program will be beneficial for students in Palliser by bringing the world to them and creating opportunities for cultural understanding.

As part of Palliser's development of this program, Superintendent Kevin Gietz and Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard will participate in an Alberta Education-planned mission to China in late February and early March.

## **Correction to the 2014-15 calendar**

A third change to the 2014-15 divisional calendar was inadvertently approved by the Board at its January meeting when two division-wide collaboration days were changed. A third professional development day April 20<sup>th</sup> was not intended to be changed. The Board approved the calendar to keep that April 20th date.

The 2014-15 calendar was initially approved in November 2012 to help families plan their summer and Christmas holidays.



## **Officials tour historic Barons School**

Alberta Infrastructure officials toured Barons School in January. In 2008, the Barons and District Historical Society had received Palliser Board approval to pursue historical building status as long as that designation would not restrict the operation of the school or necessary renovations to the building. The effort to have the grand brick building designated is being revisited, prompting the recent visit.

## **Upcoming meeting dates and sites:**

9 a.m., March 18, Kate Andrews High School, Coaldale  
9 a.m., April 8, Noble Central School, Nobleford  
10 a.m., May 13, Calgary Christian Secondary School, Calgary

**Board agendas and approved minutes of past meetings can be found online at**

<http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/board-of-trustees/meeting-information>