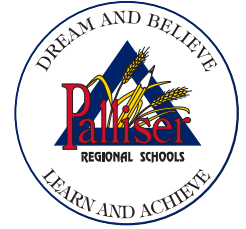


# Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

October 21, 2014



Palliser Regional Schools' Board of Trustees held its regular monthly meeting at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge Oct. 21. Trustee Debbie Laternus was absent from the meeting. The next meeting will be Nov. 25.

## Nobleford mayor, councillor welcomed

The board welcomed Village of Nobleford Mayor Don McDowell and Coun. Marguerite Wobick to the meeting to discuss lobbying for a new school.

"Let me start by saying a big thank you for all you have done for our community," McDowell said. "Nobleford school is the absolute lifeblood of the community."

McDowell asked the board to consider asking the province for money for a new school in light of a new premier taking the helm.

The province announced in January approval of a modernization of Noble Central School, providing the first major changes to the building in 40 years. The school serves about 210 students from early learning through Grade 12.

The board said although other schools in Palliser and elsewhere in the province are short of space due to rising enrolment numbers, Noble Central likely received modernization funding over other serious facility needs because the building is not wheelchair accessible, an issue identified decades ago. The modernization plan will not only make the school accessible to all who have mobility issues, it will update all mechanical and technology systems and provide other improvements.

Palliser Vice-Chair Don Zech, who represents the Nobleford area and who attended and taught at Noble Central, said the school was designed for upwards of 350 students. With about 200 students now attending, there was a real risk the modernization would include a "right sizing" of instructional space. That was the case at Picture Butte High School, where modernization saw the school downsized by about a third. The plan for Noble Central, though, will see no classrooms lost.

The board explained that infrastructure projects for schools are held to rigid formulas for allowable space based on student population.



Work on the Noble Central modernization began more than two years ago with a meeting that included the village's then mayor to discuss potential partnerships for the project. The village has been represented at various planning meetings and invited to consider investing in a community library or fitness centre, but it declined to commit. Zech noted the Town of Magrath has committed \$2 million toward a school modernization in that community.

"We are fortunate to get this money for modernization," Zech said. "I can't underscore that enough. For 35 years, I've wanted to see that school modernized. We're finally doing it."

The board said the modernization work could be jeopardized if trustees now signal a desire to seek a brand new school.

Chair Colleen Deitz, a trustee since 1998, said in her time on the board, Palliser has reopened three schools (Barons, John Davidson and Carmangay), and been part of new schools at Jennie Emery in Coaldale and Vulcan Prairieview in Vulcan. Noble Central is only the second modernization announcement for Palliser in 16 years.

McDowell and Wobick thanked the Palliser board for its work in Nobleford.

"I know you will make the best decision for our school and our community," Wobick said.

For more information on the modernization project, please visit <http://www.noblecentralschool.ca/modernization/modernization-updates>

## Board's organizational meeting delayed

The board discussed a delay of its annual organizational meeting at which committee membership, a chair and vice-chair are determined. Normally that meeting is held in October.

This year, the board opted to delay with one trustee spot vacant due to a resignation in July and another trustee absent.

The board voted to proceed with audit and board-teacher advisory committees as committees of the whole (meaning all trustees serve) for now. Both committees

have meetings scheduled in the next month. The board also voted to extend the one-year term of Chair Colleen Deitz and Vice-Chair Don Zech for a month. They were voted to those positions last October.

The board has scheduled a byelection for Feb. 2, 2015 to fill the vacancy in Ward 1, Subdivision 4, representing the Lethbridge County area surrounding and including the communities of Picture Butte and Iron Springs. Nomination day will be Jan. 5.

The remaining trustees have been attending school council meetings and other functions to cover for the trustee vacancy.

## **Palliser's school review process continues to gather interest**

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said three people from Medicine Hat Catholic Board of Education will be coming to Palliser to observe a school review at Jennie Emery Elementary School. The review team of central office administrators and principals and vice-principals from other Palliser schools will be at the Coaldale elementary school Oct. 30. Dan Ferguson, education manager of south service with Alberta Education, has also asked to participate in a review. He joined Palliser for a review last year as well.

The review process includes surveys of staff, students and parents, focus group meetings with those groups and one-on-one interviews with teachers.

## **Palliser's pillar results outstanding again**

Superintendent Kevin Gietz congratulated the board for the latest [Accountability Pillar](#), which reflects results from last spring's provincial achievement tests and diploma exams.

This year, Palliser surpassed the provincial average in 15 of 16 categories. More than 85 per cent of Palliser students passed their provincial achievement tests, compared to 74 per cent provincially; and 27.5 per cent of students achieved excellence on PATs, compared to 19 per cent provincially. Nearly 90 per cent of students passed their diploma exams, compared to about 85 per cent provincially.

Gietz said Palliser staff are doing an analysis of high school results because the percentage of students achieving excellence on diploma exams has remained strong but have declined. Nearly 20 per cent of students achieved excellence on their diploma exams this past year, but that's down from a three-average of 26 per cent.

Overall, Palliser results are excellent across the board and are among the best in the province, Gietz said. High school completion rates are high and students are demonstrating achievement at a high level.

"Kudos to the staff we have in place," Gietz said. "With the structures the board has put in place, you've allowed our staff to grow... Students are prepared to become citizens."

Chair Colleen Deitz issued a public thank you to Palliser staff for the hard work that sustains excellent results.

## **Calgary Christian Secondary team urges students to up their game**

Calgary Christian Secondary School Principal Jason Kupery was welcomed to the board meeting to share his response to a school review conducted in November 2013.

"I am very proud of my staff," he said, thanking the board for the review opportunity. "The school review was a very positive thing that happened to us. It is a very valuable process."

The review found the school's strengths include a great staff, strong Christ-centred atmosphere and an inclusive and supportive environment. Kupery said that inclusion extends to other Palliser schools. Students from Brant Christian School attended a Thanksgiving event at Calgary Christian, students from Calgary Christian attended a career fair at Master's College and last year Picture Butte High School students attended Calgary Christian's volunteer fair.

"We're all a community. It doesn't matter if you're a north school, a south school or a Christian school," Kupery said. "The partnership between Palliser and Calgary Christian means a lot to me."

Calgary Christian joined Palliser as a faith-based alternative program in 2008 after having operated as a private school. The secondary campus serves about 420 students from Grade 7-12.

Kupery said the review identified as areas of growth higher expectations for learning and learners; consistency in discipline; effective use of class time and homework; and meeting the needs of all learners.

The staff has adopted the book "Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations," written by teenaged twins Alex and Brett Harris ([therebelution.com](http://therebelution.com)). Teachers are committing to doing something challenging this year and encouraging students to do the same. Student council members are reading the book as are some parents.

The school has adopted a restorative policy on discipline that connects to assessment for learning. If a



student doesn't get an assignment done, they face lunch-hour study hall when they can work on completing missed assignments.

"They don't get out till the work is done," he said. "It holds kids accountable . . . We're getting kids working and getting deadlines met."

On Friday afternoons, students are dismissed at 1:50 p.m., and staff start their weekly professional development time by about 2:05 p.m. The work is focused on the school's "big rocks" of assessment for learning, literacy and faith. Every second Friday is literacy focused with teachers discussing the assessments of individual students so each teacher knows each student's strengths and gaps and can provide support.

Kupery said Palliser's high school administrators, working together during the division-wide collaboration days, have created a definition of what high school literacy looks like, and that's helped shape the literacy work occurring at Calgary Christian Secondary.

The school has adopted flex time for middle school students, providing a period a day for students to focus on subjects where they need extra help. To ensure accountability, the student provides his/her homeroom teacher a document the teacher signs to acknowledge that the flex time was spent focused on work.

"For kids who don't struggle, it's a great time for enrichment," Kupery said, noting some students are using the period to work on science fair projects or participating in jazz band.

The board thanked Kupery for his presentation and the work he's doing at the school.

## **Next collaborative day will go Google**

Palliser Regional Schools' teachers will meet for their third of four collaborative learning days on Dec. 1. While normally these professional learning groups meet in Vulcan, a central location in the division, this time teachers will have the option of connecting by Google Hangout, said Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger.

The recommendation came from Palliser's joint C2 committee which discusses teacher efficacy and workload. The committee, comprised of Palliser administration, trustees, teacher representatives and facilitated by Dan Ferguson, of Alberta Education, recommended that the superintendent examine the travel component associated with Palliser's collaborative days.

Tom Hamer, Palliser's director of learning who oversees technology, attended the committee meeting Oct. 14 to discuss using Google to support this collaboration. As a backup, Garinger said the division could use Blackboard Collaborative, a tool used to connect students and teachers in Palliser Beyond Borders, the division's online school.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said during the committee's discussion, it was clear teachers value their collaboration time and they want to reduce travel time to maximize time working together.

## **Palliser breaks new ground on placing student teachers**

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger said Palliser will have 26 Professional Semester 1 student teachers from the University of Lethbridge placed in Palliser schools with mentor teachers starting in November. These placements were handled using a new system that sees the HR department manage requests for placements, rather than having the university contact principals directly.

In Calgary three student teachers from the University of Calgary will begin practicums in Palliser's schools in that city.

By centralizing the placement process, Garinger said Palliser can ensure students are placed with the best possible mentor teachers.

## **Criminal record check requirements in interest of student safety**

There appears to be some confusion about Palliser's requirements for criminal record checks for volunteers in schools.

According to Palliser's Administrative Procedure 470 (found online [here](#)) volunteers who may be left alone with students are required to provide a recent criminal record check once a year. The criminal record check must have been completed within three months of it being submitted to the school.

Although the administrative procedure encourages volunteers to notify the school principal if their criminal record status changes during that year, there is no recourse should they fail to do so, leaving the school unaware of a record that may mean the volunteer is no longer suited to work with students.

Trustees discussed that Palliser staff are only required to submit a current criminal record check at the time of hiring, but they are notified that they must let their supervisor know if their criminal record status changes. If they fail to do so, their employment will be at risk.

Trustees suggested sending a reminder to volunteers toward the end of the school year to suggest they apply to their local law enforcement agency for a new CRC in July in order to ensure they have the document in hand when the school year starts.

Trustees said the Palliser practice of requiring criminal record checks is in the best interest of student safety.

## Testing program requires discussion

The board received a report on alcohol and drug testing programs for school bus drivers. The board sought more information after a question was raised at a school council meeting about whether such a program had merit.

The report from Transportation Services Supervisor David Shaw found there are no federal or provincial regulations mandating such a program and none of Alberta's school divisions that operate their own school buses have random testing programs.

However, the two largest school bus contractors in the area have adopted their own testing policies.

The report estimated it would cost \$1,750 to \$2,200 annually to test six to 10 drivers a year.

Trustees said further investigation and more discussion is warranted.

## Choral Day has board support

Palliser students will be able to take part in a Choral Day with transportation support from the board.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Dale Backlin said Heritage Christian Academy in Calgary has offered to host a day for choral groups from across Palliser. The day would be similar to Palliser Band Day, which has brought together students from across the division for mass practice and performances.

Backlin said this is intended to be a one-time event. The board supported Band Day by covering transportation costs for participating schools, and the board will do so for Choral Day as well.

## Buses still the safest for students

The board discussed the safest way to transport students and maintained a stance adopted in December 2010 that states buses should be up to D250 or D270 standards. D250 standard is found on school buses. D270 multi-activity vehicles are structurally the same as school buses, but they are not yellow and don't have the flashing red or amber lights.

The question of student transportation came up after some high schools reported community groups are interested in buying vehicles for use by sports teams. The board discussed not wanting to discourage community support, while encouraging the safest option for student travel.

## International agency will visit Palliser

The CEO of an international student recruitment agency will visit several Palliser high schools at the end of October and tour the University of Calgary and University

of Lethbridge.

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard said Palliser has arranged for the delegation to tour post-secondary campuses during their visit to Alberta.

The international student program in Palliser was launched last year to help students develop cultural understanding and make global connections.

Rivard said Palliser is looking for families interested in playing host to an international student as interest in the program grows.

## Central services in high demand

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard updated the board on a number of services that are in high demand around Palliser.

He began by offering thanks for the work of Dan Doerksen, Palliser's Low German liaison worker. Doerksen provides language support to Low German-speaking families, is often the first point of contact between Palliser and LGM families, and he helps with all family meetings to ensure the parents, who may have limited English skills, are informed about school matters. He is called on to support Low German-speaking families from across the division.

Rivard said since September, Palliser staff have completed 20 violent threat risk assessments to address worrisome and threatening behaviours, a process that involves a number of people, including the student and parent/guardians, and includes follow up to support the student. The process is intended to address issues before they can escalate.

The Palliser academic wraparound team has consulted on five cases so far this year and have three more booked. The team is led by Director of Learning Laurie Wilson, who is an expert on inclusive education, and includes Palliser's literacy coach and technology integration specialist, and others as needed. The team meets with a classroom teacher to discuss a particular student who may be struggling, observes the student, and identifies strategies to help the student learn. The process serves as professional development for the teacher who often finds the strategies and supports identified for one student prove beneficial to others in the classroom.

Rivard said Palliser's behaviour support specialist, Karen Braun, has been accessed by 17 schools to help 34 students so far this year.

Palliser's central services also include speech language pathologists, family and school liaison counsellors, and career and academic counsellors. Rivard said Palliser also received a wellness grant this year and will be working to support "health champions" in every school to support student wellness.

## **Barons, Coalhurst Elementary top priorities for modular request**

The board named Barons School and Coalhurst Elementary Schools as Priority 1 and 2, respectively, as Palliser prepares to make its annual request for modular classrooms.

Barons School serves about 165 students from early childhood services through Grade 6. Coalhurst Elementary has nearly 300 students from ECS through Grade 6.

This past year, Palliser was approved for two modular classrooms that were recently installed at Jennie Emery Elementary School in Coaldale, a school serving about 450 students from ECS through Grade 4.

## **Financial trend data shared**

Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun shared a profile of Palliser's financial position over the past five years, trend data prepared by Alberta Education annually.

The report shows change over a six-year period up to 2012-13, and compares how a jurisdiction is positioned financially compared to the average and median of all other school districts and divisions in Alberta and to those with similar student enrolments.

Highlights include an increase in the value of Palliser's buildings compared to historical cost, indicating the condition of facilities. The significant rise is attributed to modernization of Picture Butte High School and the insurance-funded rebuild of Arrowwood Community School, which was heavily damaged by fire in April 2012.

The condition of equipment and vehicles has also increased in recent years as Palliser began purchasing new school buses after nearly three years without buying new buses.

The report shows Palliser had about \$2 million in accumulated operating surplus, the equivalent of what it costs Palliser to operate for 6.35 days. That was considerably lower than all other divisions at 15.34 days, and similar sized divisions at 21.69 days.

A few years ago, the minister of education asked boards to spend down their surpluses. Braun said Palliser appears to be where it should be in terms of maintaining a manageable surplus.

## **Board supports facility support strategy to address lease funding inequity**

Palliser's board voted in support of providing facilities support funding for those alternative programs that currently do not receive facility lease funding from the province.

Calgary Christian Elementary and Secondary Schools, Master's Academy and College and Trinity Christian School, which joined Palliser in 2008-09 or later, receive no lease funding support from Alberta Education. Palliser's alternative programs at Brant, Menno Simons Christian School and Heritage Christian Academy, who joined Palliser in 2005 and 2006, do receive lease funding.

The board has lobbied Alberta Education unsuccessfully for years for fair provision of lease funding because hundreds of students in Calgary programs are being educated in space built and funded privately, at no cost to taxpayers.

Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun recommended facilities support funding could be provided to those schools that have received no lease funding by redirecting a portion of Plant Operations and Maintenance (PO and M) dollars. Currently, labour costs for Palliser's Facilities Services staff come largely out of the PO and M fund, even when staff are working on Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal (IMR)-funded projects. All schools, including the alternative programs in Calgary, receive PO and M funding for general maintenance, utilities and caretaking needs. However, IMR funding can only be spent on Palliser-owned facilities, not privately owned facilities that house the faith-based alternative programs.

The provision of facilities support to schools not receiving lease support would not have any impact on Palliser's operating grants for the educational program.

With Palliser staff now doing more IMR work, those labour costs could come from IMR funding. That would free up PO and M funding for facilities support for the Calgary schools that do not receive any provincial lease support.

Some facility support funding could begin immediately if there's a surplus in facilities funds at the end of the 2013-14 financial year. A year-end audit will be completed in a few weeks.

The board supported the strategy of providing facilities support funding in light of the lack of lease funding for some of its alternative program schools.