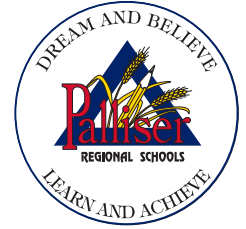


Highlights of the Board of Trustees Meeting

April 14, 2015



The Board of Trustees held its regular monthly meeting at Palliser Centre in Lethbridge Tuesday, April 14, 2015. Corporate Treasurer Wayne Braun was not in attendance. The board held a moment of silence at the start of the meeting in light of the recent passing of two individuals in Palliser. The next regular meeting of the board will be held May 26. The meeting was rescheduled by board motion from the previously announced date of May 19.

Kudos to Palliser staff and students

During the regular roundtable discussion during which trustees share their activities from the previous month, kudos were offered to a number of groups and individuals.

Trustee Craig Whitehead congratulated the 16 students who presented at the Palliser Student Leadership Conference in Calgary. He said the presentations were excellent and the feedback he's heard from students who attended the day has been positive. Chair Colleen Deitz commended student presenters and keynote speaker, Sheldon Kennedy, a former professional hockey player who is now a leading advocate for victims of sexual abuse. Vice-Chair Don Zech and Trustee Debbie Laturnus commended Superintendent Kevin Gietz, Associate Superintendents Pat Rivard and Ken Garinger, Directors of Learning Cynthia Gietz and Laurie Wilson and Director of Human Resources Mike Nightingale for their presentations at the National Congress on Rural Education. Gietz, Rivard and Wilson led a session on Palliser's model for inclusive education; Garinger, Nightingale and Gietz presented Palliser's induction and mentorship program for beginning teachers. Trustee Esther Willms commended Menno Simons Christian School Principal Byron Thiessen for his work with the school council and the great job he does sharing information with parents. Trustee Robert Strauss offered kudos to all involved in County Central High School's drama presentation of "A Pirate's Life."

Budget discussion continues

Chair Colleen Deitz says many constituents she's talked to don't realize how difficult the provincial budget will be for schools across Alberta.

Although the provincial budget included a two-per-cent increase to a portion of the basic per-student grant to

cover a contractual obligation to teachers due this fall, a smaller portion of the grant was reduced, along with every other grant to school systems.

She says there's a false sense of security that boards can absorb the reductions by cutting in administration, but administrative costs are already capped at 3.6 per cent of spending, and even that was reduced by 10 per cent in a previous provincial budget.

The budget announced in late March finds almost every grant to school jurisdictions has been cut by 3.1 per cent, including grants for English as a Second Language, program unit funding for early learners with special needs, Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (which serves students with complex needs) and First Nations funding. Inclusive education funding was cut by 1.9 per cent and transportation grants by 1.4 per cent.

The cuts will affect the most vulnerable Albertans, Deitz said.

She noted the province also will not provide any funding for enrolment growth next year and has capped high school credit funding levels. The province also set restrictions on teacher staffing levels and on surplus use, giving boards less flexibility than they've had before.

Superintendent's reappointment approved for new five-year term

The board received a letter from Alberta Education Deputy Minister Lorna Rosen approving the reappointment of Superintendent Kevin Gietz for a new five-year term. The board had recommended Gietz for reappointment following his annual evaluation in June 2014. The request was submitted to the province in August but was only now confirmed. His current contract expires at the end of June.

Central Office review recommendations completed or in progress

The board received a report following up on recommendations made in a review of Palliser's Central Office, conducted in January 2014 by educational consultant Dr. Leroy Sloan. As part of the review, Sloan conducted one-on-one interviews with Central Office staff and conducted group meetings with the board and the division's principals and vice-principals.

The review resulted in 11 recommendations, all of which have been or continue to be acted on. These included the appointment of a treasurer with an accounting designation; appointment and training of a co-ordinator of Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy; strengthening of the division's Occupational Health and Safety program; expansion of the physical space used by Palliser staff in the central office building in Lethbridge to improve working conditions; and adoption of LEAN practices to improve efficiency, and abandon some practices while maintaining service. The review also recommended the board and senior management work to strengthen the organizational culture for dealing with concerns by following defined organization structure. The review reiterated the importance of concerns or complaints being directed to the person who is the focus on the concern, and if not resolved, then advanced to the person's superior, and up the chain of command until the matter is resolved. The process is reflected in Palliser's administrative procedures and staff and encouraged to comply so matters can be addressed in a professional manner.

The board accepted the report.

Picture Butte schools move to early dismissal Fridays for two-year trial

The board reviewed the results of a vote by parents at Dorothy Dalgliesh and Picture Butte High School on whether students should be dismissed early on Fridays. The vote was conducted by the school councils at the two Picture Butte schools in accordance with the process outlined in Palliser Administrative Procedure 111 School Year Calendar.

The AP states significant deviations from the school calendar must have the voting support of at least 65 per cent of families who will have children enrolled in the school during the year in which the proposed change will be implemented. Each family is entitled to one vote, even if they have children at more than one school affected by the proposed change.

Parents at Picture Butte High voted 85 per cent in favour of early Friday dismissal; parents at the elementary school were 69 per cent in favour.

The Superintendent sought input from other groups, including the town council, Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and Alberta Teachers' Association and others.

The ATA declined to offer an opinion. CUPE Local 290, which represents the schools' caretakers, and Holy Spirit Separate Regional Division, which operates a school in the community and which uses Palliser bus service, said they were in agreement with the proposed change.

The board voted to approve the request for early Friday dismissal starting this fall on a two-year trial basis. Continued approval is contingent on the results of a school-administered survey in April of the second year of the pilot. That vote requires the approval of 70 per cent of families for the change to continue.

HR department streamlining processes

Associate Superintendent (Human Resources) Ken Garinger and Director of Human Resources Mike Nightingale provided the board the annual report from Palliser's HR department.

The Human Resources department oversees 455 support staff (bus drivers, caretakers, Central Office staff, educational assistants, school administrative assistants and librarians) and about 430 teachers, principals, vice-principals, specialists, associate superintendents and directors.

The department also works with about 440 casual or substitute employees.

Garinger and Nightingale said several processes have been streamlined this year, including the creation and use of Google forms and automated tasks and notifications so when a person is hired, others in Central Office are notified to set up their staff email, create their computer login and provide them a building key as required.

The department also co-ordinates staff evaluations and has overseen 197 evaluations of school staff this year.

Garinger said Palliser Central Office staff are trained to be trainers for professional development, including Seven Habits of Highly Successful People. That training promotes staff development in Palliser.

New this year, the department began co-ordinating the placement of student teachers completing practicum work as part of their degree programs, to ensure aspiring teachers are paired with the strongest teachers.

One major undertaking this year is the move to new human resources and payroll software. That transition is occurring now through early fall. Garinger said this change will streamline processes for Central Office and school staff.

Literacy work making a difference

Palliser's division-wide focus on literacy is making a significant difference to the reading strengths of students, according to assessment data collected this spring.

This is only the second year that Palliser has conducted Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments on all students not yet reading at a Grade 7 level. The assessments are conducted in early fall and early spring by classroom teachers so they know what reading skills students already have and what they need to work on next

to keep progressing.

This spring, about 4,150 students were assessed from Grade 1 up. Testing stops as soon as students reach the highest level in the assessment tool. Only students with severe communication or cognitive delays are not assessed.

Comparing last spring's results to this spring's, there's been a 5.5-per-cent increase in the number of students in Grades 1-6 working at expected grade level.

Rivard said Grade 1 students performed similarly last year and this year in the assessments, with relatively little change between the percentage of students who are reading at or above grade level in the fall and in the spring.

In other grades, though, the difference between fall and spring has been significant. In Grade 2, for example, only 43 per cent of students were reading at or above grade level in the fall. That rose to 70 per cent by spring.

Superintendent Kevin Gietz said Palliser intends to adopt a new literacy goal based on a presentation by literacy expert Richard Allington. The goal states 95 per cent of students starting kindergarten in Palliser this fall will be reading at or above grade level by the time they reach Grade 3.

The data also found students' reading levels fall back between the spring test and the following fall, something literacy experts refer to as "summer reading loss." Associate Superintendent (Education Services)

Pat Rivard said research shows reading even four or five books over the summer may prevent summer reading loss, and Palliser's literacy team will be looking for ways to encourage students to maintain their reading momentum through July and August.

Staff award dinner June 4

Palliser will honour its award-winning staff at an annual staff recognition dinner in Lethbridge June 4. This annual event invites award winners and those nominated for recognition to dinner with the board. The award recipient's immediate supervisor is also invited to introduce the award winner and acknowledge his or her contributions to Palliser.

Vulcan expected to host international student from China this fall

Associate Superintendent (Education Services) Pat Rivard said Palliser will have its first international student attend school in Vulcan this fall. The student is from China.

Rivard said he will attend a meeting with Alberta Education officials in Edmonton later in the week to discuss Palliser offering online courses to international students as well.

Palliser's international student program has four students attending division schools this year. The program was started last year.

Next meeting: Tuesday, May 26

