



Key Community Leaders Newsletter

March 20, 2015

2015/2016 Division Calendar

The Board approved the 2015-2016 PLRD #25 Division Calendar. Students' first day back is Monday, August 31. The calendar provides family holidays during the weeks of November 9-13 and February 15-19 and Christmas and Easter breaks. This approved calendar includes 182 instructional days and 197 teacher days that include seven PD and four teacher preparation days.

The Board appreciates the feedback and the support that it received from our communities for this calendar and encourages all parents and staff to work together to support student learning every day that students are in school so that we achieve high performance standards by utilizing each and every school day to its fullest potential. Staff, parents, and students are asked to schedule their time away from school on designated days off so that student attendance is consistent and individual student learning needs are supported. The division Calendar can be accessed at <http://www.plrd.ab.ca/documents/general/2015-2016%20Approved%20Calendar.pdf> .

Continuous Improvement for PLRD's Provincial Accountability Pillar Results

PLRD's achievement results on the provincial accountability pillars demonstrated higher than provincial standings in all 16 indicators of effective school measures with the exception of parental and student satisfaction with the program of studies. Our standing on diploma examinations was at the standard of excellence (although improved for the district with 12.8% of our students achieving at the standard of excellence compared to 21% provincially.). Compared to the province PLRD's standings on achievement test results at both the standard of excellence and the acceptable standard are above provincial averages as is our standing on Diploma examinations at the acceptable standard. PLRD has a significant greater proportion of students registering in diploma examinable courses than happens provincially (60.9% compared to 50.5%) with an equal result at the acceptable standard.

In the categories of safe and caring schools, preparation for lifelong learning, work, citizenship, parental involvement, and continuous improvement, PLRD's schools demonstrated excellent results. Student learning opportunities and achievement from K-12 were rated as good overall. These standings demonstrate growth over the past five years for PLRD with the last three of these years showing continued and significant improvement.

PLRD's focus on the seven correlates of effective schools, (access our Q and A regarding these correlates at <http://www.plrd.ab.ca/documents/general/Effective%20What%20-%20What%20Are%20Effective%20School%20Correlates.pdf>) effective classroom instruction and teaching excellence for the 21 century, and principal instructional leadership are factors that we think have improved our achievement standings on these pillar results. PLRD intends to stay the course. This year we have been focusing our

attention on parenting for a successful schooling experience as per one on the seven correlates. On Thursday, March 19th, parents from across PLRD are invited to take part in a parenting workshop entitled *Ten Tips to Help Your Child Succeed*. This workshop is being hosted in Hanna and will be webcast throughout the division.

PLRD will continue to focus on teacher development through our cohort work with teachers. Our new calendar allows for additional PD days to give teachers an opportunity to work collectively to continue to support and improve our overall teaching quality and curriculum implementation. PLRD's provincial pillar results can be viewed at <http://www.plrd.ab.ca/documents/general/PLRD%2025%20Division%20Accountability%20Pillar%20Summary%20Report%20-%20October%202014.pdf> .

PLRD's Enrollment Profile

PLRD has experienced a steady decline in enrollment of students over the past 20 years. In 1996 PLRD's enrollment was 2,112 students from K-12. This school year our enrollment 1,353.5. We have adjusted to these enrolment declines by changing the way we deliver courses and staff our schools and division services. Staff reductions at the division level have been significant over the past five years with a reduction in about four positions overall. PLRD's capacity to support learning through central services has been reduced significantly so we have focused our leadership over these functions at the school level by enhancing principal and secretary allocations in most of our schools. The coordination and supervision of services for students happens in a partnership between the school and the division with school principals and their staff assuming more responsibility for ensuring that wrap-around services for students in need are made available and are effective. Each of our schools has responded with an enhanced focus on students with exceptional needs and on students at risk.

PLRD has invested in and utilizes enhanced program delivery technologies such as video conferencing in order to staff our schools at sustainably affordable levels in accordance with the shrinking provincial budgets that we have received over this same number of years. The majority of funds flowing to school divisions from the province are per/pupil funds, so with fewer students in our schools the cost per student continues to rise as budgets shrink.

Over the past years PLRD boards have adjusted staffing levels in school and divisionally with most of our schools staffed at levels that the current board would consider bottom-line staffing levels. The Board has instructed the superintendent and secretary-treasurer to develop a budget for the 2015-16 school year that focuses on maintaining staffing close to the current levels by drawing down reserves. Over the same years that our enrolment has declined, PLRD's operating reserves have been significantly reduced from a high of \$4,589,341 in 2001 to our current level of \$2,275,122 or 9.4% of our total operating budget of \$24,189,043. PLRD's budget document can be accessed at <http://www.plrd.ab.ca/documents/general/2014-2015%20Budget.pdf> .

Organizational Meeting

The Prairie Land Regional Division #25 trustees assembled on Wednesday, September 24, 2014 for the Board annual organizational meeting. Trustees accept specific roles and responsibilities for the upcoming school year as follows:

- a. E. Brinkman was elected Board Chair, and M. Tkach elected Vice-chair.
- b. Negotiating Committee – E. Brinkman, H. Smith, M. Tkach & J Hill (alternate)
- c. Discipline Committee – E. Brinkman, L. Cawiezel, & D. Hansen
- d. Scholarship Committee – L. Cawiezel, H. Smith, & A. Warwick
- e. Executive Committee – E. Brinkman, J. Hill , & M. Tkach
- f. Support Staff Liaison Committee – D. Hansen & H. Smith
- g. Board-ATA Liaison Committee – J. Hill & M. Tkach
- h. C2 Committee – M. Tkach & A. Warwick
- i. Aboriginal Committee – D. Hansen
- j. Alberta School Boards Association Zone 5 representative – H. Smith/J. Hill (alternate)
- k. Public School Boards Association of Alberta representative – B. Davis/J. Hill (alternate)
- l. Starland County Family and Community Support Services representative – E. Brinkman/L. Cawiezel (alternate).

The Board congratulates and thanks trustees for assuming these roles and for accepting the responsibilities they necessitate.

Board meetings will be held on average on a three week rotation to be held on Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m. at PLRD central office. The 2014-2015 Board meeting scheduled can be accessed at <http://www.plrd.ab.ca/Meeting%20Dates.php> .

Board Advocacy Plan

This year's *Board Advocacy Plan* will focus on ensuring quality core programming for all schools, securing adequate funding for transportation and improved capacity to recruit and retain bus drivers. Our trustees have met with our MLA, Rick Strankman to explain our budget pressures and the inadequacy of funding PLRD receives for our transportation services. The Board Chair and the superintendent of schools have met with the Minister of Education and the department of education to highlight our funding pressures and areas of inequity in funding to school boards. The Board's advocacy plan can be accessed at: <http://www.plrd.ab.ca/documents/general/AdvocacyPlan.pdf> .

PLRD administration has developed talking points that highlight funding issues related to the Equity of Opportunity, Small Schools by Necessity, and transportation grants that if corrected would address PLRD's funding challenges and enable us to better offer equitable access to quality programming for all of our students. The Board has asked their school councils to share these talking points and to encourage their communities

to write our Premier and our Minister to advocate respectfully and responsibly for fairer funding for remote rural school divisions. The Board emphasizes that in times of shrinking provincial revenues it would be unconscionable to ask for more funding for education; however, equitable funding that creates a level playing field for large metro, urban, rural, and remote rural boards is a necessary democratic principal that the Board believes must be adhered to in good times and especially so in times of economic duress. The talking points can be accessed at http://www.plrd.ab.ca/documents/general/Effective%20What%20-%20What%20Are%20Effective%20School%20Correlates_1.pdf . These talking points can be used to help our school communities highlight, in their own words, the inequities in funding and thus advocate in a fair and responsible manner for our students in PLRD.

Enhanced Programs for PLRD Schools

PLRD's focus on quality teaching and learning for every child has been in place over the past five years and will remain our focus. We have emphasised the importance of curriculum rigour and relevance, student engagement, mastery teaching and learning, formative assessment and meaningful feedback, rapport and mutual respect; effective use of time on task, and well planned, scaffolded learning activities that address every child's learning needs. Additionally, PLRD continues to focus on enhancing program access for our students.

To date this school year approximately 80 students across Prairie Land have and are accessing dual credit programming. These programs including *Health Care Aide* with Red Deer College, *Heavy Oil and Gas Productions*, *Esthetics*, *Environmental Sustainability*, *Early Child Care*, and *Exploring Exceptionalities* with Lakeland College, and *Power Engineering* through NAIT. These programs provide students with advanced college credits and in some instances first year program completion so they can continue their studies once they graduate from High School. PLRD will continue to explore dual credit offerings for our students.

The Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) continues to support PLRD students who wish to explore their interest in a trades related field. This year 12 of our students are enrolled in mechanics, agricultural technician, parts technician, welding, auto-body, carpentry, heavy duty mechanics, and instrument technician registered apprenticeship programs. Students can achieve up to two years of their apprenticeship certification while they are in school and they can earn up to 40 high school credits towards their diploma.

Ninety PLRD students are enrolled in green certificate studies. Students who complete this program receive special recognition on their high school diploma certifying completion of the green certificate. Specialties include studies in cow and calf, field crop, equine sheep, swine, and feed lot.

Additionally many of our students are engaged in work experience studies that allow them to explore unique avenues of interest, some of which lead to positive career pathways. The Board takes this opportunity to thank your community leaders and all of our business

and community partners who generously support these students through sponsorships and placements within their organizations. Your support for these learners is invaluable.

Board School Council Meeting

On March 31, the Board is hosting a meeting of all school council chairs and invited key community leaders to discuss how we can work together to create and maintain sustainable vibrant communities throughout PLRD. Schools operate within an environment of community economic wellbeing and social vibrancy. We will be exploring ways to encourage a return to rural and ways of creating new, sustainable investments in our schools and communities.