



Key Community Leaders Update

Introduction

In February 2008 the Board of Trustees of Prairie Land Regional Division embarked on a major initiative in an effort to engage as many citizens, parents and community leaders as possible in discussing the future direction that education should take for our children. Meetings, which were called *Engaging the Community*, were held in June 2008 in Altario and Veteran, in the fall of 2008 in Youngstown and Berry Creek, this winter in Delia and Morrin. Next fall's meetings will be held in Hanna and Consort. The direction that education will take in this Division for the next two years will be determined after the information gathered at these meetings has been analyzed. As a result of undertaking these meetings the Board decided to cancel their annual *Key Community Leaders Meeting* for this year. However, in an effort to keep you updated on what has been occurring in the Division, the Board decided to outline for you in this brief newsletter some of our Division highlights. If you have any questions about the content of this newsletter or about the Division in general, please feel free to contact any of the trustees or central office staff.

School Building Operations (PO&M)

PLRD is fortunate to be in receipt of capital funding in the amount of \$1,538,255, announced in the fall of 2008, to purchase a Mobile Training Lab and Supply Trailer. The lab and supply trailer, manufactured by Innovative Trailer Design (ITD), a sole-source firm out of Mississauga, Ontario, is a state-of-the-art facility that will enable us to offer courses in welding, woodworking, automotive, electrical and plumbing to students who do not currently have a facility in their school. The lab will be operational for the first semester of 2009-2010, located in Morrin from September to January and Delia from February to June.

The PLRD mobile lab will be on display at the *2009 World Skills Competition* in Calgary during the first week in September, prior to its delivery to Morrin. World Skills provides a unique means of exchange and comparison of world-class competency standards in the industrial trades and service sectors of the global economy. The showcase of this unit will be a milestone in our area.

Student Transportation

For the majority of rural Alberta's student population, it is safe to say that the road to education begins and ends in YELLOW. That definitely holds true for PLRD students. During 2008-2009 PLRD is operating 45 distinct school bus routes, delivering students to nine schools spread over our 6000 sq. mile jurisdiction. With an overall student population of 1,599, we have 848 students who ride the bus every day, putting on in excess of 1.6 million kilometers each year.

Over the past few years we have injected significant capital dollars into upgrading our fleet and have effectively reduced the average age of our fleet to six years old, a plausible age, and a number we will strive to maintain with regular budgeted acquisitions.

Working within organizations like the Student Transportation Association of Alberta, PLRD's Transportation Department continues to meet and exceed the increasingly stringent safety requirements of Alberta Transportation and Alberta Education. Recently developed and implemented safety standards, practices and equipment in the student transportation industry have enhanced the safety of our students and the motoring public alike. Driver development and education also remains one of our top priorities.

Financial Synopsis

PLRD operates with provincial funding based on a total of 1,549 full time equivalent students during the 2008-2009 school year. The majority of funding received is enrolment-based and as a result, expenditures are budgeted on that basis. Total budgeted revenue for the 2008-2009 year was \$22,388,950; budgeted expenditures were \$23,114,737 to generate a deficit budget of \$725,787 to be covered primarily by instructional reserves.



Seventy-three per cent of total expenditures go directly to the payment of salaries and benefits of which 68 per cent of those, \$11,671,712, relate to certified teaching salaries. The average teacher salary, including benefits, was estimated to be close to \$87,500 for 2008-2009. The remaining salaries, \$5,310,825, include all other school-based and divisional staff including educational assistants, library support, secretarial support, custodial, operating and maintenance, transportation, administrative, financial and governance (Trustee) positions. Other expenditures include all supplies and services, as well as non-cash depreciation on Board funded capital assets.

At the end of the 2007-2008 year, the Division was in a solid financial position retaining \$3.5 million in operating reserves and \$1.5 million in designated capital reserves. With the exception of \$330,000, all operating reserves are restricted to designated areas including \$781,479 at the school level. The majority of capital reserves are held for the replenishment of the bus fleet, technology requirements and non-school buildings, primarily our staff housing requirements. A total of \$432,230 is budgeted to be spent on capital items for the 2008-2009 year with the majority of that being for the purchase of buses.

Financial information including the detailed 2008-2009 budget and the 2007-2008 audited financial statements can be found on the PLRD website.

Instructional Programming

Report Card Implementation: During the past year all PLRD teachers have been involved in the implementation of new Division-wide report cards. The new reports focus on providing parents with information specific to their child's mastery of the outcomes in the Alberta Program of Studies. At the end of this school year, the committee will consider further changes to the new reporting system.

New Curriculum Implementation: During the past year teachers have implemented new curriculum in Social Studies and Mathematics. Workshops to assist teachers in the implementation of the new curricula have been ongoing for the last two to three years.

Bring Your Own Laptop Project: The Division has received special project funding that will allow for the installation of network infrastructure that will provide both students and staff with the ability to use their own personal computers on PLRD networks. All necessary firewalls and virus protection protocols will be in place to ensure personal laptops do not disrupt the Division network.

Mini Laptop Project: Three classrooms in PLRD (Delia, Morrin, Altario) at the Grade 4/5/6 level have been provided with mini laptops as a pilot project to use in their daily instructional processes. These mini laptops do not have the same capability as a fully functioning laptop, but they cost slightly less than \$300 each. The Division wants to determine if these computers are an appropriate investment for students at this age level.

Paving Health Pathways Project: The division has received a substantial grant from Alberta Education to implement career-related courses in the Health Care Sector pathway. Commencing September 2009, students in Prairie Land will have access to courses in Sports Medicine, Child Care Assistant, and Health Care Aide pathways. Once this project is fully implemented over a three year period, students will be provided with a seamless transition from high school to post-secondary programming in these selected career pathways. Many of these pathways will also include certification courses with the high school program itself.

New Teacher Orientations: During this past year all new teachers to PLRD have participated in a series of workshops (4.5 days) that are intended to provide them with strategies to enhance their classroom performance.

Emerge Project / Videoconferencing: Many students in our smaller schools continue to participate in course delivery through the use of video-conferencing technology. All students who take video-conferencing courses are provided with a laptop to enhance their ability to communicate with their teacher and other students in the course. Teachers who deliver courses through video-conferencing technology meet on a regular basis to discuss best practices in course delivery. Given our low enrolment in our small schools, the use of video-conferencing as a means of delivering programming has become an integral component of these schools.

Cosmetology Pilot at Berry Creek Community School: This fall Kelsey Yule, the owner/operator of the Kelsey Yule Academy of Beauty will be providing students at Berry Creek School the opportunity to take a series of cosmetology courses through her academy. A limited number of students in some of our other remote schools will also be able to access these courses through video-conferencing technology. In addition to having the opportunity to take courses from one of the best hair stylists in the business, students enrolled in these courses will have the opportunity to earn credit toward their Hairstyling Diploma while still enrolled in High School. If this course is successful in the pilot stage at Berry Creek School, it will be offered to more students throughout the Division.

Leadership: Finally, the biggest change of all is the resignation of Superintendent Bill Lee, under whose guidance PLRD has thrived. We bid him farewell effective June 30 and thank him for his five years of service and for leaving us in great shape. As well, we welcome Dr. Wes Neumeier to the helm, effective July 1. The announcement of his appointment as Chief Superintendent of Schools and CEO can be found on our home page at www.plrd.ab.ca.

