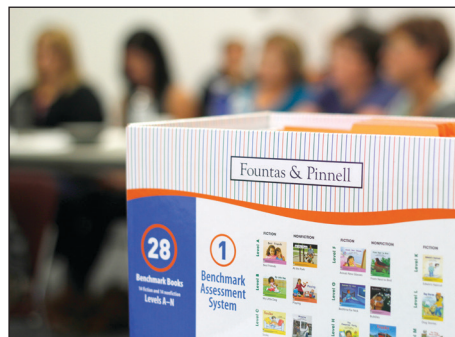


Individual attention, assessment key

Assessment of each individual student's reading ability is vital to the success of Palliser's literacy program.

This year, all students from Grades 1-6 have been assessed using a benchmark tool designed by Fountas and Pinnell to determine their reading level. Students in Grades 7 and up who aren't yet reading at a Grade 8 level have also assessed.



The assessment gives each student time to read one-on-one with their teacher. The information gathered from this assessment is used by teachers to ensure students are reading books suited to their ability, as well as materials that provide a challenge for ongoing development.

In addition to assessing reading (whether the student can sound out the words), the tool measures comprehension (whether the student understands the words). The comprehension conversation ensures students are able to think beyond the text to predict, make connections to their own experiences, process information and make inferences. The discussion goes beyond the student merely retelling what they read.

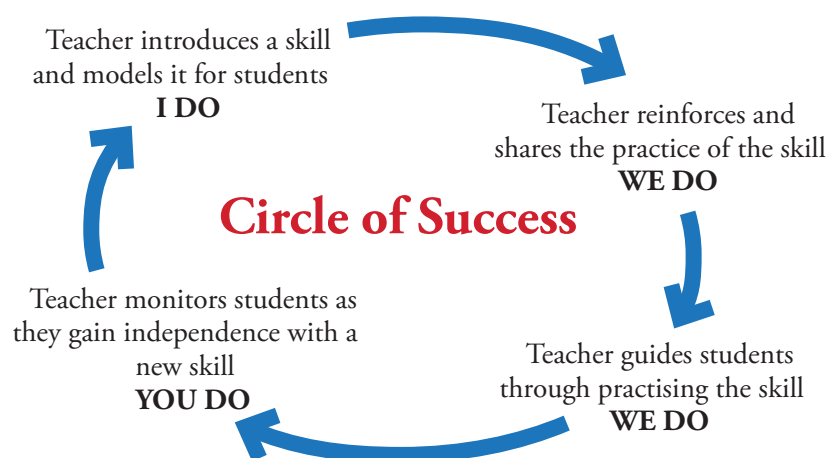
The assessment gives the teacher an understanding of the student's starting point on the road map to literacy.

A second assessment is to be conducted in the spring so the teacher can fine-tune instruction to move the student's literacy forward.

There is a strong link between reading and writing skills, and students need time to do both daily as they work toward independent mastery. A third block of instruction is devoted to word work, which teaches students how to use spelling patterns to read and spell. This work goes beyond memorizing lists of words.

A balanced approach

Palliser Regional Schools has adopted a balanced literacy approach to teaching reading and writing skills to younger students. Instruction is divided into large blocks of time every day for reading and writing. In primary grades, word work (understanding how words sound and are constructed from root words, prefixes and suffixes) is the third major block.



How you can help raise a reader

You don't have to be a literacy expert to support your child's literacy development, and it's never too early or too late to start.

- Read daily. A student who reads 20 minutes a day will read 1.8 million words by Grade 6. A student who reads five minutes a day, will read 282,000 words in that time. Make time daily.
- Be a reader. Your child will notice and follow your lead.
- Create opportunities for your child to write, whether it's a shopping list or an email to a friend.

Here are some age-specific suggestions. More can be found online.

Babies to Age 2

Provide board books small enough for little hands; sing to your child.

Ages 3 to 6

Encourage reading, even if it's memorization of a favourite book. This is a first step to reading. Point to words as you read. Make time for the child to draw and write. Play rhyming games.

Ages 7 to 10

Take turns reading a book at a level comfortable for your child. Talk about what you're reading. What might happen next? What was his/her favourite part? Provide materials on topics of interest to your child.

Ages 11 and up

Take your tween or teen to the bookstore and let them pick what they want to read. Read the same book as your teen so you can talk about it. Read song lyrics and talk about what they mean.

Want more Palliser news?

If you'd like to receive updates on our literacy efforts, news from the Board and other information from Palliser, subscribe to our email **Palliser News Service**.

To subscribe, please send an email to dawn.sugimoto@pallisersd.ab.ca and you'll receive emails notifying you of news, links to our website content, and information from our Board of Trustees.

To comment on this publication, please contact us at literacy@pallisersd.ab.ca or call 403-328-4111, toll-free 1-877-667-1234.



Palliser Regional Schools Leadership in Literacy

Winter 2014

Today a Reader, Tomorrow a Leader

Vol.1, Issue 1

Focus on literacy skills supports student success

Welcome to the first edition of Palliser Regional Schools' Leadership in Literacy publication, a report on our division's commitment and action plan for ensuring all students of Palliser develop the literacy skills essential to survive and thrive in the information age.

Palliser Regional Schools adopted a literacy focus in 2011-12, expanding the program in 2013-2014.

This year, Palliser has two full-time literacy coaches working to support classroom teachers at all grade levels across the division in helping students master reading and writing. Once thought to be the responsibility of teachers up to Grade 3, we now understand literacy is an ongoing process that continues through high school.

While early elementary students will be learning how to recognize letters and sound out words, older students will be developing critical thinking skills that are part and parcel with literacy. They'll

be learning the language of higher level math and sciences, and they'll be writing in a more academic style.

At every grade, students need teachers who can help them learn new reading skills, develop comprehension and hone writing.

In this first issue, we report on what literacy education looks like in Palliser, how we are supporting teachers to deepen their understanding of each individual student's learning needs and what steps we've taken so far to ensure every student becomes a competent reader and writer.

We will continue to provide updates on this important work.

We invite you to visit the Literacy section of our website at <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/literacy/> to learn more about how you, as parents, grandparents and mentors to young people, can help support their literacy needs.

What is literacy?

"Literacy is more than the ability to read and write. It involves the knowledge, skills and abilities — the competencies — that enable individuals to think critically, communicate effectively, deal with change and solve problems in a variety of contexts to achieve their personal goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in society."

— "Living Literacy: A Literacy Framework for Alberta's Next Generation Economy," Government of Alberta, 2009

A goal in Palliser and in Alberta

An emphasis on literacy is reflected in the goals set by Alberta Education and adopted by Palliser Regional Schools. In particular, the goal of "success for every student" refers to students achieving Alberta's student learning outcomes and demonstrating "citizenship, entrepreneurship, and proficiency in literacy and numeracy." This goal is identified in Alberta Education's Business Plan 2013-2016 and in Palliser's Three-Year Education Plan.

Contact Us

403-328-4111
1-877-667-1234

@ literacy@pallisersd.ab.ca

Website
www.pallisersd.ab.ca



Colleen Deitz
Board Chair



Kevin Gietz
Superintendent

In this document, you'll notice Quick Response Codes. Using a free QR Code reader on your mobile phone or tablet, you can be taken directly to additional content on our website.



Literacy is an investment in people, society

Palliser Regional Schools is committed to students' literacy success not only for the value these skills provide the individual, but for the significant return on investment to the greater community. Literacy skills equate directly with success in life and ongoing prosperity for society.

- 42% of Canadian adults, aged 16 to 65, lack literacy skills at the level considered necessary for coping in our knowledge society.
- Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) Survey, Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005
- Nearly 20% of Canadian adults aged 16 and older scored at the lowest level

of literacy; in Alberta nearly 14% were at that level, meaning they have limited abilities to locate, understand and use information, or to do simple, one-step numerical operations..

— International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003

- “A country that achieves literacy scores one per cent higher than the average ends up in a steady state with labour productivity and GDP per capita respectively higher than other countries by 2.5 and 1.5 percent on average.”
- International Adult Literacy Survey: Literacy scores, human capital and growth across 14 OECD countries, Serge Coulombe, Jean-Francoise Tremblay and Sylvie Marchand, 2004

Palliser's progress so far

Here's a look at key events in Palliser's literacy journey:

- Palliser has two full-time literacy coaches who work with school leaders and classroom teachers to support literacy at all grade levels and in every school in Palliser.
- All Grade 1-6 teachers and all Palliser administrators have been trained on how to assess student reading levels. A selection of teachers from Grades 7 to 12 have been trained as well.
- This fall all Grade 1-6 students and any older students identified as needing additional literacy support were assessed using Fountas and Pinnell's benchmark assessment tool. These assessments give teachers information they need to provide individualized instruction to build the skills the student needs.
- Literacy is the focus of professional learning groups across Palliser this year.
- A symposium called “Leadership in Literacy” was attended by Palliser's principals, vice-principals and Central Office leadership. Organized by Palliser staff with individual sessions led by the division's own experts, the symposium was an opportunity for school leaders to discuss best practices in literacy education, learn from each other's experiences, and review data collected in the fall benchmark assessments of students' reading levels.
- The division has invested significantly in human and print resources to support literacy education, including substitute teacher time to give classroom teachers the time they need to read one-on-one with each student.



From left, Noble Central School Principal Scott Oikawa and Hutterite Colony Schools Principal Wayne Tate talk with Palliser Literacy Coach Connie Adserballe during a symposium on literacy organized and led entirely by Palliser staff. Adserballe is joined by Literacy Coach Bev Smith (left) as the division's full-time literacy experts.

‘Thanks for not giving up on me,’ student says

After years of struggling to read, Grade 6 student makes leap forward with help from teacher and Palliser's team

When Palliser Regional Schools started its Academic Wrap-Around pilot project last year, teacher Mitchell Van Dyk didn't hesitate to volunteer for the opportunity to access Central Office resources and expertise to support a struggling student.



Mitchell Van Dyk

He also had no hesitation about which student to bring to the table.

“Trinity was a student who, in looking through her file, showed almost no growth in the previous year at a different school in her reading, and was significantly below where her peers were. But she was keen to read and she really wanted to learn,” Van Dyk says. “Being a Grade 6 teacher, teaching early literacy was not my expertise. It really helped me learn how to teach reading to a beginning reader.”

Van Dyk had adopted a balanced literacy program

Watch the video of this story



in his classroom, with students reading aloud, in groups or guided by him, in addition to reading independently, silently by themselves.

Trinity took part in this literacy instruction with the rest of the class, but also had access to one-on-one time with her teacher, the principal and early literacy support worker. Palliser's literacy specialist, Connie Adserballe, helped Van Dyk identify specific gaps in Trinity's reading skills using Fountas and Pinnell benchmark and additional assessment tools, and used this information to determine key strategies to improve reading fluency and comprehension. An iPod and apps identified by Palliser's technology integration specialist, Rocky Wilson, helped Trinity work on her sounding out of words.

“Through the wrap-around services (project), I gained a lot of experience on how to teach somebody like Trinity,” Van Dyk says. “Just knowing that there's all these different resources available to us and all we need to do is ask, not only did it help last year,

but it's been valuable to me this year as well.”

Trinity describes often feeling lost in class when reading was required. She says if she didn't understand written instructions, she'd often just sit quietly, waiting for class to end.

“I didn't really know what to do,” Trinity says. “I was stuck on words. I didn't get a lot of big words.”

Her coping mechanism was to ignore the words she got wrong or couldn't comprehend. That changed when she joined Van Dyk's class at Dorothy Dalgliesh School in Picture Butte in October 2012.

“I liked having someone help me through, without having just to forget about it, pretend that word doesn't exist. I actually solved it out and found out the word,” she says. “Mr. Van Dyk always pulled children aside and read with them and if you did a word wrong, he would say it and then he would ask us to say sound it out and say it in our head and then say it out loud, say it in our head, and say it out loud again.”

It's all part of the balanced literacy framework. The teacher demonstrates a strategy, gives students opportunity to practice together, then guides them individually, until the student is able to use the strategy independently.

“The tears became a lot less frequent and the smiles came along as the year went,” says Van Dyk. “A lot of what held Trinity back was her reading, and what went along with that was her writing as well.”

Trinity's mom, Michelle Savard, says she didn't know what they were doing at her daughter's new school, but she knew whatever it was, it was working.

“Her overall confidence, a mom likes to see that,” she says. “She would start talking about the story she was reading. Before, she wouldn't but I didn't know she didn't know the details. She could tell you the main characters and the gist of it, but now she could tell me, ‘In this chapter, this happened.’”

Michelle, an avid reader whose home is filled with books, says she knew her daughter had a reading problem but she didn't know how to help. She says she kept hoping Trinity would have an epiphany and discover a love of reading others in the family had.

Reading assessments show Trinity improved by five reading levels in a matter of months, progress typically achieved over the course of nearly two years. While this success story was a team effort, for Trinity, it was her classroom teacher who made the difference.

“He took time with me and he had patience,” she says. “It was like going on a field trip. He showed me the way there. My other teachers they brought me a little bit and went back without me. So I kind of got stuck.”

At one point, Trinity says she thanked Van Dyk “for not giving up on me because all my other teachers did.”



Michelle Savard and daughter Trinity look through one of Trinity's favourite books.

“She was so happy that people believed in her and that she'd never really seen that before,” Van Dyk recalls, noting there's still work for Trinity to do. “That was really exciting. I think that's what teaching is all about.”

“It was more than just me, even though she didn't even realize the effect our literacy coach or other people had on her. . . It was all part of the bigger picture and we were all working together.

“It was a pretty special moment.”