

# Palliser Beyond Borders earns international award

*Online and outreach program lauded for use of technology*

**BY CRAIG ALBRECHT  
PALLISER REGIONAL SCHOOLS**

Technology has allowed for great advancements in education, but it doesn't come without its challenges.

Palliser Beyond Borders is being recognized internationally for not only embracing those challenges, but providing a more efficient learning environment for its students in the process.

The Palliser online and outreach program will receive Blackboard Inc. awards later this month for excellence and innovation in using technology to advance education.

Palliser Beyond Borders has earned awards in the categories of both Student Success and Professional Development and Principal Alison Hancox says one relies on the other.

"Our job as educational leaders is to close the gap between learning to use technology and using technology for learning, so the focus is on learning and not on the machine or how to turn it on," she says.

Providing regularly scheduled professional development for teachers and encouraging them to share best practices has helped Palliser Beyond Borders expand from 27 students to more than 680 over the past three years. High school student completion rates have improved from 65 to 97 per cent over that same time frame.

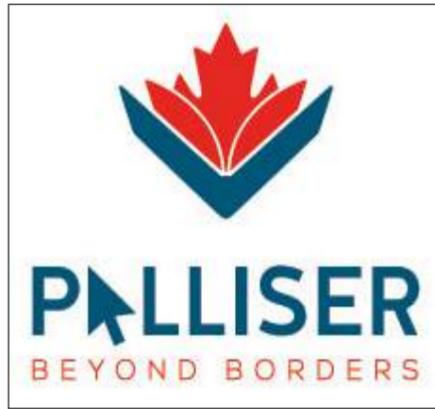
The other award winners in the category of Student Success are three American universities.

Hancox notes about 90 per cent of Canadian universities offer online courses and about 30 per cent of Canadian post-secondary students take online courses as part of their degree or diploma programs.

"So we are very much a developmental program in the whole learning landscape across Canada," she says. "We are teaching students how to be effective learners as they move on to their post-secondary opportunities."

Hancox is quick to note Palliser Beyond Borders is not an online marking program.

It uses Blackboard Collaborate to provide students working online with the closest thing possible to a face-to-face classroom. Students are also assigned a course teacher and a



teacher advisor to monitor their academic plan and progress and they have access to help at regularly scheduled times online or drop-in sessions in person at four physical campuses in Coaldale, Picture Butte, Vulcan and Calgary.

Palliser Beyond Borders has developed an eight-pronged communication plan — both electronic and otherwise — to keep connected with students despite the distance. It is also working with a neighbouring school division on an electronically based attendance tracker system to monitor students at risk of not completing their course work.

Professional development includes an orientation for new staff, while teachers are assigned mentors and can shadow their colleagues online.

This year PBB staff were also instructed on how to use Blackboard Ultra, which is compatible with the Chromebooks now in greater use throughout Palliser Regional Schools.

"As technology improves, the onus is on us as educators to figure out how we use that to instruct for student success," says Hancox. "When we get a student engaged with us, we don't want to be spending the time trying to make Flash (software) work. Let's get in there and help you get ready for that chemistry exam."

She says recognition by Blackboard Inc. — an educational technology company based out of Washington, D.C. — is not only confirmation of the work they are doing at PBB but the commitment shown the program by Palliser Regional Schools and the board of trustees.

Hancox will be sharing Palliser Beyond Borders' success at the annual user conference Blackboard Inc. is hosting in New Orleans. She says it's also an opportunity to see what other educational institutions are doing to engage with their students online and other best practices.

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