

# Palliser outreach principal to receive national award

Alison Hancox to receive award in Toronto at end of month

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**A** Lethbridge-based educational leader is one of five Albertans selected as one of Canada's Outstanding Principals.

Alison Hancox is also one of 40 Canadian innovative educators invited to take part in a week-long executive leadership training program at the University of Toronto.

Since joining Palliser Regional Schools in 2013, Hancox has expanded its online course offerings while providing more choices at outreach schools throughout the Palliser system.

During that time, officials point out, enrolment has grown from 27 to 671, as of last June. At the same time, the number of high school students completing courses through Palliser Beyond Borders has reached an amazing 97 per cent.

"That's significant in the online world," Hancox notes.

While some students complete all their high school requirements that way, others sign on for courses they need as post-secondary pre-requisites — but can't fit into their regular high school timetable. These "distributed learning" courses are available to all Alberta students, she adds, not just those inside Palliser's territorial borders.

"We have a hockey player who's playing pro," working online from northern Alberta.

Hancox says another student, who began her high school program in southern Alberta, continued her online from Nigeria when her family moved there. Now she's back in Alberta, completing her courses for graduation.

"We offer the entire high school program online."

What's different about the Palliser approach, she says, is teachers are also online through the day and evening, ready to help students whenever they need assistance. Over time, a trust relationship grows just as it should in a bricks-and-mortar school.

"There are some students we never



Herald photo by Triana Martin

Alison Hancox with Palliser Beyond Borders was recently named one of Canada's Outstanding Principals 2017. @TMartinHerald

meet," Hancox says. "But we know them online," course after course. Some are actually working full-time, she adds, while others juggle part-time work with their studies. Students can get help 12 months a year.

"They can pace their own learning," in today's plugged-in world, Hancox says, more and more post-secondary programs as well as high school courses are being offered online.

Today 93 per cent of Canada's universities offered online courses, she points out, while about 30 per cent of the nation's university students are taking one or more online courses as they earn their degree.

"Really, we're all online learners today," she says. "What Palliser is doing is preparing students to be effective learners online."

Adding to that opportunity, Hancox says Palliser's outreach schools — in Coaldale, Picture Butte, Vulcan and Calgary — do double duty. Students in each of the small campuses can work with teachers in a classroom setting, with the option of enrolling in online courses as well.

At the same time, students taking online courses in fields like biology or chemistry can head to Palliser's nearest outreach school for hands-on components like dissections or laboratory experiments.

Hancox says "Palliser Beyond Borders" also encourages students to enrol in registered apprenticeship, "green certificate" and other community-based learning opportunities. In Vulcan, she adds, some are working with town staff on

the solar energy farm project.

Others, Hancox says, are learning more about health care from physicians, technicians and other personnel at Vulcan's health centre.

The "Outstanding principal" award, she maintains, gives recognition to all the Palliser teachers and support personnel who helped bring the program together — starting with school trustees.

"It really is a team effort."

Hancox will fly to Toronto to receive the award, presented by The Learning Partnership, in late February. She'll also attend a five-day executive leadership program presented by the Rotman School of Management at the U of T.

The Learning Institute, a national non-profit "dedicated to building stakeholder partnerships to support, promote and advance publicly funded education in Canada," has been recognizing the nation's leaders in education for the last 13 years. They're selected by a national jury which considers nominations and endorsements by students, parents and fellow teachers.

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