

# AISCA NEWS

ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES IN ALBERTA

DECEMBER 2009

## Alberta Education Budget 2010 Consultations

Alberta Education continues to review ways to reduce the 2010 Education budget. This year's budget input process involved direct consultations where the Ministry met twice with all stakeholders, including AISCA. It would be fair to say that the Ministry's intent is to minimize the impact of any reductions on program delivery. Nevertheless, the review process has been highly politicized by some stakeholders and by the media. A reasonably balanced article in the Edmonton Journal on December 14, 2009, "Murky education road ahead worries Albertans", captured some of the general public sentiments.

AISCA board representatives met with Ministry representatives in Calgary on September 16, 2009 to provide initial input and then again on December 3rd to review the summary document "What We Heard", a compilation by the Ministry of the earlier fall consultations. The document reflected a broad range of public and stakeholder views and AISCA's input from the earlier session was fairly represented. The broad areas where reductions might be possible involved review of Ministry business processes, ways of collaborating to reduce costs, and other general ideas of where funding might be reduced. Some suggestions fell outside of Education's jurisdiction.

## AISCA Responses

AISCA asserted that it is only fair that if and when grants are reduced, independent schools share proportionately in those reductions but only in the grant categories shared in common with public jurisdictions. AISCA discussed some specific ideas of what may or may not be worthwhile and submitted that to the review team.

The AISCA board also stressed that independent schools already make an enormous fiscal contribution to the province when, from a broad public purse perspective, most of our schools offer education that meets or exceeds public standards at something like 50 to 60 cents on the dollar. The general public often fails to understand the enormous savings that results from the cost avoidance aspect the government is not required to pay for land, buildings and transportation as these expenses are paid for from private funds.

In addition, the 30% reduction or more depending on a school's status in the main instruction and maintenance support grant areas also significantly reduces the public investment level in education. Independent schools are also excluded from receiving most three-year targeted funds and most other differential grants applicable to education generally. Public teachers' current pension values are excluded from their funding formula. It is important to look at what independent schools do not receive as a counter-balance to viewing how much they receive when reviewing the funding framework.

The Ministry's finance review team understands fully that reducing funding to independent schools is something like killing off the golden goose. They are aware that independent school enrolment in 2008/2009 was below that of 2000/2001 and that long term sustainability opportunities are diminished when the independent school sector shrinks.

The Ministry's review team is also aware that the general public has many misconceptions about support to independent schools and they have educated other stakeholders by doing some myth-busting.

The 2010 education budget review process is moving forward to refine areas of possible reduction for next year. It is possible that the actual budget cuts will not be fully known until Budget 2010 is tabled in the spring legislature. If we become aware of any changes that may help for next year's financial planning, we will inform schools.

---

## Budget 2009 Adjustments and Public Backlash

Apparently \$124 million has been eliminated from the 2009 Education Budget as part of the provincial effort to reduce projected short-falls in the current year's budget. The Ministry recalculated socioeconomic and goods and services grants and reduced fuel contingency grants. Public boards also had to return so-called surpluses. Independent schools grants were adjusted for 2009 with reductions in some grants of 0.9% as was communicated to schools by the Ministry back in October.

Since mid-October public boards, the provincial superintendent's association (CASS), the ATA and the Alberta School Council's Association teamed up and launched a public campaign to stop funding cuts feared for 2010. They bought TV spots, placed articles and ads in newspapers, and had representative voices on radio stations. Suggestions that mid-90's cuts and roll-backs may happen again was branded as fear-mongering by Education Minister David Hancock. He rebuked the public boards for what he saw as unwarranted scare tactics. One columnist in the Edmonton Journal, Paula Simons, added her own excessive commentary by describing the Minister's rebuke as "spanking" trustees. Bitter memories from the mid-90's continue to haunt public perceptions of what may happen.

## Dispelling Misconceptions

In October Duane Plantinga, AISCA's executive director was invited to speak to the University of Alberta Education Students' Association. A healthy dialogue followed the presentation. University students appear to be poorly informed on the nature of independent schools in Alberta and know very little about how they operate and how they are funded.

On November 30 Plantinga made a presentation also to the Edmonton Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) Chapter which meets at the U of A and provided that audience with an overview of Alberta's Independent Schools. The PDK group consists of a number of Alberta Education staff, some area public school

principals and teachers, and some Education Faculty members. Again, the discussion was invigorating and hopefully the interaction fostered a better understanding of the role of Alberta's independent schools both now and in the future. It is important for AISCA to continue to dispel misconceptions by sharing the facts and explaining some of the complexities of the independent schools' diversity as a group and to inform people about the public benefits that these forms of school choice provide.

## AISCA Board Meeting Highlights

10/29/2009

AISCA's August 31, 2009 annual audited financial statements were reviewed prior to the Fall General Meeting.

Mr. Sam Radke and Dr. John Myroon from Alberta Education presented an overview to the AISCA board on development of the Provincial Authority Student Information (PASI) initiative. AISCA's executive director and a number of representatives are serving on a Small School Authority PASI Alternative Solutions Subcommittee (SAPAS). This subcommittee will review how best to enable school authorities to modify their student information system (SIS) in order to have their school's information interact with PASI in the areas required.

## AISCA Fall General Meeting Highlights

10/30/2009

The general membership approved the 2009 audited financial statements and appointed the auditors for next year. A general report of activities and projects was shared with the participants.

Duane Plantinga, AISCA's representative on the Inspiring Education Working Committee, and Bonnie Brooks, Alberta Education's director for the Inspiring Education project, provided the audience with an update on the Inspiring Education Dialogue to date.

Working groups from the membership provided feedback on AISCA's draft

presentation brief to Alberta Education regarding the School Act. Teresa Haykowsky, LLB from McClellan and Ross highlighted points and responded to questions.

Dr. Sue Lynch provided an overview of the Early Childhood Mapping Project. A power-point presentation on the Project is available at <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/ecs/ecd.aspx>

## School Act Submissions

Submissions from all stakeholders about changes to the School Act are available on line: <http://education.alberta.ca/department/policy/schoolactreview/stakeholder.aspx>

AISCA's submission is also posted there.

## Inspiring Education Update

AISCA participated in two meetings with the Steering and Working Committee members, a half-day on November 30th and a full-day on December 4th. In the November 30th session, summaries of the fall Inspiring Education Forum participant opinions were shared. Small groups met to share additional ideas. The term "excellence" has been added as an additional core value to the previous terms: opportunity, fairness, citizenship, choice and diversity. AISCA was particularly concerned with views expressed by some stakeholder groups opposing strongly the inclusion of the core underlying values of choice and diversity.

---

## Contact Information for AISCA

Postal Address:

201, 11830 - 111 Avenue,  
Edmonton, AB T5G 0E1

Phone: (780) 469-9868

Fax: (780) 469-9880

Office e-mail: [office@aisca.ab.ca](mailto:office@aisca.ab.ca)

AISI office: [aisi@aisca.ab.ca](mailto:aisi@aisca.ab.ca)

Web Site: <http://www.aisca.ab.ca>

---

## School Act Review Update

At AISCA's Fall General Meeting on November 30th member schools provided feed-back on the initial draft of the Association's "Submission Regarding the School Act Review". Suggestions were incorporated and AISCA sent its submission to Alberta Education.

As can be expected, some submissions propose that the role of independent schools should be limited and that they should not be eligible for public funding. Some also have misgivings about the range of choices offered as alternative programs. The notion of "one system for all" as promoted by the Public School Board's Association suggests that only this entity is truly inclusive as a system but in doing so it limits authentic diversity as mandated in the current School Act.

On December 4, 2009 AISCA representatives Duane Plantinga and Fred Burghardt joined a large gathering of Steering Committee, Working Committee and other representatives for a day long discussion intended to align elements of the Inspiring Education work with the School Act review. Education minister the Hon. Dave Hancock, the deputy minister Keray Henke, co-chair of the Inspiring Education Dialogue, MLA Jeff Johnson and members of the School Act review team all participated in the day's events.

The first part of the day reviewed what was referred to as "the emerging vision and transformational shifts" arising from the Inspiring Education initiative. The philosophy guiding the work of the School Act review was shared and common themes from public submissions were summarized. The new legislation is intended to be more values based than rules based; more enabling than restrictive.

Participants worked in groups in the afternoon to respond to the information provided and the director of the review, Maureen Towns, proposed a structural outline of a new Education Act. The categories suggested include: Preamble, Access, Opportunity and Programming, Student Success and Supports, Governance and Roles, Financial Responsibility, Educational Leadership and a General section. The proposed Education Act will apparently be tabled in late March or early April and debated in the spring session of the Legislature.

When the Act is under discussion in the spring, it will be a very important time for AISCA members as constituents to have conversations with their MLAs in helping them understand the pros and cons of the proposed legislation for education in general but especially to understand the Acts' implications in relationship to independent schools. AISCA is developing a communications plan for that occasion and will be involved in assisting members in responding. The new Education Act, if that is what it is called, will not be proclaimed until September 2011 as it requires a year for the Ministry to work out the implications at the regulatory level and to properly communicate changes to the schools and to the public. In addition to what is likely to be a very vibrant spring public debate involving the Education Act, 2010/2011 will also be an important time to gear up for any significant changes and refinements in regulations.

## Teaching Quality Standard Review

Fred Burghardt led AISCA's Designated Signing Authorities through a review exercise related to A Framework for Teaching Quality in Alberta – in support of Quality learning for Alberta Students. AISCA has reviewed the DSA input and after some additional research, it submitted its response to the proposed TQS changes to the Teacher Development and Certification branch. If your school wishes to receive a copy of the submission, contact the office@aisca.ab.ca

## AISCA Proposes Renewal of Shared Transportation Services in Rural Areas

On November 12, 2009 AISCA representatives met with Minister Hancock's Parliamentary Assistant, Mrs. Janice Sarich for an extensive 1 ½ hour meeting on rural transportation challenges. Two Alberta Education staff familiar with finance and transportation planning backgrounds joined the meeting. AISCA board members Bob Duggan and Martin Folkerts from central Alberta and executive director Duane Plantinga presented AISCA's recommendations to restore rural transportation arrangements where public boards are provided with grants to transport all students.

AISCA emphasized in its presentation that all students as citizens of rural areas with unique transportation challenges should be included in the provisions for rural bus transportation. These rural students should be entitled to a "funded" ride to the nearest school based on rural transportation funding formulas. The AISCA board members at the meeting provided concrete illustrations of the negative impact on both public and independent schools which occurred when an earlier policy change negated rural transportation service agreements. We agreed that collaborative rural transportation systems would increase efficiencies and possibly improve safety. Shared arrangements had worked well among some boards for years. AISCA provided a sample agreement from Manitoba regarding its "shared services" agreements for transportation between public jurisdictions and independent schools.

Janice Sarich, the Minister's Parliamentary Assistant will look further into the situation. She is sympathetic to the unique challenges that rural students and rural schools face but we should not expect an immediate solution to the issue. We emphasized that the exorbitant transportation fees being charged by public boards is not fair to rural students but also pointed out the negative impact on public boards' transportation systems as well. We hope that a fair solution will be tailored into the provincial review of transportation. Cooperation in rural areas appears to be the preferred policy direction. In the case of non-cooperative boards, AISCA suggested that consideration be given to something like a transportation voucher and that incentives be provided to improve rural cooperation for transportation.

## Energy Program Update

AISCA is doing some preliminary planning with Energy Associates International to help those institutions that are participating in the energy management program to look for efficiencies or build other

support programs of value. AISCA plans to hold several sessions on the Energy Management Program:

Edmonton on February 5, 2010

Calgary on February 19, 2010

Edmonton on February 12, 2010 a session for the private university colleges participating in the program is being scheduled.

Watch for specific program details in January as these sessions are intended to be of interest to business managers and facilities managers. Schools not participating in the program may wish to attend to find out how the program works and also to be made aware of possible spring market opportunities for long-term energy commodity management.

### Early Childhood Development Inventory project (EDI)

Dr. Sue Lynch made a presentation on the Early Childhood Development Inventory project (EDI) at AISCA's Fall General Meeting. Since then AISCA has been working with Pat Chemery from the Early Childhood Development branch and with Dr. Marie Keenan, a Calgary area DSA to initiate a small scale pilot implementation project with half a dozen schools, primarily in the Calgary area. Dr. Keenan and a few other Calgary area educators from the private sector have attended "train the trainers" workshops.

The province is proceeding with the full-scale EDI project over the next five years as early learning is a provincial priority. AISCA is advocating that administrative support for any "train the teachers" workshops, substitute relief for kindergarten teachers, and general administrative support for guiding and coaching the kindergarten teachers should be supported on a cost recovery basis by Alberta Education. From the Calgary area "pilot" project a broader proposal will be refined and crafted in such a way that all ECS classes in the province will be prepared to administer the EDI twice during the next five years as that is the Ministry's goal. For more information on this provincial initiative see ECD Mapping PowerPoint Presentation and Factsheet on the EDC Mapping Project from Alberta Education's website.

### Enabling PASI Testing and Implementation

The Provincial Approach to Student Information (PASI) is a strategic, multi-year initiative aimed at ensuring the business processes and technology related to student information are effectively positioned to serve the needs of Alberta's ECS-12 students now and in the future.

AISCA's executive director and a number of representatives from small school authorities, including some independent schools, met on December 16, 2009 to plan for how small school authorities can best adjust their student information systems to be compliant with the province's PASI initiative. AISCA will be looking at a way to make PASI implementation easy as all school authorities will need to be PASI enabled for reporting enrollment by September 2011. AISCA is investigating ways in which it may form some partnership relationships to make it possible to have all of the 139 private ECS operators and more than 100 publicly accredited independent schools make an easy transition as a group rather than struggling individually to make the adjustments.

"The goal of PASI is to integrate student information across the province in order to support a student's journey in education from ECS to grade 12 effectively...Existing SIS applications in the schools and school authorities will need to be modified to interact with PASI in support of the integration (SIS Provider Summary, 1.2 PASI Overview).

**Reminder:** Principals are asked to urge all teachers employed by their school who will complete their second year of teaching by June 30 of 2010, while having an active Alberta Interim Professional Certificate, to apply as soon as possible to AISCA for the necessary evaluation visit by a DSA to determine their eligibility for their permanent professional certificate.



### Designated Signing Authority Orientation November 20, 2009

Paul MacLeod - centre right - senior manager with the Teacher Development and Certification branch, joined with AISCA's Designated Signing Authorities (DSAs) for their annual Orientation held November 20, 2009 in Red Deer, Alberta.