

AISCA NEWS

AISCA creates a positive social, fiscal and political environment in which independent schools are free to maintain their identity as they serve the public interest.

September, 2015

Greetings from AISCA's new Executive Director.

In my experience, September is a wonderful, if hectic, month for all those involved in education. There is an unmistakable energy and enthusiasm to the start of the school year. Students arrive with a range of emotions and no lack of exuberance on the first day of school. Prior to their arrival, the staff and administration have had their own firsts: introductions, meetings, classrooms, policies, schedules, supplies, class lists, and much more. Besides the busyness of September there is also the promise of new opportunities. Each new school year is a clean slate, full of potential and aspirations.

For the first time in many years, I won't get to experience the coming to life of a new school year first hand. Having transitioned out of school administration and into the executive director role at AISCA, I am now one step further removed from the hustle and bustle of those first weeks. Fortunately, the change hasn't been too dramatic as I've had ample opportunity to experience the challenges and excitement of a whole collection of new 'firsts' over the past few weeks. While I was familiar with AISCA's work as a teacher and administrator, I've spent the past month beginning to gain a deeper understanding of the range of educational matters that AISCA addresses. I've also spent some time

getting to know our member schools, and I hope to spend more time connecting with you in the coming months.

I look forward to continuing to build on the many years of support and advocacy that AISCA has offered independent schools in Alberta. While I have much to learn, I am blessed to be surrounded by a team of capable, wise, and experienced staff members. Should you have any questions regarding education in Alberta I'm confident we can be of assistance in helping you get the clarity you seek; don't hesitate to call or email for input regarding your local educational context or the broader learning landscape in Alberta.

Wishing you all the best as you enter the new school year,

John Jagersma
Executive Director



AISCA's New Principals' Retreat!

AISCA's Principals' Retreat for school leaders new to independent schools had its largest group of participants ever! Held on August 13 & 14 at the Best Western Port O' Call Inn in Calgary, it included 32 new and returning administrators, AISCA board and staff representatives, as well as Alberta Education representatives for a total of 47 participants.



The retreat aims to orient principals new to independent school operating contexts to key information and support networks before schools open. As they take on the complex tasks, roles and responsibilities of leadership in an independent school, AISCA, Alberta Education and experienced principals and board members assist in establishing collegial relationships while focusing on some key priorities. New mentorship and protégé relationships are created after the conference for added supports. While it is a crash introduction, it has proven highly informative and beneficial to principals.

The first afternoon and evening sessions provided an overview of Alberta Education requirements and introduced participants to one another, as well as providing them the opportunity to identify key challenges. All enjoyed a fantastic dinner together! On Friday an overview of AISCA was provided, emerging educational issues were discussed, and teacher certification, educational leadership, and Inclusion issues were all reviewed.

As AISCA's satisfaction survey has indicated, many of the participants saw the Principals' Retreat as a valuable opportunity to discuss their concerns and share information amongst peers. The retreat set a vibrant beginning framework for building networks and support groups for the year and for new mentorship possibilities.

Meeting Your MLA: You are all advocates!

The past 6 months have seen a significant change in the political landscape. With a transition to a New Democratic Party government there are new concerns and uncertainties for independent schools. Historically, the NDP has not been supportive of public funding for our schools. However, there is some evidence that this position has shifted more recently. The Minister of Education, David Eggen, has stated that there are no plans to alter the educational landscape, and that the variety of delivery models allows parents to select the model that they feel will best help their child reach his or her potential.

While AISCA fills a needed advocacy role in communicating with the provincial government, the reality is that you and your schools have an advocacy role as well. You make up a component of your MLA's electoral riding, and can provide local context to your member of the Legislative Assembly. AISCA urges school administration and/or Board members to meet with their MLA in the coming month. Time is of the essence as the Government will be introducing a new budget in late October. When a meeting is held, AISCA would suggest the following as talking points:

- Thank your MLA for serving in public office and for the decision their government has made to maintain a stable level of funding to independent schools, and to eliminate the student count freeze proposed in the previous PC budget.
- Provide some insight into your school's structure, history, vision, and membership.
- Note that independent schools have been part of the educational landscape in Alberta for over 100 years, and that currently independent schools serve 28000 students.
- Point out that rather than being the 'elite' schools so often portrayed in the media, independent schools are built and supported by parents for a range of cultural, religious, educational and philosophical reasons.
- Independent schools serve the public good by providing the children of minority groups, who may otherwise feel isolated as outsiders, with quality education that meets provincially mandated requirements.
- During this time of tough budget decision making, it is important to note that each student educated in an independent school saves the government thousands of dollars because they only receive partial government funding and no support for capital costs. Collectively independent schools save Albertan taxpayers nearly 150 million dollars per year.

Principal Mentorship Program

For the past 4 years AISCA has developed a Mentorship program that connects those new to administrative roles with experienced school leaders. AISCA hopes to again mount a mentorship program for new school principals. School leaders new to Alberta independent schools should watch for more information on this program via e-mail toward the end of September. Call the office if you require urgent assistance.

Information for schools re: Homeschooling

The Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA) supports parental choice in the education of children, including the right of parents to choose home education.

A school serving as an associate private school for parents delivering home education programs has informed AISCA about difficulties the school encountered from Alberta Education auditing of its 2014/15 home education operations and finances and suggested that AISCA alert its member

schools about difficulties that may arise from audits of home education programs offered by schools.

Schools serving as an “associate private school” or contemplating serving as an associate private school should keep in mind that the *Home Education Regulation* is quite explicit about the roles and responsibilities of home schooling parents and associate boards or private schools.

- Parents are responsible for planning and delivery of the home education program which may relate to the Alberta Programs of Study or reflect “the Schedule of Learning Outcomes” which are part of the *Home Education Regulation*. A more complete outline of the parent’s responsibilities may be found in the *Handbook*.
- An associate school that agrees to accept a parent’s notification of intent to home educate must, at the parents’ request, advise the parent about program options and about services and resources; it does not deliver the program. (suggest you provide the reference to the Home Education Regulation)
- Legislation (the School Act, the Home Education Regulation, the Guide to Education, and the Funding Manual for School Authorities) recognize three parties to home education programs: the student, the parent and the associate private school.
- The *Funding Manual for School Authorities* stipulates the allocation criteria for Home Education funding which is provided to support the home education of Alberta students from Grade 1 to Grade 12.
- It is important to note that legislated and policy responsibility for home education rests with parents and the associate private school. Home education contractors exist to support and enrich the educational efforts of parents.

The *Home Education Regulation*, Section (7.4) allows parents to use the up to 50% of funding provided to them to defray the costs incurred for “programs of study, instructional materials and other resources.” The same sub-section explicitly does not allow parents to remunerate themselves, to use funding for travel costs “or other expenses usually required to be paid by a parent of student who is enrolled in a school operated by a board or private school.” For example, AISCA has been informed that one Alberta Education audit apparently considered unacceptable remuneration to parents of the cost of music lessons, presumably because such lessons would normally be paid by parents, not the school at which the child is enrolled. At this time, it is unclear whether other costs, for example,

participation in a community band program or gymnastic lessons would be acceptable. If the charge from the school is the same charge other students who attend the school incur then the parent may not claim that amount (since the charge would be seen as a school fee), if other students receive the service at no charge but the home educating parent is charged then yes the parent should get a receipt and claim that amount against their share.

- The Home Education Regulation makes school responsible for communicating policy for a home education student’s involvement in school and extra-curricular activities and use of school facilities and equipment. Given current uncertainties, schools should be careful about promising to refund parents for “other expenses” that an audit may find unacceptable.
- The *Home Education Regulation* requires the teacher referred to in the *Regulation* to be an employee of the associate private school. This person is responsible for reviewing plans and evaluation files and for conducting at least two evaluations of student progress.
- The Home Education Regulation and the Student Record Regulation make the “associate private school” responsible for maintaining student records and making them available to parents.
- Alberta Education’s 2015/2016 Funding Manual, p. 19, outlines provincial dollars that may be provided for distance education and blended programs. These provisions should be read carefully and their meaning confirmed with Alberta Education representatives.

Current copies of the School Act and its regulations are available through the Queen’s Printer. Current contact information for Alberta Education is available in the Funding Manual and the Guide to Education.

Teacher Certification

AISCA works closely with Alberta Education’s Teacher Certification Branch to process all applications regarding teacher certification for all Independent K – 12 Schools and all Community based Early Childhood Service providers. Each school authority and administrator needs to ensure that all teachers have proper and current teaching authority in the Province. AISCA’s website www.aisca.ab.ca under the “Teacher Certification” link provides schools with a digital copy of the Teacher Certification Handbook AISCA updates

annually. It provides the forms required for certification applications and answers frequently asked questions concerning Permanent Certification. Note the following:

Any teacher who this school year will be completing the equivalent of two full time years of teaching in Alberta while holding a valid Interim Professional Certificate should apply to AISCA for Permanent Certification. The application process begins in October and all should be received preferably before the end of March 2015.

If you have any questions concerning teacher certification applications and processes, please call AISCA first (780) 469-9868 before calling the Teacher Certification Branch. Connie, Ary, or John will be happy to answer your questions and guide you through the process to make things easier.

Supporting Students

As the new school year unfolds, teachers, support staff and administrators will be learning as much as possible about both new and returning students in order to best plan programs for their success. The following resources can provide useful tools to school personnel as they seek to better identify the needs of students and subsequently to provide the supports that will best serve those students.

1. ***Implementing Inclusive Learning Environments in Early Childhood Services to Grade 12.***

This web-based resource is available for schools and teachers at http://www.aisca.ab.ca/inclusion_resources.html. This resource page provides numerous links to help educators build a foundation for inclusive education, develop their capacity as teachers, help teachers in understanding instructional intervention strategies, and assist in professional development planning and growth.

2. ***The Inclusive Education Library.***

This Alberta Education resource is available at <http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ieptLibrary/index.html>. It contains an array of useful templates and tools for teachers, including:

- a. IPP Templates
- b. Medical/Disability Information
- c. Inventory Templates
- d. Sample ELA and Math Objectives

3. The ***Regional Collaborative Service Delivery*** (RCS D). Each region of the province has now established a

RCS D program to offer a variety of support services to children, families, and teachers. Typically, each school will be assigned a team of professionals who will provide Speech/Language, Occupational Therapy and Mental Health supports. Regions will also provide a means of accessing supports for Low Incidence needs such as Blindness and Deafness. If you have not yet been contacted by the RCS D Regional Director for your area, search <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/supportingstudent/collaboration/rcsd/regbound.aspx>.

Many Independent School representatives sit on various RCS D planning and governance teams. Questions can be forwarded to Dave Eifert, david.eifert@aisca.ab.ca

Important Dates

October 29 - New Teacher Induction Workshop (Chateau Louis Hotel, Edmonton)

October 30- New Teacher Induction Workshop (Best Western Port O' Call, Calgary)

May 6th - AISCA Spring AGM & Conference (Calgary region, location TBD)

(AISCA Fall Leadership Conference: Date to be determined)

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