

**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.**

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## Director's Report: What does AISCA do?

As I've taken my first, cautious, steps in my 'new' role as Executive Director of AISCA, I've heard the question, 'What does AISCA do?' on a regular basis.

It seemed reasonable to me that friends and family, who weren't closely connected to education, might ask such a question. However, I wasn't prepared for the reality that many of those involved in government and in the field of education also ponder the same thing.

Perhaps it shouldn't have surprised me, since we represent a diverse range of independent schools, and work in areas of advocacy, research, teacher certification, and school support. It isn't easy to find a simple catch phrase that captures what it all is that AISCA does. A lengthier answer is required to do the question justice.

AISCA works to provide support to independent schools in 3 key areas: advocating for school choice and parental rights in education, participating as a stakeholder in working with Alberta Education, and providing support services to independent schools.

AISCA's advocacy work is multifaceted. The association has had the opportunity in the past couple of months to meet with the Education

Minister, as well as the Wildrose Education critic, to discuss the role of independent schools. AISCA also seeks opportunities to regularly communicate with all elected officials.

Behind the visible advocacy work there is also a lot of important groundwork that occurs. Our association has submitted briefs on a range of educational topics; in the past few months this has included submitting to the Education Minister a background brief articulating the history, current status, and proposed direction for private schools in Alberta, as well as a brief which articulates the importance of keeping the teacher certification process under the auspices of the government. We also work to equip our member schools to successfully engage in political advocacy.

The second key pillar of our association's vision is our work with Alberta Education. Some aspects of this work include an advocacy component; this is particularly true of opportunities we have to serve as stakeholders on committee items. In the past year AISCA has provided input on the Education Act Regulations, Bill 10, and the Deputy Minister's Advisory Committee on Teaching and Leadership Excellence.

AISCA also receives a grant from the ministry to facilitate certification for teachers in independent schools. When new initiatives are introduced by Alberta Education, AISCA often fills a role providing implementation support.

The final area of focus for our association is to provide support services to independent schools. This includes providing input regarding local school issues, creating policy templates, running leadership conferences, creating networking opportunities, and managing an energy program.

My hope is that by giving this detailed explanation, you can assist me in spreading the word on the important work AISCA does on behalf of independent schools and Early Childhood Services.

Executive Director  
John Jagersma



## New Teacher Workshops



and I hope to attend another one soon. I came here thinking that I should be working on report card comments, but now I can't tell you how grateful I feel for this workshop. Collaboration & action in action!" Very good workshop! I feel inspired and refreshed!"

"The end of October is when teachers begin to feel burned out. Our plans are off rail. We are feeling tired, all of our exciting goals and ideas from the beginning of the year are not going the way we thought. This workshop was a great reminder of what I need to be successful, that there are other teachers having the same challenges as me, and giving us motivation and tools to be successful educators. Thanks!!"

*"It felt so good to share and learn experiences/strategies. This was invaluable and I hope to attend another one soon."*

*"This workshop was a great reminder of what I need to be successful, that there are other teachers having the same challenges as me, and giving us motivation and tools to be successful educators."*

As part of the Designated Signing Authority Program, AISCA once again hosted two workshops for new teachers, on October 29 in Edmonton and October 30 in Calgary. AISCA has offered these sessions for many years now, with the purpose of giving first (and some second) year teachers an opportunity to build supportive networks, to reflect on their own developing practice, and an opportunity to receive input from a group of seasoned educators. The sessions were led by the *sages who have taught for ages*, Ary DeMoor and David Eifert, but this year, a new dimension was added by including an AISCA board member in each city. Jawdah Jorf, Superintendent of

Edmonton Islamic Academy and Erin Corbett, Head of Calgary's River Valley School, added the insights they have gleaned from their teaching and administrative careers. Participants were given many opportunities for table discussion around topics that were relevant to them. Over 40 teachers participated in the Edmonton session and close to 30 in the Calgary session, and participant comments were overwhelmingly positive:

- it felt so good to share and learn experiences/strategies. This was invaluable

Watch for news on a follow-up session in mid March.



## A Discussion on Successful Political Advocacy

As part of AISCA's Fall Leadership meetings in both Edmonton and Calgary, Keith Penner, principal at Living Waters Christian Academy, presented on the importance of, and strategies for, effective advocacy.

Penner highlighted the importance of understanding the complex role that politicians fulfill. Supporters of independent schools should seek opportunities to support and inform their elected officials. He emphasized a need to approach advocacy work from a perspective that understands that politicians have put themselves into political life because of a desire to serve the community, and make positive change.

The important role that school leaders fulfill was also emphasized during the presentation. School leaders have a voice based on the position they fill. Even though the job is a demanding one, it is important to allocate specific time to developing effective political engagement. Our school leaders are experts on education, and can provide specific input to help equip and educate their MLAs regarding topics pertaining to their school, and education in general.

Besides the direct influence that a school leader can have, there is also a community component to successful advocacy.

The head of school or the school authority board can

facilitate good interaction between the school community and elected officials by equipping members with relevant information, and clear directions on how to connect. Often members of the community are hesitant to engage because of a fear that they don't have the requisite background knowledge or context to provide meaningful input. They are also bound by time constraints. School leadership can work to mitigate these barriers.

Penner concluded his engaging presentation by summarizing three key take-aways:

1) develop productive relationships with community leaders.

2) inform your community so they can have effective dialogue in their workplaces and with community leaders.

3) provide simple, easy to use support for positively communicating with leaders, via phone, email, or letters or in-person at school related events.



Keith Penner  
Principal of Living Waters  
Christian Academy in  
Spruce Grove.

## Standards for Teachers, School Leaders, and System Leaders

Alberta Education is working to update the Teaching Practice Standard, and is also working to develop School Leader and Systems Leader (such as superintendents) standards. The stated goal of this work is to ensure that there is "an excellent teacher in every classroom and excellent leaders in the education system".

AISCA is also actively involved in this process. The association has representatives on the Deputy Minister's Teaching

and Leadership Excellence in Alberta Advisory Committee, as well as on a working committee tasked with constructing draft standards.

At the fall leadership meetings AISCA invited representatives from the Leadership Excellence branch to present to, and interact with, independent school leaders. These sessions helped to inform the ministry of the distinct challenges that teachers, school leaders and system leaders face in independent schools.

As the process moves forward, AISCA will seek opportunities for members of independent schools to review the draft documents and give input to AISCA. This feedback will be considered as AISCA works with other stakeholders to compile standards that will be provided to Minister Eggen for his consideration and approval.

After an approved set of standards has been put into force, AISCA will also seek to provide support to independent schools through the implementation phase.

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## Early Childhood Services Workshops

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*This marks the 15<sup>th</sup> year of ECS sharing sessions and they continue to be a highlight for all who participate.*

On October 22 and 23 2015, community based private ECS operators met together under AISCA's umbrella to share common concerns and to interact with AISCA and Alberta Education staff and of course, with each other. The meetings were well attended with 41 participants in Edmonton and 52 in Calgary.

Suzanne Maclean was able to attend both meetings to introduce

herself as the newly elected ECS AISCA Board member. Joy Malloch, Sheldon Bossert and Cathy Martin were able to present information from Alberta Education. AISCA's work on behalf of private ECS operators was also highlighted and various AISCA templates and initiatives were presented and distributed.

These meetings gained excellent evaluations from

the participants and there was great interest in AISCA offering another ECS sharing session in the spring of 2016. This marks the 15<sup>th</sup> year of ECS sharing sessions and they continue to be a highlight for all who participate.

These meetings provide a great opportunity to stay abreast of the latest issues, and to broaden the networks of support for ECS operators.

## AISCA meets with Hon. Minister David Eggen

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*We look forward to further opportunities to interact with Minister Eggen on the important role that independent schools play in serving Albertan students.*

On Tuesday, October 20<sup>th</sup> members of the AISCA board and staff had the opportunity to meet with the honourable Minister of Education, David Eggen.

The meeting allowed AISCA to inform the Minister of the great work that is being done by the independent schools across the province. The diverse range of independent schools and ECS programs was also elaborated on.

During the meeting AISCA representatives brought up two areas of importance to independent schools. The first area addressed was the issue of funding. AISCA expressed appreciation for the Government's restoration of funding that

had been threatened by the previous government's spring budget. The need for continued predictable, sustainable, and equitable funding was also emphasized.

The second item that was addressed was Teacher Certification; AISCA provided a brief to the Minister which provides a myriad of reasons why the certification of teachers is of importance to the public domain, and should remain as a specific task of the Ministry of Education.

Besides the two points of emphasis, other educational topics were also discussed. These included reviewing Alberta

Education's survey data which show that a high percentage of our students, parents, and teachers agree that private schools are safe and caring (93.9%) institutions with engaged parents (89.9%), and which equip students for the world of work (92.9%) and prepare students for their role as citizens (91.1%).

Overall, it was a positive meeting, and we look forward to further opportunities to interact with Minister Eggen on the important role that independent schools play in serving Albertan students.