

AISCA NEWS

Director's Report: Tales of the Times.

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.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Charles Dickens words capture what Alberta as a whole, and independent schools, have experienced these past few months.

We have only to look north to Fort McMurray to see both the best of times and the worst of times. While the fire that ravaged the city was terrible, the response of Albertans was heartwarming. Elsewhere in the newsletter we will highlight how various independent schools stepped up to help their northern neighbours.

For independent schools, budget week also saw divergent experiences. Our provincial government put forward a budget which emphasized the importance of stable funding for education. Thankfully, this included continued stable funding for independent school students. Within the same week, the legislature saw a heated debate on choice in education. Many in our school communities were disappointed to see amendments proposed by the government which would have severely undermined the rights of parents in the province.

Fortunately the democratic process played out in such a way that there were opportunities for reasoned discussion and reflection, and in the end the government and the opposition parties

could unanimously agree to continue supporting a diverse educational system that values the rights of parents, and supports choice in education.

AISCA's annual general meeting certainly qualifies as a 'best of times' moment as well. From the powerful keynote messages delivered by Chief Wilton Littlechild and Assistant Deputy Minister Jane Martin, to greetings from the government delivered by Education Minister David Eggen, the day had many highlights.

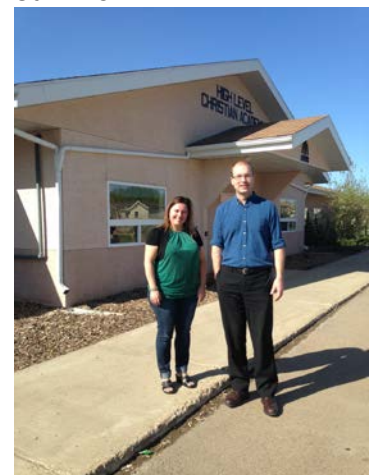
AISCA has also experienced a variety of emotions over these past few months. The public attention on choice in education, and funding for independent schools meant that significant time and energy was spent on messaging and communication with various forms of media. The debate in the legislature led to AISCA formatting key messages for our schools to share with their societies and communities. The spring budget also triggered analysis and information related tasks. With all this going on, the more 'regular' work of teacher certification, ECS sharing sessions, school support work, and policy development also continued.

In early May I experienced a 'highlight' moment when I went on a trip up North. The journey was a microcosm of much of what AISCA does; it

involved teacher certification work, a meeting with individuals seeking to start a new school, and a visit to High Level Christian Academy, our most Northern member.

As I've ventured across the province through this first year with AISCA I've seen a 'tale of two schools' as well. On the one hand each school has its own history, purpose and vision. Yet, there is so much that links us together: a desire to serve and support children, a passion for excellence, a formidable will to thrive and grow, consistent support for our surrounding communities. This unity in diversity is a key foundation on which AISCA will seek to build in the coming months.

I would like to conclude by wishing you all a successful end to the school year, and a wonderful and relaxing summer.



John Jagersma,
Executive Director
(With Vera Bartlett, principal of High Level Christian Academy, In High Level, AB)

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AISCA AGM: Education for Reconciliation

Minister Eggen brought greetings on behalf of the government... He stressed how his ministry is dedicated to an excellent education for all students in Alberta and to closing the achievement gap for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Chief Littlechild highlighted the problems caused by residential schools and the reconciliation and healing that can occur through education.

Dr. Martin outlined the policy shift ... to facilitate a societal shift in thinking based on the premise of Education for Reconciliation.

On May 6th over 120 participants came together at the Sheraton hotel in Calgary to participate in a day of discussions and presentations focused on reconciliation. One of the keynote speakers was Chief Wilton Littlechild, who shared his perspective as a commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and spoke of the need and opportunities for reconciliation. He shared his own experiences as a survivor of residential schools, and expanded on the 94 Calls to Action coming out of the TRC. He highlighted the problems caused by residential schools and the reconciliation and healing that can occur through education.



Our second keynote speaker was Dr. Jane Martin, ADM for FNMI branch of Alberta

She discussed the work Alberta Education is doing to close the achievement gap for 17,000 FNMI students in Alberta: FNMI students suffer a higher dropout rate, lower PAT scores, and lower graduation rate. She discussed the historical reasons for this and the intergenerational trauma resulting from residential schools, poverty and racism and explained the jurisdiction gap between federal and provincial governments and the lack of educational supports.

Dr. Martin outlined the policy shift that began with a memorandum of understanding in 2010 and continues with Alberta Education establishing the FNMI Division in August 2014 to facilitate a societal shift in thinking based on the premise of Education for Reconciliation.

Between the two keynote sessions of the day, participants had the pleasure of being addressed by our Education Minister, David Eggen. AISCA and its member schools appreciated that the Minister was able to spare some time to attend the AGM, considering the significant work he and his government were involved with due to the fire in Fort McMurray.

Minister Eggen discussed the challenges posed by



the fire owing to the number of displaced students from 25 schools in the area. He stressed how his ministry is dedicated to an excellent education for all students in Alberta and to closing the achievement gap for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

The rest of the day was filled with updates regarding upcoming initiatives for AISCA, including a new website and a teachers' convention for all schools of choice in the province for the 2017-18 school year. In between the presentations and discussions there were opportunities for networking and informal discussions. All in all, it was a wonderful day and AISCA thanks Minister Eggen, our keynote speakers, and all participants for their contribution to making the event such a success!

AISCA defends choice in education

The accusation made of independent schools was that they don't serve the public good. This argument is divisive and unfounded. It attempts to create an 'us versus them' mentality, when the reality is that for many decades our schools have been part of a diverse and successful educational system.

Independent school funding received significant media attention this spring. Agencies supported by organized labor, and bearing catchy names such as "Progress Alberta" and "Public Interest Alberta" published news releases calling for an end to funding private schools. At the same time, Edmonton Public School Board passed a motion (with a 6-3 vote it should be noted) to lobby the government to stop funding private schools.

AISCA responded to these attacks through editorials, and interviews with print, radio, and television media. Members of the AISCA staff also reached out to MLAs of both the government and opposition parties to provide perspective regarding the amount of funding being received, and the vital public good that independent schools and ECS programs provide. Schools also received communication from the Association about ways school communities could respond to support continued choice.

The brunt of the attacks focused on two areas. The first was financial. It was argued that cutting funding to our schools would 'save' the government hundreds of millions of dollars. AISCA pointed out that the facts don't bear this out. In discussions with the media, and our elected officials, AISCA staff emphasized that research showed that private schools had saved the

public purse 750 million dollars over the past 5 years. The math is in fact relatively simple. All Albertan tax payers contribute tax dollars to the cause of educating children in Alberta. Independent schools receive \$5200 per child per year of this tax money; public and separate schools received around \$13,000 to educate a child for a year.

The second attack was ideological. The accusation made of independent schools was that they don't serve the public good. This argument is divisive and unfounded. It attempts to create an 'us versus them' mentality, when the reality is that for many decades already our schools have been part of a diverse and successful educational system. Our graduates are contributing members in society, serving the good of all alongside graduates from a range of other school systems. Our schools serve as hubs in their communities, and fund raise for and support many public initiatives.

During this time of increased media attention, AISCA put forward evidence based reasons for supporting and funding choice in education. Thankfully the members of the legislature were willing to consider these and other facts, and unanimously voiced their support for educational choice.

AISCA Website: Coming this summer

The new site will give members of the association an opportunity to post employment opportunities, and to highlight their school on a directory page.

At the AGM in May, AISCA unveiled its new logo, as well as conceptual diagrams of a new website. The new site will give members of the association an opportunity to post employment opportunities, and to highlight their school on a directory page. The site will also provide important information regarding AISCA, choice in education, and the teacher certification process. There will also be an interactive component

that will facilitate effective advocacy opportunities for members of the independent school community. Work is progressing on the website development;

The expectation is that the site will go live towards the end of July. This will give users an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the site, and to update any key information prior to the start of the coming school year.



Independent Schools Support Fort McMurray

On May 3rd a huge forest fire swept through the city of Fort McMurray destroying approximately 2400 homes and buildings. Over 80,000 residents were forced to flee the city, and only recently have some residents been able to return. This mass evacuation was met with an outpouring of support from across the province, the country, and even internationally.

Independent schools and ECS programs, as well as our associate member schools, were quick to respond. Perhaps the most pressing need was for the displaced students to have access to education. Quite a few of our schools and ECS programs have accepted students from Fort McMurray. In most cases schools were able to expand their class sizes to create the necessary space. This was not possible for Edmonton Islamic Academy which took in over 170 students! In order to accommodate these students the school built a 'school within a school' and hired teachers and educational assistants to support this large group from Fort McMurray. The school also worked hard to create a sense of community in which these new students have felt safe and included.

It's wonderful to see how Albertans from a diverse range of faith, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds have come together to support the citizens of Fort McMurray. Many of our schools and ECS programs shared stories of how their students, staff, and communities raised money to support the Red Cross and other agencies providing relief efforts. Some examples included Gr. 8 & 9 students in a school worked with staff to run a pancake breakfast in their neighborhood and community to raise money for Fort McMurray. Another school's Gr. 5&6 students organized a garage sale as a fund raising effort. Other schools saw families support students from Fort McMurray by providing toys, games, clothes, and lodging.

Although AISCA doesn't have an exhaustive list of the work done by our schools, the information that has been shared with our office makes it clear that hundreds of students have found a place in our schools, and tens of thousands of dollars have been raised in support of those fleeing the fire. It's wonderful that our school communities could show that they truly are part of the learning landscape supporting the public good.

It's wonderful that our school communities could show in such a genuine and practical way, that they truly are part of the learning landscape supporting the public good.

Budget 2016: Education clearly valued by gov't

On Thursday, April 16, the Alberta Government delivered the provincial budget. While these are difficult economic times, the government managed to provide sustainable funding to education. This financial commitment ensures that all students in Alberta will continue to have access to quality education.

For independent schools and ECS programs, it was a good news budget as well.

Funding levels were left at the same rate as previous

years (independent schools to subsidize the cost of receive 70% of the base education in our schools the provincial instructional grant, and the sustainable and predictable funding that around 40% of public school equivalents). The Plant has been provided is welcome news to independent schools. As Minister Eggen stated in the legislature, "I've given them the reassurance that they can start planning on a longer basis ...so that they can make long-term plans for their budgets and so forth, which I think is very productive as well."

While parents will continue

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- Minister Eggen