Improving Student Learning

First-Year Implementation of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

Provincial Report for the 2000/2001 School Year

February 2003
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Report Overview

This is the first provincial report of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). This four-year, $68 million per year initiative was introduced in 1999 and implemented province-wide in Alberta schools during the 2000/2001 school year.

The first chapter describes the background to the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. It also discusses progress toward the Minister’s expected outcomes for the initiative. The AISI program is described as well as information about mobilizing it. AISI project funding and scope also are included.

The second chapter describes the initiative. Information about the AISI projects includes the types of students served, the themes and subjects, instructional level, and teaching strategies. The final section identifies the types of measures adopted by project teams to provide evidence of success.

The third chapter describes the partner support for implementing the projects. Support includes the online system, school visitations, workshops, the first provincial AISI conference, and the AISI Clearinghouse.

The fourth chapter presents the results of the first year of implementation. It has three major sections: project outcomes, project team observations, and school effects.

The final chapter presents a summary of the first year of implementation. Based on the evidence it outlines some lessons, draws some implications for action, and presents the agenda for the 2001/2002 implementation. The conclusion after one year of province-wide implementation suggests that with resources, commitment and careful strategies, teachers can find new ways to work together to help students learn.
1 Introduction

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), introduced in 1999, is a bold approach to fostering the improvement of student learning by teachers, parents, and the community working collaboratively through innovative and creative school improvement initiatives. AISI is based on the belief that an effective school improvement program should address local needs and circumstances, and be collaboratively planned, developed and implemented in a climate of trust, flexibility, and common purpose. This report covers the first year of AISI implementation in Alberta schools during the 2000/2001 school year.

Background

Prior to the first year of province-wide implementation, Alberta Learning spent a year developing and mobilizing the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. The Government of Alberta announced the School Performance Incentive Program (SPIP) on March 11, 1999 at the time of the 1999/2000 budget. In June 1999, as a result of feedback from stakeholders in terms of both the program and development process, the Minister of Learning placed SPIP on hold and immediately commenced a process of consultation with key stakeholders.

On July 14, 1999, the Deputy Minister invited five key associations to participate in a collaborative process to develop a program to improve student learning and performance in Alberta. Each association could appoint two representatives. All five associations accepted the invitation:

- Alberta Home and School Councils’ Association (AHSCA)
- Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
- Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA)
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)

Development began on August 26, 1999 when the Minister of Learning, Dr. Lyle Oberg, met with representatives of these organizations to design and develop the new initiative. The Minister outlined five expected outcomes of the consultation process:

1. Development of a program that improves student learning and performance.
2. Establishment of a solid foundation of trust between government and stakeholder groups.
3. Creation of a model for future collaboration between Alberta Learning and the external stakeholders.
4. Establishment of accountability measures and criteria to provide evidence that the initiative works.
5. Continuous improvement of the initiative.
The AISI Task Team, consisting of Alberta Learning staff and association representatives, became the Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC). Appendix A identifies the original and the first-year members of the partnership. The partners met seven times between August and December 1999 to develop the goal, principles, key considerations, and administrative requirements for AISI.

The School Improvement Branch (SIB) was established to serve as the Secretariat for AISI. Two staff members were seconded from other branches of Alberta Learning, bringing extensive experience in administration, finance, research, measurement, and reporting. An office administrator joined the team in fall 1999. This three-person team was responsible for the logistics and documentation of the developmental work of AISI.

In December 1999, the *AISI Framework* and the *AISI Administrative Handbook* were published and distributed to school authorities and posted on the Alberta Learning website.

**Table 1.1: Milestones in the Establishment of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Date (1999)</th>
<th>Document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Minister put SPIP on hold</td>
<td>June 9</td>
<td>News Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Minister met with stakeholder associations to develop a program to improve student learning</td>
<td>August 26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. School Improvement Branch (SIB) established</td>
<td>August 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SIB distributed proposed framework for AISI to 37 associations for feedback</td>
<td>October 1</td>
<td>Draft Proposed Framework for AISI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC) reviewed consolidated feedback from stakeholder associations and 6 partners, revised framework paper, and developed AISI program parameters and requirements</td>
<td>November 6–7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. EPSC approved revised framework for AISI</td>
<td>November 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Standing Policy Committee review and recommendation</td>
<td>December 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. EPSC reviewed and approved:</td>
<td>December 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• administrative handbook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• dissemination package</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Alberta Government Cabinet reviewed and approved AISI Program</td>
<td>December 14</td>
<td>News Release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Partners held AISI press conference</td>
<td>December 15</td>
<td><em>AISI Framework</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. SIB distributed school jurisdiction packages</td>
<td>December 23</td>
<td><em>AISI Administrative Han</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Progress Toward Expected Outcomes**

Alberta Learning monitored progress on each of the Minister’s expected outcomes. The partners responded to a mini-survey and rated the degree to which they felt AISI was addressing the expected outcomes. They answered the following questions:

To what degree do you think that:
1. trust between your association and Alberta Learning improved on this initiative?
2. the AISI process has met your expectations for collaboration?
3. AISI is creating a model for future collaboration between Alberta Learning and external stakeholders?
4. AISI (goal, principles, key considerations) will result in improved student learning and performance after implementation?

Figure 1.1 presents the results of this survey at two points in time: September 15, 1999 shortly after the partners began work on AISI and December 15, 1999 after they had completed their initial developmental work. In September each of the five associations provided its perspective; in December each partner responded individually (10 respondents). The results indicate considerable progress in the partners’ perceptions of trust, the collaborative process, the AISI model, and its potential for improving student learning.

**Figure 1.1: Education Partners’ Perceived Progress on Expected Outcomes of AISI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Improvement</th>
<th>September 15, 1999</th>
<th>December 15, 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The AISI Program**

AISI is an extension of Alberta’s accountability framework that has been in place since the early 1990s. For example, since November 1996, school boards have been reporting to their publics on how well their students are performing on a variety of measures (Alberta Learning, 2000). AISI provides funding to school authorities for specific local initiatives to improve student learning and performance. AISI funding is targeted and is in addition to basic instructional funding.
The goal of AISI is to improve student learning and performance by fostering initiatives that reflect the unique needs and circumstances within school jurisdictions. It has six principles:

1. Funding will flow to school jurisdictions and charter schools based upon approved proposals.
2. Proposals may be multi-year (maximum of three years) but must have interim (at least annual) progress measurement targets. Continued funding depends upon evidence of success.
3. Funding consisting of an equal amount per registered FTE (Full Time Equivalent) student will be based upon the previous year’s September 30th enrolment.
4. Jurisdiction proposals need to be linked to and become part of the current three-year planning and reporting process for purposes of the school jurisdiction’s annual planning, reporting and accountability processes.
5. There will be an appropriate balance of local and provincial performance measures that includes approved quantitative and/or qualitative measures.
6. Project results will be shared with Alberta school jurisdictions and others while Alberta Learning will act as the “clearinghouse” on behalf of all partners.

Further elaboration of the principles is found in the Framework for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI Education Partners Steering Committee, 1999). Administrative requirements and local and provincial processes are outlined in the AISI Administrative Handbook (AISI Education Partners Working Group, 1999).

Each partner organization is responsible for working with its own constituents to ensure the AISI principles are followed. The partners are continuing their collaboration to decide on priorities and to identify issues, challenges and enhancements to the AISI program and its processes.

In May 2000, AISI partners participated in a symposium at the annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education in Edmonton. The proceedings of this symposium, entitled AISI Opportunities and Challenges, provide the partners’ perspectives on the first year of AISI development. All AISI materials are available on Alberta Learning’s website at http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k-12/special/aisi

Mobilizing the Initiative

Between January and March 2000, AISI partners provided a series of planning supports to school authorities, including 12 overview presentations and over 20 intensive implementation workshops. In total over 1,000 people participated in these sessions. As well, under the leadership of CASS, the partners organized two sharing symposia (in Edmonton and Calgary) for school jurisdictions. More than 300 people attended these symposia.

A third support was an annotated bibliography posted to the Alberta Learning AISI website in January to help school jurisdictions begin their literature review. This online resource is fully searchable by author, title, key word, descriptor, and source. A fourth support was to fund the four Faculties of Education (University of Alberta, Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Calgary, and University of Lethbridge) so they could provide direct assistance and information to school authorities requesting advice on related AISI literature, improvement strategies, measures and evaluation, and other areas of local need.
Alberta Learning’s Help Desk Team assisted AISI project co-ordinators in accessing the Extranet (a secure site for school authority data) and SIB staff assisted school authorities in working through the AISI online application and reporting form. All Help Desk and School Improvement Branch staff are available by phone, e-mail or fax for assistance as needed.

A project review and approval process was developed and distributed so that school authorities would know exactly how their applications would be reviewed. Each AISI project plan/proposal includes the following requirements:

1. project description
2. school community involvement
3. literature and research (citation and application)
4. improvement goal(s)
5. support of implementers
6. measures, baseline(s) and improvement targets
7. strategies
8. evaluation methods and data sources
9. ongoing administrative support
10. staffing requirement
11. budget projections
12. project expense percentages
13. certification by project co-ordinator
14. certification by superintendent

**Project Funding and Scope**

All school authorities in Alberta (ECS to grade 12) are eligible to receive AISI funding. The rate is $121 per registered student in grades 1 to 12 in public school authorities, $73 for private school students (60% of public school funding), and $61 for Early Childhood Services (Kindergarten) students. In the 2000/2001 school year, Alberta Learning provided $68 million for AISI.

There are 74 public (public, separate and Francophone districts, and charter schools) and 231 private school authorities (115 private school and 116 ECS private operators) in Alberta. Public school authorities have 469 projects that started in the first year (2000/01). Private authorities started 255 projects in the first year. Almost all (95%) of the projects are for three years. Tables 1.2 and 1.3 present the number and type of projects and 2000/2001 FTE students and funding. Appendix B provides detailed information on the actual financial results.
Table 1.2: Number, Type, and Annual Report Status of Approved First-Year AISI Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>% of Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>% of Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Authorities</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>231*</td>
<td>305</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Report Status**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>97.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Approved</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Completed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under Review</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 115 private and 116 ECS private operators
** As of June 25, 2002

Table 1.3: AISI 2000/2001 FTE Students and Initial Allocated Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2000/2001</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>ECS Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FTE Students</td>
<td>532,292</td>
<td>22,290</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>555,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>$64,407,332</td>
<td>$1,671,319</td>
<td>$162,443</td>
<td>$66,241,094</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4 and Figures 1.2 and 1.3 show that AISI projects are being implemented in the majority of schools in Alberta: 86.2% of all public schools and 73.2% of all private schools (including private ECS operators) were involved in at least one AISI project in the 2000/01 school year.

The projects address a wide range of themes including literacy, numeracy, technology, early intervention, and multiple intelligences. Chapter 2 provides elaboration of the projects.

Table 1.4: Alberta Schools Involved in 2000/01 AISI Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved</td>
<td>1,510</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Involved</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,752</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.2: Public Schools involved in 2000/01 AISI Pro

Public Schools’ Involvement in AISI Projects

- 86.2% Involved
- 13.8% Not Involved

Figure 1.3: Private Schools involved in 2000/01 AISI Projects

Private Schools’ Involvement in AISI Projects

- 73.2% Involved
- 26.8% Not Involved
The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

What is AISI?

AISI is a unique school improvement initiative for the province of Alberta. The following attributes/characteristics can be used to describe AISI.

1. **A Partnership** – AISI is a partnership among teachers, superintendents, trustees, business officials, universities, parents, and government. The AISI partnership has resulted in building trust, collaboration, and teamwork among the education partners who represent diverse perspectives in providing education for children. Students are the beneficiaries of this strong and diverse partnership. By working together, the partners can develop new relationships, strategies, and practices that will provide long-term benefits to teaching and learning. This collaborative approach served as a model for other initiatives, for example, the Special Education Review.

2. **A Catalyst** – AISI is a catalyst for change. The common goal, targeted funding, partnership, positive climate, and supportive infrastructure are acting in concert to bring about significant change in teaching and learning. Time will tell if the AISI vision of systemic and sustainable school improvement is realized.

3. **Student focused** – AISI is focused on “what is good for students”. It communicates a compelling future of school improvement that aligns with the long-term vision of Alberta Learning – optimizing human potential. Students are active participants in their learning and work with teachers and other education partners to reach their potential. The initiative will ultimately influence all students in basic learning (K-12) in the province. AISI lessons also will influence how future teachers are trained and the nature of the professional development teachers receive to enhance their repertoires of instructional practices.

4. **Flexibility** – The AISI goal – to improve student learning and performance through a reflection of local needs and priorities – focuses attention on students, while permitting those who deliver education maximum flexibility to address local priorities, needs, and conditions.

5. **Collaboration** – The initiative is taking place not only with the concurrence of all partners in the design and development of AISI, but also in schools and communities across the province. The sharing of promising practices is an important outcome of the collaborative process.

6. **A Culture of Continuous Improvement** – AISI promotes a culture of continuous improvement. Meaningful and sustainable school improvement requires collaboration, commitment, and effort. Professional development and ongoing administrative support are important elements in helping educators engage in continuous improvement.
7. **Evidence-based Practice** – AISI will establish empirical evidence that enhanced educational practices benefit student learning and performance. The use of multiple methods and data sources will give Albertans confidence in the results. As the body of evidence on successful practices emerges, government will review the findings and consider how these practices will impact education in the province.

8. **Research-based Interventions** – The themes relate primarily to literacy, numeracy, early intervention, differentiated learning, and technology. Because these are all areas that have a solid research base with a reasonable expectation that improvement will occur given the implementation of effective instructional strategies, AISI projects will establish the efficacy of these interventions in the Alberta context.

9. **Inquiry and Reflection** – Many factors affect student learning. A decline in a particular measure needs to be investigated in light of other sources of data for judging whether teaching strategies are working. Strategies that did not work as predicted in a particular situation will also contribute to understanding. Apparent failures can provide important indications of what needs to change and how another approach might be more successful. Reflection leads to improved understanding and thoughtful changes to instructional practice. The time frame of the initiative allows for continuous improvements in teaching practice.

10. **Building Capacity and Sustainability** – Professional development will continue to ensure that teachers and students benefit from the emerging knowledge, practices, and technologies that are being developed through AISI. Teaching and learning resources developed and/or acquired through AISI will benefit Alberta’s students in the future.

11. **Longitudinal** – Four years of results will provide longitudinal evidence of what works and what might be adapted and implemented province-wide and elsewhere for the benefit of Alberta students.

12. **Knowledge** – AISI will contribute to the body of knowledge about teaching, learning, and instructional improvement. The AISI family will share this knowledge widely through conferences, reports, the Clearinghouse, and other dissemination strategies.

**The AISI Projects**

AISI is a province-wide school improvement program in which individual school authorities (through collaboration and prioritization) decide (1) which areas of student learning and performance need attention, (2) how to go about improving these areas (new teaching strategies), and (3) how to provide evidence that improvement has taken place (measuring student performance). School authorities chose to operationalize AISI in the first year by way of 721 projects.

Project co-ordinators were asked to identify the primary characteristics of their projects. Appendix C identifies the categories established to classify projects according to type of student served (target population), themes, subjects, teaching strategies, and types of measures.
The following subsections provide a description of the AISI projects according to target population, themes and subjects, and teaching strategies. These summarized descriptions are based on the approved project plans. Appendix D provides the supporting tables for each figure in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Targeted Students

Students were classified into one of ten categories. As with all the categories, more than one category could be selected. Figure 2.1 presents the major groups of students targeted by AISI projects. Table 2.1 in Appendix D provides the details. Regular students were included in 298 public projects (63.5%) and 197 private projects (78.2%). Special-needs students were included in 181 public projects (38.6%) and 44 (17.5%) private projects. Almost a third of public projects (31.1%) targeted at-risk students while a fifth (94 projects) included gifted and talented students.

Figure 2.1: Major Groups of Students Targeted by AISI Projects

Themes and Subjects

AISI projects were classified according to 21 themes. Figure 2.2 presents the nine most common themes. The major themes for public projects were capacity building [primarily through teacher professional development (36%) and the purchase of teaching and learning resources (18.6%)], technology (17.5%), behaviour/school climate (11.9%), and parent/community (11.1%). Professional development overlaps with most of the other themes indicating that it was integral to the projects. Private school authorities used their AISI funds primarily to purchase resources [including equipment, books and library upgrades] (48.4%), followed by professional development (19.4%).
Figure 2.2 presents the major subject areas. The overwhelming areas of interest were literacy and mathematics. Literacy accounted for 39.4% of the public projects and 26.2% of the private projects. Mathematics accounted for 18.9% of the public projects and 10.3% of the private projects. Thirty-five public (7.5%) and 21 private (8.3%) projects focused on all the core subjects (language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science). Other projects targeted one or two core subjects such as science and social studies while others focused on elective subjects or a new curriculum. A small number of both public and private projects (4.3% and 4%, respectively) focused on the fine arts.
Figure 2.3: Major Subject Areas of AISI Projects

Figure 2.4 presents the distribution of projects across grade levels. Since many schools in Alberta encompass several grades, there is considerable overlap. The majority of the projects included students in the elementary (Kindergarten to grade 6) and junior high (grades 7 to 9) levels. See Table 2.4 in Appendix D for details. Most public (74.4%) and private (86.5%) projects included the elementary level. More than half of public (53.3%) and four in ten private (42.1%) projects included junior high students. About a third of the projects included high school (grades 10 to 12) students (38% public and 32.5% private). Twenty-nine public projects (6.2%) and 47 private projects (18.7%) included pre-school children (those not yet in Kindergarten).

Figure 2.4: AISI Projects By Division/Grade Level
Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies were coded into one or more of 27 categories. Most projects used two or more teaching strategies. Figure 2.5 presents the results in descending order of frequency of the 14 most common strategies (each accounting for 5% or more of the public projects). The most widely used public teaching strategy was small groups (74 projects, 15.8%). This was followed by the use of individual programming (44 projects, 9.4%) and teaching to accommodate learning styles (41 projects, 8.7%). The remaining commonly used strategies ranged from 35 projects (7.2%) using experiential learning to 24 projects using tutoring (5%).

Private projects used 18 teaching strategies. The three most common teaching strategies were individual programming (6%), use of paraprofessionals (5.6%), and experiential learning (4.8%). The remaining strategies used in more than five private projects included small groups (8 projects), workshops (7 projects), and alternative delivery (6 projects).

Figure 2.5: Teaching Strategies in AISI Projects
Types of Measures

Every project had at least one quantitative measure of student learning. These measures included Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT), Diploma Examinations (DE), standardized tests such as Canadian Tests of Basic Skills, Gates-McGinitie and Brigance Tests, and local teacher tests (see Figure 2.6).\(^1\) The results of these measures are used to assess how well AISI interventions are improving student learning. While indicative of what is happening in the school, a single year of results precludes any definitive conclusions about the success of individual projects.\(^2\)

Figure 2.6: Types of Measures Used to Provide Evidence of Student Learning

---

\(^1\) Also, each school authority was required to have a balance of 60% locally determined measures (e.g., standardized tests and teacher tests) and 40% provincially determined (i.e., PAT or Diploma Exam) measures.

\(^2\) The *AISI Administrative Handbook* (1999, p. 13) indicates that more than one year of data is required to achieve success. An apparent decline in a single year may not be a reflection of lack of success but would need to be investigated further.
3 Implementation Support

The Online System

The efficient and effective management of the various AISI business processes is a prerequisite to the success of the initiative and the discharge of accountability. The project review and approval and internal management systems were developed shortly after AISI was announced and have since undergone many refinements to enhance their capacity and performance. The resulting extranet AISI management system is used for submission of project proposals and interim and annual reports. The School Improvement Branch uses the system to review and approve project proposals and reports and communicate decisions to school authorities. The system also enables school authorities to review and update their project plans and share information. The extranet system is a legacy of AISI that may be used to manage future school improvement initiatives. Table 3.1 summarizes the components and functions of the AISI Management Information System.

Table 3.1: Functions of the AISI Extranet System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Functions</th>
<th>SIB Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Proposals</td>
<td>Operational Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Reports</td>
<td>Financial Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Revision</td>
<td>AISI Updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Reports</td>
<td>Searching Mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Help</td>
<td>Review and Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Certification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Superintendent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School Visitations

The School Improvement Branch provides significant support to AISI project co-ordinators and staff. This support is provided by telephone, electronic mail and through on-site visitations with school authority staff.

The visitations are important for supporting the successful implementation of AISI projects and provide opportunities for:

1. Hands-on assistance, sharing current information, and discussion of current issues.
2. Reviewing project progress (e.g., comparing actual performance with established targets) and monitoring the actual against budgeted expenditures.
3. Building collaboration, enhancing trust, and strengthening the relationships between SIB and local AISI co-ordinators and staff.

In spring 2001, SIB staff visited with staff in the public school authorities (public and separate school authorities, charter schools, and Francophone school authorities). In total, 65 out of 74 public, separate, Francophone and charter authorities were visited. A summary of the SIB observations follows.

1. Virtually all school authorities were very pleased and positive about their AISI projects and the concepts upon which they were built.
2. Virtually all school authority projects were progressing as planned and as expected (very well).
3. The vast majority expressed appreciation for the visits and the assistance given; no one expressed dissatisfaction.
4. During school-site visits, SIB staff observed passionate excited and committed professionals who are enthusiastic about their AISI projects.
5. Some concerns were expressed about the writing of the project proposal and the interim progress report. Some felt requirements were onerous.
6. The primary difficulty for many authorities is slow internet/extranet access through dial-up telephone systems.

The one-on-one assistance was well received by the AISI co-ordinators. Based on these observations, SIB is committed to continuing visitations with the school authorities. With the removal of the spring Interim Progress Reports for ongoing projects, SIB staff members have reallocated their time to include more in-depth visitations in spring 2002.

**Workshops**

The success of AISI rests on the implementation of projects by local project co-ordinators and local project staff. With more than 720 projects under way in Alberta, the School Improvement Branch must communicate regularly with the many project participants to ensure a shared understanding of the scope and objectives of the overall initiative.

While SIB staff can provide direction to local co-ordinators and project staff, the collaborative process underpinning the initiative demands communication among all AISI participants. It is essential for local co-ordinators and project staff to have opportunities to share ideas and discuss challenges with their counterparts in other school authorities. Accordingly, SIB and its partners sponsored nine workshops for AISI co-ordinators between October 2000 and May 2001. The workshops had three main objectives:

1. Discussion of a key topic relevant to the co-ordinators at the time (e.g., the roles and responsibilities of co-ordinators (in fall 2000), completing the Interim Progress Report (in March 2001), and sustaining professional development (in May 2001).
2. Opportunities to network and meet fellow co-ordinators.
3. Opportunities to share information.
The majority of participants at the workshops were AISI co-ordinators and project leaders. Central office administrators, teachers and school administrators also attended. Table 3.2 summarizes the workshops.

Participants were asked to rate the quality of the workshops and provide written feedback. Generally participants appreciated the opportunities for networking and information sharing, the clarification of issues, and the opportunities for small-group discussion with their peers. Suggestions for improvement related to the facilities set-up and the time available for small-group discussions. Participants’ representative comments for the fall, spring, and regional PD workshops follow Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Summary of AISI Workshops from November 2000 to May 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Overall Rating*</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Workshops</td>
<td>1. To establish a network</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary, October 30, 2000; Edmonton, November 2, 2000</td>
<td>2. To understand the co-ordinator’s role and responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. To share information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Workshops</td>
<td>1. To update participants on the current issues related to managing AISI projects including a focus on the April Interim Progress Report</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton, March 5, 2001</td>
<td>2. To share information and provide direction on measurement and data collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary, March 8, 2001</td>
<td>3. To provide networking opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional PD Workshops</td>
<td>1. To share and examine information about the AISI projects and professional development,</td>
<td>93% rated workshop as good or excellent</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innisfail, May 3, 2001</td>
<td>2. To present models and characteristics of effective professional development which link to school improvement and enhanced student learning,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton, May 9; 2001</td>
<td>3. To identify powerful strategies for professional development,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grande Prairie, May 14; 2001</td>
<td>4. To identify sources of professional development assistance,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethbridge, May 16, 2001</td>
<td>5. To plan professional development for AISI projects in 2001/2002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary, May 17, 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Scale of 1 to 10, 10 being highest
Sample of Workshop Participants’ Positive Feedback

**FALL 2000**
- The ability to network with others involved in similar projects and along with it the reminder that this is an ongoing process.
- The opportunity to meet and share – an incredible amount of learning can be acquired through the networking and sharing.
- Work in the small groups very beneficial – more of this is needed.
- Very well organized – moved along quickly – informative.

**SPRING 2001**
- The opportunity to hear from others about not only projects but concerns, stumbling blocks, anxieties, positives, etc.
- It’s very valuable to have the chance to clarify issues for ourselves and to get some validation that the work we’re doing so far is valid.
- I was put at ease with regards to data collection, measures, targets and baselines.

**REGIONAL PD WORKSHOPS**
- Lots of ideas and information provided, lots of sharing.
- Well organized, lots of pertinent information, lots of great activities.
- Handouts, activities, being able to talk to others.

Sample of Workshop Participants’ Constructive Feedback

**FALL 2000**
- My jurisdiction is already very clear about AISI technical requirements - so it might have been better to host beginner-intermediate-advanced workshops.
- Would have liked more time to talk to people from other jurisdictions.

**SPRING 2001**
- Not enough examples. I’d love to hear from those in the trenches. Let’s see live examples!
- The important information was presented in the afternoon. Should have been given in the morning.
- Need more time to work together in smaller groups.

**REGIONAL PD**
- More time should be spent with the people that have similar AISI projects, (e.g., math improvement).
- Less time spent discussing "What is good PD" and more time spent sharing examples of good PD in each district.
- Grouping similar "projects" together for exchange.
First Provincial AISI Conference

The first provincial AISI conference took place November 1-2, 2001 in Edmonton. Because it celebrated the first year of implementation, it is included in this report. In total, 444 delegates attended the conference from across Alberta. Conference participants included teachers, parents, superintendents, trustees, university personnel, and MLAs. The Minister of Learning provided special funding of $220,000 to cover conference costs.

Participants were requested to complete an evaluation form prior to their departure. Of the 444 participants, 150 (34%) completed the survey. A detailed report on the survey can be obtained from the School Improvement Branch. The survey invited respondents to rate three areas (the program, importance/usefulness, and overall rating) and to comment on six aspects of the conference: positive and negative features, organization, value of conference, suggestions for future conferences, and general comments. Table 3.3 summarizes the findings.

The conference was very well received. The main purpose was to showcase AISI projects in order to foster extensive sharing. A total of 65 individual projects were highlighted in the various breakout sessions, with 20 projects highlighted more than once. Most participants attended at least two of the three breakout sessions. Representative comments are found in Appendix E.

The overall sentiment of the conference can be summed up by the following quotation from a conference delegate:

*Thank you for creating the AISI initiative; the passion from these projects was so evident throughout these two days. Students and teachers, all stakeholders, are the true benefactors of these projects. Thank you for supporting our schools. Can’t wait till next year’s conference.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Importance/Usefulness (Quite &amp; Very) %</th>
<th>Rating (Very Good &amp; Excellent) %</th>
<th>Representative Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showcase Sessions</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>66</td>
<td><em>The showcase sessions were informative and helpful. It was great to network with others regarding projects and revisions. A very positive experience.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster Presentations</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
<td><em>The energy, excitement and pride everyone displayed regarding their projects.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keynote Address</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
<td><em>Dr. Levin, the mingling, the ideas, some very impressive projects. It gives hope.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sessions</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>65</td>
<td><em>I really enjoyed the information sessions. I found them very practical. I wish I could have attended more than one.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The AISI Clearinghouse

Sharing the findings of the various improvement initiatives both within and among schools and school authorities is a key component in achieving the goal of sustainable improvement. A public Clearinghouse on the Internet will facilitate sharing among educators and dissemination to a broad audience that may include anyone who has access to the worldwide web. Developmental work began in July 2000 when the AISI Clearinghouse Education Partners Working Group was established.

The primary purpose of the public AISI Clearinghouse is to share what is learned through AISI projects individually and collectively about how to improve student learning and sustain school improvement. The Clearinghouse will serve the needs of multiple audiences. It is essentially a communicating vehicle that can further discussion among educators and the public on school improvement. Making use of the latest electronic technology, it will permit viewers to access and retrieve information quickly and permit links to related materials. In addition to facilitating “teachers talking to teachers” about their experiences with school improvement, the Clearinghouse will inform education policy and decision makers at the local school, school authority, and provincial levels. It also will provide a database for educational researchers and analysts.

The contents of the Clearinghouse will be the AISI project proposals, reports, products, tools, and promising practices. It will provide different levels of detail from a high-level synthesis of projects by user-selected categories to synopses of projects and rich descriptions of outcomes, practices and teacher insights.

Access and retrieval to and from the Clearinghouse will be through a hierarchical model (generalized/synthesized to specific details) with multiple linkages at any stage using a drill-down approach. Access will be user-friendly and efficient.

The Clearinghouse will be dynamic (continuous updating) and interactive (through extensive navigational capabilities). With the continuing collaboration of the AISI partners, it will become not a static warehouse of “things past”, but rather a model of collective learning and wisdom in the pursuit of improving the education of Alberta’s students.

Components

1. **Website and Synthesis** – This component has two major parts: a way to access different types of information in the other components of the Clearinghouse, and high-level syntheses of what has been learned through AISI projects.

2. **Approved AISI Projects** – This component consists of the project plan details for approved AISI projects and a brief synopsis of each project.

3. **Rich Description** – Rich description refers to documentation that helps to explain successes and failures of projects. This optional component will include products, tools and promising practices that encompass broad, subjective, and in many cases, anecdotal information on instructional strategies and teachers’ insights. This information will be fundamental to
helping others understand school improvement efforts and how they work. It will assist schools and/or authorities that want to replicate a particular project.

Issues

The Clearinghouse was developed with extensive input from the AISI partners. It was presented and discussed at all AISI workshops and at the 2000 CASS Issues Forum. In February 2001, an electronic survey was distributed to superintendents so they could provide further input on a number of issues that had been identified. In total, 37 of the 64 (58%) public and separate superintendents responded. Four in five school authorities were in favour of the Clearinghouse as planned. The major concern expressed was the time and effort required to complete rich descriptions. Superintendents wanted any such information to be optional. Respondents identified a number of barriers to implementing the rich description component, including time, money and effort, expertise/support and in-service, format/scope/requirements, FOIP/copyright issues, and comfort with technology. Some sample comments follow:

Time is a big concern, both for developing the “rich description” and in reading the finished products.

Co-ordinators and teachers will need lots of in-service on what this all looks like. Workshops, on-line, and hard-copy examples will be necessary.

Decision

As a result of the input from school authorities, the AISI partners decided to make the rich description component optional. They further agreed to provide assistance to school authorities in preparing the rich description they wished to include.

For schools and school authorities to benefit fully from the diversity of AISI projects, it is imperative that they have access to the depth and breadth of material generated in support of the projects. Optionality permits school authorities to choose whether or not to document their developmental work, which can be labour intensive. Small projects with small budgets would, therefore, not divert scarce resources from their AISI intervention to this optional documentation. Explicit and rich documentation of the products, tools, instructional strategies, and promising practices will provide the means for the meaningful interpretation of the findings. The “W5” of improvement strategies (what, why, who, when, where) will help others share successful approaches and avoid strategies that did not meet expectations.
4 Outcomes

One year of AISI is insufficient to provide definitive conclusions about the initiative. However, the first year’s results indicate that progress has been made in a number of key areas: development of measurement tools, project outcomes, project teams’ professional judgment about what transpired during the first year, and the impact on schools.

Measurement Tools

Evidence-based practice dictated that AISI projects have an appropriate balance of quantitative and qualitative measures. Most projects that focused on cognitive outcomes used provincial achievement tests and diploma examinations as indicators of success. These tests have the advantages of long-term use by teachers and extant analyses and reporting, which means school staff do not need to expend resources in test development, analysis and reporting. However, these tests and exams cover only four grades (3, 6, 9 and 12), so projects that include students in other grades needed to find other measures. In addition to the provincial tests and exams, school authorities are using more than 40 other assessment instruments (e.g., Canadian Tests of Basic Skills, Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Schonell Tests, Brigance Tests).

Many projects have affective and behavioural goals. Such projects do not lend themselves to standardized assessment so project teams had to develop or adapt local measures. While these instruments may be valid for a particular project, outsiders may question how applicable they are for other projects. Local measures also require a great deal of work in analyzing, interpreting and reporting results. Most local data come from administrative sources (e.g., attendance) or surveys. Because these measures generate quantitative data, it is possible to summarize findings over projects with similar themes and/or strategies.

Public projects used 2,500 measures with numbers per project ranging from one to 51 measures. Private projects used fewer measures for an overall total of 376 with a range for any given project of one to nine measures. On average, public projects used six measures, usually a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, to determine the impact of their project during the first year of implementation. Private projects used an average of two measures.
Table 4.1: Incidence of Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Authority</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Average # of Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1,720</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>1-51</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>2,876</td>
<td>1-51</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Narrative approaches to provide evidence of success also were encouraged. Project co-
ordinators could describe what happened and then rate how well they achieved their intent. In
the AISI Project Annual Report (APAR), this is called “description of quality measures”. As
well, project co-ordinators were encouraged to provide comments, observations, and suggestions
that may be germane to the present and future results of the project.

Table 4.2 presents the distribution, number and percentage of descriptions of quality measures. Almost half (44.3%) of the public projects included one such measure compared to 77.4% of the private projects. Four in ten public projects (39.4%) and 21.5% of private projects used two or three such measures.

Table 4.2: Distribution of Descriptions of Quality Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Measures</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Projects</td>
<td>% of Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project Effects and Results

Comparing First Year results to Targets and Baselines

Each project had to establish a baseline and improvement target for each measure, except for the descriptions of quality measures discussed above. The baseline represents student performance prior to the intervention. Project co-ordinators were advised to use three-year averages as the baseline if using a provincial achievement test or diploma exam. In the absence of past performance data for a new measure, first-year results could be used as the baseline for a project.

Project teams were required to set realistic improvement targets for each project year. Figure 4.1 presents two examples: a provincial achievement test with a three-year average baseline and a new student survey for which the first-year results serve as the baseline.

Figure 4.1: Illustrative Examples of Results from AISI Project Annual Reports (APAR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2000/2001</th>
<th>Number* Measured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Actual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 English Language Arts</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Baseline Comment**
Three-year average of the % of students achieving the acceptable standard on the provincial achievement test in the school (1998, 1999, 2000).

(**) APAR Comment
Students did not reach the target because we were unable to implement all strategies as expected. The slight improvement over the baseline suggests we are on the right track.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2000/2001</th>
<th>Number* Measured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Actual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Baseline Comment**
Our first-year actual results in June 2001 will establish our baseline.

(**) APAR Comment
85% of our grade 6 students agree that they are improving their writing skills. The response rate was 92% (92/100 students).

Note: White areas are carried forward from the current approved version of the project plan; shaded areas require completion for the first-year annual report (APAR).
* For quantitative measures: number of students who were tested or measured; for qualitative measures: number who responded to the survey, interview or other type of measurement instrument.
** Please interpret the results/findings, and if target not met, MUST explain.

The use of a three-year average is generally a good practice, however, in this instance additional clarification may be necessary. Historically, student achievement has followed a trend with minimal fluctuations. Between 1998 and 2000, results rose significantly during the province's implementation of accountability practices such as standardized large-scale assessment, development of education plans and public reporting of education results.
Figures 4.2 and 4.3 present the summarized results on the quantitative and qualitative measures for all approved projects. Eighty percent of the public projects and 83% of the private projects met or exceeded their targets on half or more of their measures. A higher percentage (94%) of both public and private projects showed improvement on half or more of measures over the baseline.

**Figure 4.2: First-Year Results Compared to Targets**

![Bar chart showing the comparison of first-year results to targets for public and private projects.]

**Figure 4.3: First-Year Results Compared to Baselines**

![Bar chart showing the comparison of first-year results to baselines for public and private projects.]

Magnitude of Project Effects

The preceding figures indicate the percentage of projects that met or exceeded their baselines and targets. They do not tell us the magnitude of the improvement. To determine the extent to which AISI projects improved over the baseline, all measures were converted to a common scale. This method permits comparison of improvement regardless of the type of measure (test, survey, etc.) that the school authorities used. An effect size expresses the increase or decrease in standard deviation units.

For each measure, the baseline and first-year result were converted to standardized (z) scores with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1. The effect size for each measure was determined by the difference between the z scores for the baseline and the first-year result and then averaged over the measures for each project. These average effect sizes were grouped into categories of small, medium, and large. An effect size of 0.20 can be considered small, 0.50 can be considered medium, and 0.80 can be considered large (Cohen, 1988, pp. 25-26). Effect sizes below 0.2 are considered trivial while those above 0.4 of a standard deviation suggest moderate improvement over the baseline. The percentages of projects in different ranges of categories are shown in the charts below. See Appendix G for further elaboration.

Figure 4.4 presents the results of AISI project participation using quantitative measures. The results were similar for both public and private projects. Approximately a third of the projects (31% public and 32% private) demonstrated moderate or large effects after one year of implementation. About 21% of public and 26% of private projects demonstrated small effects. One in seven projects (14% public and 13% private) saw a decline in performance on the quantitative measures.

Figure 4.4: Magnitude of Effect Sizes (Quantitative Measures)
Figure 4.5 presents the results of public projects that used the provincial achievement tests (grades 3, 6, 9) and diploma examinations (grade 12). These assessments represent a subset of the quantitative measures that were used in 216 of the 350 public projects included in this analysis. Using the provincial tests, a quarter of the public projects demonstrated a decline in achievement (27%) while one in five (22%) projects demonstrated a small positive effect. About 16% demonstrated a moderate or large degree of improvement.

Figure 4.5: Magnitude of Effect Sizes in Public Projects (Provincial Tests)

Figure 4.6 presents the results of AISI project participation using qualitative measures. The majority of qualitative measures were surveys of parents, students, and staff. Moderate or large effects were found in 44% of public and 22% of private projects. Small effects were found in 18% of public and 32% of private projects. A smaller percentage (10% public and 4% private) of projects demonstrated a decline. These positive attitudinal findings are consistent with AISI project teams’ observations.

Figure 4.6: Magnitude of Effect Sizes (Qualitative Measures)
Figure 4.7 presents the results of AISI participation in all projects (both public and private) using all measures. More than half (56%) of the projects showed improvement: 22% with small effects, 19% with moderate effects, and 15% with large effects. One in 10 projects demonstrated a decline and a third demonstrated little improvement (see Appendix H for estimates of effect sizes for each project).

These results indicate that effect size analysis is useful in determining the impact of AISI on the major types of projects, for example, literacy, mathematics, technology, etc. and to identify practices that contributed to achieving those results. This analytic procedure will be used to conduct such analyses on project types in the next report as one year’s results are too limited to do this now.  

Figure 4.7: Magnitude of Effect Sizes for All Projects (All Measures)

![Effect Size by Project Type](image)

Effect Size by Project Type

Effect size analysis is useful in determining the impact of AISI on the major types of projects, for example, literacy, mathematics, technology, etc. and to identify practices that contributed to achieving those results.

An exploratory analysis was conducted with the first year AISI data to assess the relative impact of AISI by common groups of projects. The projects that appear to be making the greatest impact tend to target at-risk students (see Figure 4.8) or focus on early intervention (see Figure 4.9). These results are based only on a sample of projects that had mutually exclusive categories and should be interpreted with caution. Projects that targeted different types of students or incorporated multiple project themes were excluded. Figure 4.8 represents 55% of all projects; Figure 4.9 represent 25% of all projects.

Preliminary effect size calculations for each project are presented in Appendix H. These results need to viewed with caution as (1) the measures are based on a single year of data and (2) the analysis includes both measures of student learning and other types of measures, such as satisfaction with the project.
Also, Figures 4.8 and 4.9 represent the results for the first year when most of the projects were at the initial implementation stage. The confidence of effect size data will be enhanced with two years’ of results. Therefore, detailed analysis on project types will be included in the second and third year Provincial Annual AISI Reports.

**Figure 4.8: Preliminary Effect Sizes for Targeted Student Population (All Measures*)**

![Bar chart showing effect sizes for different student populations](chart1)

* For mutually exclusive targeted students AISI Year 1. Results include quantitative and qualitative measures reported by authorities, and represent 55% of all projects.

**Figure 4.9: Preliminary Effect Sizes for Major AISI Project Themes (All Measures*)**

![Bar chart showing effect sizes for different project themes](chart2)

* For mutually exclusive project themes. Results include quantitative and qualitative measures reported by authorities, and represent 25% of all projects.
School-Based Effects and Results

Provincial Achievement Tests

Another way to explore the impact of the first year of AISI implementation is to analyze changes in student achievement as measured by provincial achievement tests. Since all students in grades 3, 6, and 9 must write the provincial achievement tests, these tests can serve as a common measure across all projects. Given the widespread focus on literacy and numeracy, the English language arts and mathematics tests may be used to analyze the impact of participation in such AISI projects.

The results show an overall improvement in results over the baseline for all schools. Schools with AISI projects show a slightly greater improvement compared to all schools.

Figures 4.10 and 4.11 show the change in percentage of students meeting acceptable standard in language arts and mathematics in the first year of AISI compared to the baseline (previous three-year average) for AISI schools and for all schools in the province. Schools that participated in a literacy/language arts project or a numeracy/mathematics project were identified as “AISI schools.”

Schools included in the “AISI Schools” group for each grade level met the following criteria:

i. a public, separate, charter or Francophone school involved in an AISI project that started in 2000/01; and

ii. the AISI project focuses on the subject area in question (i.e., language arts/literacy or mathematics/numeracy); and

iii. the project includes students in the appropriate grade level (i.e., grades 3, 6 or 9); and

iv. the project expects some quantitative results in the first year; (i.e., they have a baseline and a 2000/01 target); and

v. more than 5 students from the school wrote the June 2001 provincial achievement test.

A second group called “Province” included all public, separate, charter or Francophone schools where more than 5 students wrote the provincial achievement tests in June 2001. The AISI schools comprise part of this provincial group. Table 4.3 shows the number of students in schools with AISI projects who participated on the PATS.

Table 4.3: Number of Students in Schools with AISI Literacy or Numeracy Projects Who Wrote the 2001 Provincial Achievement Test (see Figures 4.10 and 4.11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>AISI Schools</th>
<th>Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts-Grade 3</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>25,920</td>
<td>40,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts-Grade 6</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>22,569</td>
<td>41,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts-Grade 9</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>18,192</td>
<td>38,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics-Grade 3</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>10,307</td>
<td>40,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics-Grade 6</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>10,572</td>
<td>41,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics-Grade 9</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>13,934</td>
<td>38,643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.10: English Language Arts PAT Results for Schools with AISI Literacy Projects (Grades 3, 6, and 9)—Year 1

Grade 3 English Language Arts PAT Results
(Percent Meeting Acceptable Standard)

Grade 6 English Language Arts PAT Results
(Percent Meeting Acceptable Standard)

Grade 9 English Language Arts PAT Results
(Percent Meeting Acceptable Standard)
Figure 4.11: Mathematics PAT Results for Schools with AISI Mathematics Projects (Grades 3, 6, and 9)—Year 1

**Grade 3 Mathematics PAT Results**
(Percent Meeting Acceptable Standard)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>AISI Schools (N=289)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1(2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grade 6 Mathematics PAT Results**
(Percent Meeting Acceptable Standard)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>AISI Schools (286)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1(2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grade 9 Mathematics PAT Results**
(Percent Meeting Acceptable Standard)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>AISI Schools (N=193)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1(2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Two thirds of schools were involved in an AISI literacy project that included grade 3 students. In grade 6, 57% of schools were involved. By grade 9, 41% of schools were involved in a literacy project. One could predict that this extensive involvement of schools in literacy projects would show that results for AISI and all schools would be similar since the AISI group represents such a large proportion of all schools. Indeed the relative impact of the current year of schooling on students over the average performance of earlier cohorts (prior to AISI) in the two groups was consistent.

MATHEMATICS

Whereas school participation in an AISI literacy project reflected decreasing participation from grade 3 through grade 9, school participation in an AISI mathematics project increased from 30% in both grades 3 and 6 to 36% in grade 9. This is not unexpected since the grade 9 math achievement results are considerably lower than in grades 3 and 6 and more grade 9 math classes were targeted for improvement through AISI. As in language arts, the pattern of effects is consistent for both the AISI and all schools. Slightly higher improvements were found on all variables.

INTERPRETATION

The results of this analysis of the Provincial Achievement Tests corroborate the findings from the school authority project results and the AISI team observations. They also suggest a need to explore the impact of specific instructional strategies in improving student achievement and in comparing AISI and non-AISI schools. Neither of these refinements was possible during this first investigation of AISI results. The extant analysis treated AISI as a single entity, which it is not. Rather than a “one size fits all” intervention, AISI is a collection of diverse approaches to school improvement.

Many instructional strategies are being used in AISI literacy and numeracy projects. During the second year of AISI implementation, a more refined analysis to explore the effects of specific interventions, if possible, is needed.

Another limitation was the inability to identify schools that were not part of an AISI literacy or numeracy project. Recall that 86% of public schools were involved in some type of AISI project (Table 1.4, p. 7) during 2000/2001. The effect-size analysis suggests that participation in any type of AISI project may affect student achievement as measured by the provincial English language arts and mathematics achievement tests. The use of school results, rather than student results, may also have contributed to the findings.

The above limitations notwithstanding, the first-year analysis of school effects shows promise for subsequent years of AISI to provide some evidence of the impact of research-based instructional interventions on student achievement. Triangulation (of methods and sources of data) increases confidence in the findings. The more consistent the results from multiple approaches, the more credible they are. Together with the project results (collected and analyzed
by the school authorities) and the AISI implementation teams’ observations and reflections, this school effects analysis can contribute to understanding the impact of AISI on student learning.

**Description of Quality Measures (Narrative Approach)**

Since narrative descriptions do not have specific targets, local AISI teams were asked to rate the project on how well these measures were achieved. Table 4.5 presents the results by project. About 86% of public projects and 97% of private projects with descriptions of quality had ratings of “very well” or “well” on the majority of their measures.

**Table 4.4: Self-Ratings of Descriptions of Quality Measures by Project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Rating on how well Description of Quality Measure was achieved</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Projects</td>
<td>% of Projects*</td>
<td>Number of Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well or Very Well on all measures</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well or Very Well on majority</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginally or Not at all on majority</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginally or Not at all on all</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages are based on projects that reported descriptions of quality: 307 public and 177 private. See Table 4.2.

**AISI Project Team Observations**

AISI project teams were asked to provide general comments, observations or suggestions about their first year of implementation (Section G of the APARs). These open-ended comments provide insights about the issues faced and the benefits achieved during year one of AISI.

Of the 469 project reports submitted by public school authorities, 371 (79%) chose to provide general comments about the progress of their AISI project. These comments provide a snapshot of the views and ideas of local AISI teams. It is important to note that the project report author(s) volunteered this information. These views and ideas may apply to other projects and AISI staff who chose not to report them.

Four broad themes emerged from the analysis of APAR summary comments:

- **AISI Implementation** – during the first year
- **Student Learning** – and other benefits achieved by students
- **Teacher Development** – learning and other benefits achieved by teachers.
- **Stakeholder Support** – support of the school community

Table 4.6 summarizes these general comments according to the four themes. The most common observation related to the successful implementation of the project (28%). As well, 22% of the comments addressed enhanced student learning and 12% identified increased teacher learning or
growth. These observations will help others understand and interpret the AISI results reported earlier and identify areas that the project co-ordinators felt were most worthy of explanation. Further elaboration on these themes is presented in Appendix F.

Table 4.5: AISI Team Observations on Their Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Observations</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Projects*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AISI Implementation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful implementation of project</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation is proceeding/progressing</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in project scope/implementation</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 implementation challenges identified</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for year 2 implementation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced student learning</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators of success for student learning</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results to date are below expectation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased teacher learning or growth</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in professional development activities</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General comment on PD activities</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive change in collegial environment</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators of success for teacher growth</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive response by stakeholders</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive quotations from parents, teachers or students</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School contributed additional funds to support AISI project</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Comments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AISI is making a valuable contribution to school or students</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other benefits obtained through AISI</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations to others for implementing similar project</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ordinator was valuable/essential to success of project</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too early to make conclusions on project</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Comment</strong> (Section G of APAR not completed)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The analysis of comments in Section G of the APAR is based on the 469 public projects.

**School Community Involvement**

Each AISI project proposal included community involvement. The project plan provided a brief description of how the community was involved (Section B, Question 2). A randomly selected sample of 80 projects (17% of the public proposals) was analyzed to identify ways in which school community members were involved in developing AISI projects. The main community groups who were involved were teachers, school administrators, school councils, parents, students, and central office administrators.
Table 4.7 highlights the types of activities involving school community members with AISI projects. The most common activities involved roundtable-type meetings (20%) and satisfaction surveys (18%) to identify school needs. Some school districts (18%) created an AISI committee comprised of central office and school staff and volunteers. Some committees developed AISI project proposals based on district needs while others were mandated to review project ideas submitted by schools.

Table 4.6: Ways in Which the School Community Participated in Developing AISI Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Sample of 80 Public School Authority Projects</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roundtables/focus groups/brainstorming sessions/think tanks/interviews</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction surveys</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District-wide AISI committee developed AISI proposal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on previous consultations on district/school goals/plans/priorities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other meetings (e.g., staff meetings, school council meetings)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools set priorities among district’s list of ideas (voting)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD planning/workshops with staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School collaboration with district AISI co-ordinator</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations with stakeholders</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No clear process described</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review and Decision Processes

Table 4.8 outlines some of the school authorities’ review and decision processes for AISI projects. The most common activity involved the review of project proposals by the local school council (33%). In other cases, the school authority created a process to review school proposals (28%). These may have been reviewed by a district-wide committee or by central office staff. In some cases, the Board of Trustees (19%) reviewed and approved project proposals prior to submission to Alberta Learning.

Table 4.7: AISI Proposal Review and Decision Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Random Sample of 80 Public School Authority Projects</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Endorsement/review of ideas by local school council</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsement/review of school proposals by school authority staff/committee/administration</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval by school trustees</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review by district school council group</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No review process described</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first year of AISI implementation was filled with excitement, enthusiasm and progress. This final chapter provides a summary and documents the lessons, implications and next steps for subsequent years of the initiative.

**Project Effects and Results**

On average, public projects used six measures to determine the impact of their project during the first year of implementation. Private projects used an average of two measures. Eighty percent of public and 83% of private projects met or exceeded their targets on half or more of their projects’ measures. A higher percentage (94%) showed improvement on the half or more of measures over their baseline. More than half (56%) of all projects showed noticeable improvement over the baseline: 22% with small effects, 19% with moderate effects, and 15% with large effects.

To determine the extent to which AISI projects improved over the baseline, all measures were converted to a common scale, or effect size. This method permits comparison of improvement regardless of the type of measure (test, survey, etc.) that the school authorities used. An effect size expresses the magnitude and direction of change of measures. Effect size analysis can help to determine the impact of AISI on the major types of projects, for example, literacy, mathematics, technology, etc. and to identify practices that contributed to achieving those results.

An exploratory analysis was conducted with the first year AISI data to assess the relative impact of AISI by common group of projects. The projects that appear to be making the greatest impact tend to target at-risk students or focus on early intervention. These results are based only on a sample of projects that had mutually exclusive categories and should be interpreted with caution. Projects that targeted different types of students or incorporated multiple project themes were excluded. The confidence of effect size data will be enhanced with two years’ of results. Therefore, detailed analysis on project types will be included in the second and third year Provincial Annual AISI Reports.

**School-Based Effects and Results**

Another way to explore the impact of the first year of AISI implementation is to analyze changes in student achievement as measured by provincial achievement tests. Since all students in grades 3, 6, and 9 must write the provincial achievement tests, these tests can serve as a common measure over all projects. Given the widespread focus on literacy and numeracy, the English language arts and mathematics tests may be used to analyze the impact of participation in such AISI projects. Figures 6 and 7 show the change in percentage of students meeting acceptable standard in language arts and mathematics in the first year of AISI compared to the baseline.
(previous three-year average) for AISI schools and for all schools in the province. Schools that participated in a literacy/language arts project or a numeracy/mathematics project were identified as “AISI schools”.

The results show an overall improvement in provincial achievement tests over the baseline for all schools. Schools with AISI projects showed a greater improvement compared to all schools, despite the fact that the provincial results include the gains achieved by the “AISI schools”.

**Project Team Observations**

AISI project teams were asked to provide general comments, observations or suggestions arising from their first year of implementation. Four in five (79%) of the 469 public project reports contained such comments. The comments fell into four overall areas: first-year implementation, student learning, teacher development, and stakeholder support.

A random sample of 80 public projects was reviewed to examine perceptions about school community involvement in planning AISI proposals, and the review and decision processes. The most common ways in which project teams involved their school community was through group sessions (roundtables, focus groups, brainstorming sessions, think tanks, or interviews [20%]), satisfaction surveys (18%), or a district-wide committee (18%). The most common review and decision processes mentioned were endorsement/review of ideas by the local school council (33%), endorsement/review of school proposals by school authority staff/committee/administration (28%), and approval by school trustees (19%).

**Lessons Learned**

The following lessons have been drawn from the first year of AISI implementation.

1. **Impact on Student Achievement** – The first year results show that the majority of AISI projects are making progress towards improving student learning. Eighty three percent of all AISI projects met or exceeded their targets on their performance measures. A higher percentage (94%) showed improvement on half or more of measures over their baseline.

   Schools with AISI literacy and numeracy projects showed a higher improvement on the Language Arts and Mathematics achievement test results compared to all schools in the province. The preliminary analysis of the first year’s results indicates that projects targeting at-risk students or focusing on early intervention are having the greatest effect on student learning. Detailed analysis on the various project categories will be reported in the second and third year reports when the data will be more stable and reliable.

2. **Measurement** – Projects that focused on cognitive outcomes were able to use a variety of independent measures such as the provincial achievement tests and diploma examinations, and more than 40 other assessment instruments (e.g., Canadian Tests of Basic Skills, Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Schonell Tests, Brigance Tests, etc.). Projects including affective and behavioural goals required development or adaptation of local measures that require extra work in analyzing, interpreting and reporting results. Most local data come from
The centralized co-ordination and gathering of data and reporting have been onerous. We will propose that after the second year of this project that schools choose (1) to end the project, (2) take on the same project themselves including all the management, implementation and reporting functions, or (3) apply for a new project.

The success of the program last year prompted the school to assign the teaching assistant full time to this AISI project this year. This TA saves and organizes student data, tracks progress, and helps teachers assess students.

Project teams were advised to keep the number of measures for each project manageable. The larger the number of measures, the greater the analytic and reporting burden. Many project teams have reduced or will be reducing the number of measures for year two of their projects.

We now feel that we have chosen too many measures for our project. In looking for ways in which to measure information literacy, we decided to choose the achievement tests and diploma exams, as these were tests that students already wrote, and thus was a way to gather statistical evidence. Also, we chose these exams, as research shows that students who have the benefits of a school library program tend to score higher on standardized tests. However, in looking at this year's results, we feel that we need to change our targets, as our scope is far too wide. Also, we are not certain that all of these exams measure reading ability or expository writing skills.

3. **Evidence informing practice** – Preliminary analysis indicates that AISI is making a difference with student learning. The findings from the first year of implementation raise a number of questions about the effectiveness of alternative strategies (e.g., which reading methods are most promising; for which types of students; at which levels). The effect size analysis begun this first year will be extended to answer these and other questions that will become evident during the second year of implementation. The results on promising and effective practices will be shared with educators using the Clearinghouse.

4. **Community involvement** – All projects were required to involve their community in developing AISI projects. During the first year of AISI projects, community involvement varied greatly. The annual AISI report for the second year and beyond will require additional information on the extent of parental involvement.

5. **Enhancing the capacity of teachers** – Research continues to point out that teachers are one of the most important variables in student achievement. There needs to be an ongoing commitment to help teachers to develop the necessary skills to conduct project activities. The partners continue to support provincial workshops to assist project teams. Each Alberta Faculty of Education is continuing to receive funds in order to provide assistance to AISI project teams. Staff in the School Improvement Branch will continue to conduct workshops, provide advice, and undertake site visitations.
This past year has also represented a fundamental shift in the type of professional supports being accessed and requested by school staff. Time and energy once devoted to awareness activities are now being directed towards professional supports that directly increase effective practices within the classroom. As in all areas of professional support, a dramatic increase in the number of school staff demonstrating an interest in and involvement in these areas has been recorded over the past year.

Professional development activities have expanded teachers’ repertoires of instructional strategies that can be used in mathematics. Monthly in servicing focused on practical ideas for teachers to implement, often with follow up ‘homework’ to allow for sharing of experiences regarding implementation of the practices. Peer coaching allowed teachers to open their doors and invite others to see what was happening in math. A consultant who worked with each teacher in peer coaching was able to spread the word of best practices being used in classrooms across the district.

6. **Teachers as researchers** – Developing capacity to collect, analyze and interpret data requires focused in-service. Over the next year ongoing workshops will assist project co-ordinators in dealing with issues of number and appropriateness of measures, validity of inferences from diverse sources of information, and reporting.

AISI funding has allowed our district to truly examine the practices for meeting the needs of exceptional students. The process has been truly evolutionary and has grown exponentially as schools, staff, parents, and students see the benefits of working together and also identify more needs and ways to meet those needs. Our monthly professional development sessions with learning support staff grew into a 3 day summer institute in which 78 district personnel gave of their own time to work toward shared understanding, common practices, and effective strategies to meet the needs of exceptional students.

Cohort groups and sustained PD sessions were key to success to build rapport and a sense of professional commitment. Again the TIME to learn and practice and play.

7. **Leadership** – Local leadership in both central office and schools helped to ensure successful implementation of AISI projects. In addition to identifying and selecting appropriate intervention strategies and assessment tools, project leaders kept staff committed and on track, collected and analyzed data from multiple sources, interpreted the findings, and completed interim and annual reports. Project co-ordinators or lead teachers who have all these skills are not common. Large districts with in-house expertise were able to meet these challenges more readily than small authorities where such capacity is lacking.

Fundamental to ensuring the sustainability of this project beyond Year 4 has been the importance placed on and attention given to professional support during this initial year of the project. The success of this direction is attested to by the increased staff interest and involvement in opportunities for collaboration and professional development.
Observations pertinent to present and future results: Need to continue to invest in this type of sustained, long-term PD and support for teachers vs. one-shot workshops or "courses" in the area of technology integration. Funding to sustain this program is essential, as teachers will continue to need training and support due to the continually changing field of technology.

8. **Staffing commitment and continuity** – Projects with staff continuity tended to be more successful. An estimated 10% to 15% of the projects underwent a change in project leadership that resulted in issues of commitment, continuity and capacity. While the originator(s) understood the intent of a particular project, those who followed may not have. Successors wanted to shape the project in their own ways. Furthermore, staffing changes led to issues of commitment and enthusiasm for the intervention or strategy selected. Comments excerpted from the APARs support this view.

Dramatic changes in staffing affected the level of ownership and understanding of the original proposal. A reworking of the proposal is anticipated during the 2001-2002 school year. Goals, strategies, staffing and budget allocations will all be addressed.

[The] principal is absolutely a key player. The principal's attitude and vision re technology makes or breaks the concept of integration. We had several principals who changed schools during this project, and it had a major impact. This type of change is very risky for a teacher, and the principal's support in big and little ways is absolutely critical.

9. **Sharing and dissemination** – The 721 public school authority and private school authority projects are creating new knowledge that will be shared in an online clearinghouse, housing not only the individual project reports and results, but also the products, tools and promising practices that emerge. The AISI Clearinghouse will include secondary analyses, narrative commentaries, and syntheses that summarize project results. Currently under development, the Clearinghouse should be operational by late 2002 and fully implemented by 2004.

Collegial sharing and interclass visits made a huge impact on teachers' knowledge about and implementation of literacy strategies.

A recommendation for schools starting a character education program would be to start slow. Don't try to do it all in one year. Visiting a mentoring school is strongly recommended as well as sharing a common PD day with the school.

10. **Administration and time** – Many districts underestimated the amount of administrative support required for their projects. Some authorities chose to use their central office administrators for support so that they could allocate all AISI funds directly to project goals. Others provided release time out of AISI funds for on-site or central co-ordinators. The latter approach seems to be working better, leading some authorities to reassess the amount and type of administrative support required to achieve maximum benefit from their projects.
The greatest difficulty we have been having with this project is lack of time. We have assigned a full-time aide to this project this year in addition to some teacher time in order to address this difficulty.

Having a co-ordinator at Central Office has been extremely beneficial to the project. The project consultant compiled results, set up in-services, provided support and ongoing coaching for groups, met with facilitators and answered questions and concerns of the teachers. The teachers expressed the need for more resources so with the help of the facilitators we identified and co-ordinated resources that were linked to the curriculum and to middle years literacy.

11. **AISI partnership** – The ongoing partnership between Alberta Learning and its six major education partners (the Alberta Home and School Councils’ Association [AHSCA], the Alberta School Boards Association [ASBA], the Alberta Teachers’ Association [ATA], the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta [ASBOA], the College of Alberta School Superintendents [CASS], and the Alberta Faculties of Education) has contributed to the success of AISI. Each partner continues to work with its constituents in improving student learning and performance in Alberta.

**Implications for Action**

Many administrators and teachers have come to realize that although AISI is more work than anticipated, the dialogue on education and the discussion of what is truly important for teaching children made the effort worthwhile. The focus on children and learning must be maintained over the duration of the initiative.

The lessons from the first year of implementation lead to a number of issues that need continued attention during the second year of implementation. Table 3 summarizes these issues and recommends action for provincial (Alberta Learning and the AISI partners) and local (school authorities) administrators during 2001/2002.

**Table 5.1: Summary of Issues and Recommended Actions**

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<th>Issue</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Recommended Action</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved Student Learning</td>
<td>• Preliminary results support that AISI is improving student learning</td>
<td>• Work with partners to identify a standardized set of measures for different types of project types/strategies</td>
<td>Provincial and Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Common measures are needed to assess overall effects</td>
<td>• Encourage projects to adopt measures from the standardized set that are appropriate to the projects’ needs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Recommended Action</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
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| Evidence-Based Practice              | • Need to identify and communicate promising practices that occur within projects  
• Need to identify projects having the strongest effects on improved student learning | • Modify the Annual AISI Report to ensure co-ordinators provide information on lessons learned and promising practices  
• Meet with project staff to collect rich descriptions of promising practices and communicate using the AISI Clearinghouse | Provincial and Local     |
| Capacity Building                    | • Need for continued assistance through workshops and visitations that address both system and individual needs  
• Ongoing professional development in areas of need: teaching strategies, analyzing and interpreting results, reporting, etc. | Provide:  
• formal professional development  
• workshops for system needs  
• visitations for individual help  
• School Improvement Branch contact with field | Provincial               |
| Governance and Leadership            | • Centralized vs. decentralized approach  
• Superintendent support is critical to success of projects | • Analyze outcomes to determine which approach is most promising. | Provincial and Local     |
| Coordination and the importance of the Project Coordinator | • Project co-ordinator must fulfill all project requirements: planning, monitoring, analyzing results, documentation  
• Providing advice and assistance to teachers | Provide:  
• adequate time for project co-ordinator to do the job  
• training to fulfill project requirements | Local  
Provincial |
| Evaluation                           | Need for:  
• measures appropriate to goals  
• comparable baselines  
• analyzing and interpreting results  
• action arising from project findings | • Analyze trends  
• Evaluate components of AISI: School Improvement Branch, university assistance, etc.  
• Determine effective practices | Provincial |
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<tr>
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<th>Responsibility</th>
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</table>
| Reporting   | • Reduce burden by eliminating IPRs for continuing projects  
• Improve APARs by requesting more explicit interpretation of findings | • Prepare Provincial Report to document annual results  
• Change APARs to focus on interpretation of results and using the results to inform practice  
• Undertake more detailed analysis of APARs  
• Analyze themes and outcomes for generalized conclusions | Provincial          |
| Sustainability | • AISI Clearinghouse  
• Address the following areas:  
  - How to maintain momentum and enthusiasm over time?  
  - What resources (time, people, dollars) are required to have biggest impact?  
  - How to generalize positive findings to other sites/schools/ etc.? | • Continue funding to school authorities  
• Share information more broadly among teachers  
• Disseminate AISI lessons learned  
• Involve the whole school or large numbers of teachers so project becomes internalized in the school and/or district | Provincial and Local |

**Agenda for 2001/2002**

AISI partners continue to meet regularly to reflect on the experiences of the first year of implementation and to identify areas that require fine-tuning. Partners agreed to the following provincial activities during the 2001/2002 school year.

1. Continued development of a Clearinghouse to accommodate all the project plans, results, conclusions, and promising practices so that all educators can share information. Technical development and assistance to school authorities began in fall 2001.

2. Province-wide professional development will continue the collaborative approach and engage educators in ongoing dialogue on school improvement across the province. Measurement and interpretation of findings are two of many topics for shared professional development.

3. Continued funding to the four Faculties of Education to provide basic services to school authorities on their AISI projects. Many school jurisdictions availed themselves of the university services during the planning and development phases of their projects. Their work needs to be refined to meet the changing needs of the school authorities.
4. **Communication** of information by each partner to their respective constituents so that all partners are kept informed. School authorities and AISI partners must continue to share information through the many communication vehicles available such as the first AISI conference, through writing articles and reports, meetings, and other opportunities to share the good news.

5. **Celebration** of success is important. Opportunities such as the provincial conference provide a way to celebrate what has been accomplished each year. Making the conference accessible to more Alberta teachers helps to disseminate the lessons from AISI.

**Conclusion**

AISI is a collaboration between government and its partners (AHSCA, ASBA, ATA, ASBOA, CASS, Universities) and Alberta teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, and universities in achieving a common goal – improved student learning and performance – through locally developed and implemented projects that address unique needs and circumstances. The first year of implementation has seen much progress.

AISI shows that with resources, commitment, and careful strategies, teachers can find new ways to work together to help students learn. Targeted resources and attention go a long way in facilitating school improvement.
References


