



The School Improvement Scoop

Information on AISI and School Improvement

Minister Announces Cycle 5

Education Minister Dave Hancock confirmed on September 22 that the government remains committed to AISI and was pleased to announce that Cycle 5 will be in place from September 2012 to August 2015. This early announcement gives school authorities the time they need to identify research and innovation priorities and involve school communities, staff, students and parents in planning new projects for school improvement.

The Education Partners Steering Committee¹ has been working for over a year planning the next cycle. The Framework for Cycle 5 will be communicated to school authorities and stakeholders shortly and detailed information will be ready in November. All information will also be posted on the AISI website. Funding allocations for Cycle 5 will be determined in Budget 2012.

The confirmation that Cycle 5 will be in place is being greeted with enthusiasm around the province. AISI has been described by a team of international researchers as “an impressive change strategy that is perhaps without parallel in the world today.”² Through Cycle 5, AISI will continue to be at the heart of the transformation of education in Alberta.

Cycle 5 will build on the learning of the past eleven years of AISI, and will have the following three priorities:

1. *Research capacity*—There will be a required research component for all AISI projects.

¹ College of Alberta School Superintendents, Alberta School Councils Association, University Partners, Alberta School Boards Association, Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, Alberta Teachers’ Association, Alberta Education

² The Learning Mosaic: Summary Report, by Andy Hargreaves et al.

Teachers and the school community will have enhanced opportunities to make connections between research and practice.

2. *Collaborative cross-school authority projects and networks*—School authorities will be encouraged to work together to plan, propose and orchestrate shared projects. Cycle 5 will see a move toward a province-wide network of research, improvement and innovation.
3. *Community engagement*—Cycle 5 will require greater engagement of teachers, students, parents, community members, elected officials, businesses, universities and other partners during the planning and implementation of AISI research and improvement projects.

After four cycles and twelve years of visioning and planning experience, the development of Cycle 5 projects promises to be an inclusive, exciting and productive experience. The next issue of *The Scoop* will be dedicated to supporting school authorities in planning for the three priorities in Cycle 5. School authorities are invited to submit to the editor, David Harvey, at david.harvey@gov.ab.ca, their thoughts, experiences, hopes and reflections on project planning. Full-length articles of 700 to 1000

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words may be submitted, as well as shorter anecdotes, illustrations, reflections and references. Submissions may focus on the three priorities by looking back on past experiences of planning and implementation as well as by looking forward to plans and intentions for Cycle 5.

About this Issue

The theme for this fall edition of *The Scoop* emerged naturally last spring as education leaders around the province submitted articles for consideration. At the core of each of their stories and vignettes was a powerful narrative about *engagement*.

Lethbridge School Division describes how the move to a district-wide project created the context for increased teacher collaboration and engagement. Rimbey Christian School tells how the whole school community became engaged through a reading project. Paul Wozny, our resident researcher at School Research and Improvement Branch, pursues the theme of engagement in the *Research Centre*, annotating a recent New Zealand study on parental involvement.

As well, we have found that many contributors to *The Scoop* have been keen to offer vignettes and anecdotes that are shorter than articles and succinctly share a reflection, insight or observation about effective project strategies and innovations in teaching and learning. These contributions have been compiled into a new section called *Quick Reflections*. We will be happy to continue this section so long as the vignettes and anecdotes keep coming!

What is engagement? How do we know when children, staff, parents and the community are engaged? Is engagement demonstrably different to involvement? Glimpses of answers to these questions sparkle through the articles in this edition. Readers are invited to pursue the question further through stories of the work being done in their projects and to submit their writing about engagement—long or short—to the editor, David Harvey, at david.harvey@gov.ab.ca.

The team at School Research and Improvement Branch wishes all our AISI colleagues an excellent year of learning and sharing. We look forward to working with you as we bring Cycle 4 to fruition and plan for Cycle 5.

Redefining Professional Learning in Lethbridge School District

“This is what PD should look like!”

Lethbridge School District teacher, April 2011

This holy grail of comments about professional learning was written last spring in recognition of the success teachers in Lethbridge School District have experienced in redefining their professional learning to be collaborative, focused and meaningful.

The catalyst for this radical change has been two major shifts at the district level. For AISI Cycle 4, the district entered new territory by moving to a single district-wide project, having had individual school-based projects for the first three cycles, with fifteen projects in Cycle 3. Coupled with this change in project structure, the district calendar was redesigned to have common professional learning days for all schools. How can such significant change “from the top” result in the positive personal change expressed by the teacher quoted above and by so many others in Lethbridge School District? Fullan has noted that there is a very real challenge for teachers and districts in “balancing top-down and bottom-up forces” (Fullan, 2001). We believe we have found that balance in Lethbridge School District.

In Year 1, the district changes were met with some skepticism and a degree of tension between schools and the district’s Education Centre. Some teachers argued that the project felt top down. Richard Dufour has written about this response to district based approaches: “The term top-down is uttered with disdain, a pejorative phrase...and they expect me to be appalled at this affront to the autonomy of educators” (Dufour, 2007). However, as the project progressed, teachers increasingly identified the alignment of purpose in teaching and professional learning that was developing because of the district-wide approach. They were able to benefit from the time provided

for collaboration and guidance to improve their teaching practice. Coming together was allowing them to deconstruct jargon and to develop common language. By establishing collaboration as a norm, teachers could more readily focus on talking to each other about their teaching and about improving students' learning.

Results of our research study (Gunn & Hollingsworth) on the effect of the district-wide project showed "significant changes" occurring in teacher practice regarding the implementation of 21st century learning methods and approaches. As well, results from Year 1 showed that student learning was positively impacted as teachers pursued their personal learning within the district-wide project.

Concurrently with the AISI project, Lethbridge School District was part of the CASS project *Moving and Improving*. The opportunity this participation gave us to pose specific questions about the AISI project to Leithwood, Levin and Fullan brought the research literature to life and helped us guide the project.

The involvement in *Moving and Improving* validated for us the directional change we had made to a systemic project, but it also reinforced the importance of teachers being the "locus of change". While a directional change at the district level has made our move forward possible, it is teachers who are the actual agents of change. The realization is growing in Lethbridge School Division that professional learning is not something that happens to teachers, but is something that teachers own. It is increasingly seen that professional learning is not limited just to district learning days or school based learning days, but is an ongoing part of our professional life together. Trust has grown in district leaders and principals that teachers are continually learning and improving their practice. Never ones to have been afraid of working hard and of learning, teachers are increasingly recognizing the power of professional learning that is collaborative, focused, purposeful and meaningful.

The necessity described by Fullan and Levin of a district being part of teachers' professional

learning has becoming evident.³ Our model of a district guided project and common professional learning days has shown tangible results. We have discovered together that increased autonomy of professional learning can occur in a district guided project. It has provided the opportunity for teachers in Lethbridge School District to radically change their professional learning.

As we move into the third year of the project, we anticipate continued growth in teachers' ownership of their professional learning, a continued improvement in teaching practice and, consequently, a continued improvement in student learning.

by Neil Langevin, Lethbridge School District
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Works Cited

- Dufour, R. (2007, November). In Praise of Top-Down Leadership. *The School Administrator*, p. 38.
<http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=6498>
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teachers College.
- Gunn, T., & Hollingsworth, M. (2011). *The Implementation and Assessment of a Shared 21st Century Learning Vision: A District Based Approach*.

³ Fullan and Leven eloquently detail effective strategies of professional learning that include the district, the school and the teacher.

Quick Reflections

Outcome-based reporting

Medicine Hat Catholic Board of Education used a collaborative process of grade-level teacher groups who worked together to identify key learnings that needed to be reported to parents. A great deal of time was spent on writing the outcomes in a way that parents and students would understand. Teachers with widely varying levels of teaching experience all shared that, as a result of reporting student achievement through outcomes, they came to understand the curriculum at a much deeper level and were confident that outcomes were assessed evenly and fairly. A retiring teacher with over thirty years experience stated that the most important change was that she truly knew each and every one of her students and was able to provide parents with in-depth information about their learning. One parent explained the benefits by acknowledging that “This is a tool that parents can use to help their children fully understand their subjects.” Another parent stated that it “makes asking questions to children about their learning easier.”

by Jill Wilkinson, AISI Coordinator
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Instructional coaching

At Foundations for the Future Charter Academy, instructional coaching parallels an action research model. It focuses on student evidence through three distinct lenses: student engagement, student success and lesson design. The classroom teacher and coach together identify an area of inquiry and a focus for data collection. The collected student evidence (data) is analysed collaboratively and then the teacher summarizes his/her learning and identifies next steps for professional growth.

by Lorie Skaper-Burtch
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The ‘Light Bulb’ Moment

A common theme in my AISI experiences of late has been the realization that our profession is one of relationships. Recent co-operative networking sessions I attended once again reinforced this experience; but a new insight also emerged for me this time. The characteristic experiences that accompany rewarding professional development surfaced—the appreciation of time with like-minded peers, the creation of a tangible product, the deeper understanding of one’s subject area, as well as the ever appreciated full lunch hour! But the real moment of understanding came when I realized the depth and breadth of teaching talent being shared at these session tables. I scanned the room and noticed the variety of gifted, talented and dedicated individuals that were taking great joy in the engaging and creative aspect of our profession. These gifts and talents are so easily overlooked in both ourselves and in others. So, too, is the creative aspect of our profession. Faced with the many pressures of our daily work lives, we often disregard how dynamic, creative and knowledgeable we are. Once again, I appreciated these moments of deeper discovery afforded me through something as simple as professional collaboration.

by Nadine Diógenes, teacher at St. Luke Catholic School, Elk Island Catholic Schools
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Reading for Fun: Who Would Have Guessed?

Rimbey Christian School has under 80 students in grades 1 to 9. In the Cycle 4 project proposal for the school, Edith Denning, principal and AISI Coordinator, described the reading culture of the school like this:

“While there are exceptions, our students typically exhibit low interest in reading, are reluctant to read, find reading a difficult and burdensome task, and feel unsuccessful in reading comprehension activities. Parents do not generally support reading at home.”

The project was designed to find ways to engage students and families in reading and to try to develop a culture within the school community wherein students and families would read voluntarily and for entertainment.

Year one was given over to teachers acquiring a repertoire of strategies for developing students’ reading skills and introducing new approaches to teaching and fostering effective reading strategies.

In the second year, two school-wide projects were implemented—the *Rocky Mountain Book Award* and *One Book One School*—and the project exploded!

Rocky Mountain Book Award

The grades 5 to 9 classrooms received sets of the 20 books nominated for the award. Students were encouraged to choose the books they wanted to read and to exchange their favourites with friends. Teachers sometimes read to students to generate interest, to introduce new genres and to model reading aloud, and students read to themselves and to each other.

Students who read at least five of the books could vote on their favourites. Every student qualified to vote. Some of the students read all the books! In a survey, the majority of students commented that they got to read new and different books that they would not have otherwise read.

Teachers soon saw a cultural shift begin to develop—students were showing excitement and enthusiasm for reading that had not been seen before. One teacher saw a Grade 9 student reading to the class during some free time; something that would never have happened

previously. Reluctant readers and the more avid readers all seemed to participate with enthusiasm, as did parents!

The exciting thing about this program is that it generated conversation between and among students about the books as they compared their likes and dislikes. These kinds of conversations are new to the students and school, and provided very positive informal feedback about the level of student enjoyment and engagement in reading.

One Book One School

All families received a copy of the book *Shiloh* and were assigned a chapter to read together as a family each night. At school, daily trivia contests generated a lot of enthusiasm and there was often speculation about what the question might be. Students began to anticipate the questions and even started making up their own to challenge their classmates.

Students’ Comments about One Book One School

What did you like or not like?

“We got closer to family members.”

“I liked the idea that the whole school was reading.”

“I didn’t like that we had to wait to read the next chapter.”

Did you enjoy voting?

“Yes, because the book I voted for got a higher rank than I thought it would.”

“Yes, and my book got second place!”

“Yes; I was excited to see if my favorite book would have won.”

“Yes, but it was hard to vote.”

“I thought it was cool to vote for a book you liked.”

“Yes, because you could influence the standing.”

Follow-up activities included renting a theatre in town and having the whole school community, including parents, watch the movie together. A local store donated popcorn! The grade 5-6 class wrote a newspaper article about the *One Book One School* program that was published in the *Rimbey Review*.

By engaging whole families in the project, teachers were able to develop a new culture in the school community that values the role of reading as an enjoyable activity. One parent commented that this was a great project. One of her daughters wanted to pick another book to read to extend the project beyond what was being done at the school. She wanted her family to continue reading together. Another parent noted that the project was a great way to unify the school and to get everyone to realize that they can read the same book; that books can engage people of all ages and interests. She also liked the idea of formalizing the process of reading together every night. She was very impressed with how well her young children were reading.

One parent complained that the *One Book, One School* project was one more thing to do. In the beginning, she was angry about it, but in the end she said it was a great thing for her family. The family loved it.

Celebrating a New Level of Engagement

The celebrations of success that were part of this project were thrilling! Having newspaper articles published locally, going to the theatre, participating in trivia contests, discussing personal preferences, and enjoying a feeling of accomplishment in a meaningful way all contributed to a new level of energy, enthusiasm and engagement in the school community.

A more formal celebration—a Fine Arts Fair called *Kaleidoscope*—was held in the spring. This was a community event where families were entertained for an evening by student performances in the Fine Arts. The fair included literacy components, such as Readers' Theatre, Twisted Fairy Tales, and students' stories posted for participants to read. Again, engaging whole families in such an exciting event began to support our cultural shift.

This project will be sustained after this current cycle in several ways. Enthusiasm for reading has become part of the new school culture and the *Rocky Mountain Book Award* and *One Book One School* activities simply were too engaging and effective not to be continued. This is in a school where previously, reading was a “burdensome

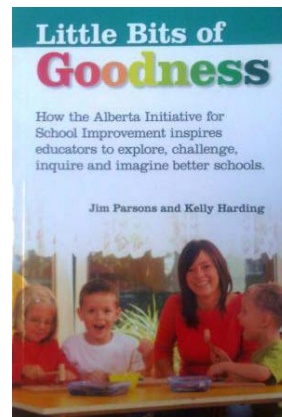
task!” The school administrator and Society have decided they will find the funds to continue both programs.

by Maureen Gough, Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta
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Little Bits of Goodness Available at LRC

Little Bits of Goodness, by Dr. Jim Parsons and Kelly Harding.

AISI findings from across the province have



become a treasure of shared research data and stories. This book is a compilation of some of these stories resulting from numerous conversations with AISI lead teachers and a lot of driving by the authors, Jim Parsons and Kelly Harding of the University of Alberta.

Stories are clustered in thematic sections:

- AISI's Impact on Individual Teachers
- AISI's Impact on Entire Schools
- AISI's Impact on Entire School Divisions
- AISI and the Larger Community
- Partners and Sources

Little Bits of Goodness may be purchased for \$9 from the [Learning Resource Centre](http://www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca) at <http://www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca>. The LRC Product # is 758922.

To order now, click [here](#).

New “Spotlight on...” Series looks at what we're learning from AISI

A new series of articles launched this fall will highlight some of the best lessons learned from AISI.

The series, entitled *Spotlight on...*, sheds light on how prevalent themes of AISI have been successfully pursued in projects across the province. The first article—*Spotlight on...Parent Engagement*—looks at the learning gained from AISI projects that had parent engagement as a focus or component.

Each article in the *Spotlight on...* series is the result of a close analysis of numerous project reports, provincial reports and research studies. Links take the reader directly to further information about each of the projects highlighted in the article as well as to other reading related to the theme.

The *Spotlight on...* series will be a useful resource for the whole school community, providing people with the benefit of both a broad and a detailed analysis of lessons learned from AISI. The series could be helpful in planning processes for Cycle 5, as well as for professional development and general communication with the school community.

Also coming this fall!!

- *Spotlight on...Professional Development*
- *Spotlight on...Student Assessment*

To be released in early 2012

- *Spotlight on...Instructional Strategies*
- *Spotlight on...Technology*
- *Spotlight on...Integration and Sustainability*

Spotlight on...Parent Engagement



What we've learned from
AISI

Communicating ⇒ *Involving* ⇒ *Engaging*

What we have learned about parent engagement

Many AISI projects have clearly demonstrated that there is a strong relationship between the engagement of parents and community and the success of students.

1. Parent engagement leads to improved student learning and attendance.
2. Engaged parents support students at home.
3. A variety of strategies increase communication with parents.
4. Parents are valuable resources for sharing expertise, knowledge, talents and gifts.
5. Parent-teacher-student conferences build partnerships.
6. Parents who participate in parent education events become more involved.
7. Parents and teachers working collaboratively can advance understandings, values, cultures and languages.
8. Volunteering contributes to the success of school activities, builds parent comfort in the school and increases understanding of student learning.

Click [here](#) for

Spotlight on... Parent Engagement!

or go to <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/leaders/lessonslearned.aspx>

AISI Coordinators' Workshop

Registration is opening soon for the AISI Coordinators' Workshop in Edmonton, October 28. This full-day event will be an excellent opportunity for coordinators to network and to share ideas. Of course, big on the agenda will be information and discussion about Cycle 5! The session will also focus on parent and community engagement and assessment: the collection of data and interpretation. Open Spaces technology will be used to bring participants together for topics of their choice.

New! AISI Website Search Tools

Beginning this fall, detailed information about all Cycle 3 and Cycle 4 projects can be found using a new tool. Project Synopses provide full details about each project description, goals, strategies, measures, student learning results, effective practices, summary and reflections – all in a user-friendly PDF format! The tool allows you to search for projects by theme, keyword or school authority. Here's the link:

<http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/leaders/projects.aspx>

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Research Centre

Parent Involvement

In this issue of *The Scoop*, we highlight a recent article about parent involvement in New Zealand.

Garry Hornby and Chrystal Witte of the University of Canterbury, England, studied the practice of parental involvement within inclusive primary schools in New Zealand. In their review of the literature, the authors refer to extensive evidence for the effectiveness of parental involvement in facilitating children's academic achievement. They also cite additional benefits of parental involvement that emerge in the literature, including:

- improvements in student attitudes, behaviour and attendance at school
- improvement in student mental health
- improved parent-teacher relationships
- enhanced teacher morale and school climate

- increased parental confidence and satisfaction with parenting along with increased interest in their own education
- positive changes across gender and various ethnic groups
- positive learning benefit to children of all ages

Parental involvement is defined as “parental participation in the education processes and experiences of their children”.

The research team randomly selected 21 primary schools in a large urban area of New Zealand. School populations varied from 53 to 551 students. Principals were interviewed on eleven aspects of parental involvement in the education of their children:

- acting as a resource
- policy formation
- collaborating with teachers
- sharing information on children
- channels of communication
- liaison with school staff
- parent education
- parent support
- encouraging parents into school
- involving diverse parents
- teacher professional learning

The researchers found a wide diversity of parent involvement in the schools as well as varied policy and style from school to school.

The research team highly recommended that teachers and school administrators receive support and professional development in parental involvement.

The New Zealand government recently addressed the issue of improving parental involvement as one of three priority areas in their publication *Schooling Strategy*.

Hornby, G. & Whitte, C. (2010) Parent Involvement in Inclusive Primary Schools in New Zealand: Implications for Improving Practice and for Teacher Education. *International*

Journal of Whole Schooling, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 27-38

This article may be accessed online at the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) at: http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ872439&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ872439

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Paul Wozny is continually reviewing research literature and provides us with these timely and salient annotations in each issue of *The Scoop*.

Alberta Education Program Delivery News

The listings below appear in full in other Alberta Education messages and publications and are presented here for the convenience of readers, given that they have relevance for some AISI projects.

Action on Inclusion – Change Agents and Capacity Builders

www.education.alberta.ca/inclusion

Budget 2011 provided funding to support school authorities to make decisions that encourage attitudinal shifts and empower individuals with the confidence to work in a more inclusive manner.

Success in School for Children and Youth in Care: Provincial Protocol Framework

www.education.alberta.ca/ppf

This is year two of the Provincial Protocol Framework phased implementation to enhance school success for children and youth in care.

Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP)

www.albertamentors.ca

The revised website has new resources to help with school mentoring programs.

Wrap-Around Opportunities Related to Health Pathways

www.arpdc.ab.ca/newsite/webinar.html

A webinar is available from the Alberta Regional Consortia.

New Resource for School Administrators and Police Working in Alberta's Schools

www.aasro.com

Partners: A Guide to Effective Collaboration between School Administrators & Police Working in Alberta's Schools will be available this fall.

New Website for School Staff supporting students with FASD and other disabilities

www.pbosc.info

The *Positive Behaviour Supports* website is designed to enhance the capacity of school staff to promote positive behaviours and manage challenging behaviours to support students' learning and school success.

Early Child Development Mapping Initiative

www.ecdmapping.alberta.ca

The first results about the development of children will be released to communities this fall. Communities will use these results to help them plan ways to maximize child development.

The School Improvement Scoop is the official newsletter of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement and is produced by the School Research and Improvement Branch of Alberta Education.

Share your AISI stories! *The Scoop* is an excellent forum for sharing your AISI project experiences, discoveries and achievements.

Please contact David Harvey at any time with your ideas for future articles.

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The School Improvement Scoop

ISSN 1916-2898

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