

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

Cycle 3: Improving Student Learning



Highlights from the Provincial Report, Cycle 3, 2006–2009

The AISI Program

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) is a province-wide school improvement program, comprised of quasi-experimental or action research projects, all focused on improving student learning. The goal of the program is to improve student learning and performance by fostering initiatives that reflect the unique needs and circumstances of local communities. Each school authority decides with the community which areas of student learning and performance need attention, how to go about improving these areas and how to provide evidence that improvement has taken place.

AISI was developed through a collaborative partnership in 1999 and provides funding for every school authority in the province to establish its own improvement projects.

Provincial funding for AISI Cycle 3, from 2006 to 2009, was \$222 million. School authorities contributed an additional \$8 million.

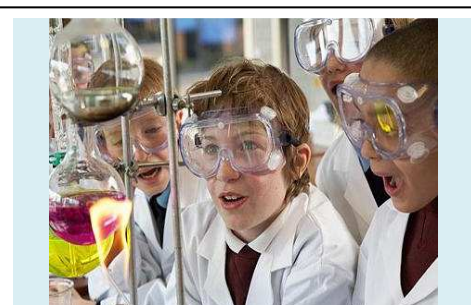
The AISI approach to improving student learning is through partnerships, in a culture of inquiry, collaboration and continuous improvement. AISI encourages creativity and innovation in enhancing strategies to improve student learning based on local needs.

Over nine years of implementation, AISI has had a profound impact on the culture of schools in Alberta. A culture of collaboration invites participation and develops ownership and commitment. AISI exemplifies this spirit of collaboration through its partnership with teachers, administrators, parents, trustees, academics and government.

AISI Partners

The seven AISI partners have been a major contributing factor in the successful design and development of an exemplary school improvement model. AISI represents the collective wisdom of the partners and other stakeholders, whose strong commitment, trust, collaboration and teamwork contribute to meaningful improvement in student learning and performance.

- Alberta Education
- Alberta School Councils' Association
- Alberta School Boards Association
- Alberta Teachers' Association
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta
- College of Alberta School Superintendents
- University of Alberta Faculty of Education
- University of Calgary Faculty of Education
- University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education



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AISI Project Characteristics

The following eleven characteristics guided the development and implementation of AISI Cycle 3 projects:

1. **Student Focused** – AISI projects strengthen the focus on student learning, help students be active and engaged learners, and accommodate their diverse learning needs.
2. **Partnership** – Teachers, superintendents, trustees, parents, business officials, universities and government together develop new relationships, strategies and practices to improve teaching and learning.
3. **Collaboration** – Teachers, staff, students, parents and partners actively engage in the development and implementation of projects.
4. **Catalyst** – AISI is a catalyst for change in teaching and learning through targeted funding, partnership, positive climate and supportive infrastructure.
5. **Flexibility** – Jurisdictions choose strategies that enhance learning in the local context.
6. **Culture of Continuous Improvement** – This culture is evident when a jurisdiction's goals align with practices and there is administrative support and professional development.
7. **Evidence-based Practice** – Practices that benefit student learning spread as solid evidence of their effectiveness grows.
8. **Research-based Interventions** – AISI is a vehicle for solid research to test the efficacy of new instructional strategies in Alberta.
9. **Inquiry and Reflection** – Inquiry and reflection focused on student learning lead to improved understanding and thoughtful changes to instructional practice.
10. **Building Capacity and Sustainability** – Professional development ensures that students today and in the future benefit from the knowledge, practices, products and technologies developed through AISI.
11. **Knowledge** – AISI adds to the knowledge about improved teaching and learning and shares it through conferences, reports, the website and provincial networking.

The AISI Projects

Cycle 3 had 395 projects, operated by public and private school authorities:

Public School Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public, separate, charter, francophone • 177 projects • 99% of authorities had projects • accounted for 95% of the students
Private School Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • private schools, ECS operators • 218 projects • all provincially funded private authorities had projects • accounted for 5% of the students

The most common areas of focus of AISI projects operated by public school authorities were:

Targeted Student Groups

All students	79%
Students at risk	18%
Specific groups of students (e.g., grades)	14%

Themes

Assessment	28%
Professional development	28%
Professional learning communities	21%

Subjects

Language Arts/literacy	33%
Mathematics/numeracy	26%
Language Arts/Math/Science/Social Studies	28%

Grades

Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3	65%
Grades 4 to 6	72%
Grades 7 to 9	68%
Grades 10 to 12	53%

Instructional Strategies

Assessment for learning	51%
Differentiated instruction	49%
Accommodating learning styles	31%
Experiential learning	22%

Types of Measures

Surveys (provincial and local)	71%
Provincial tests (achievement and diploma)	68%
Descriptions of quality	68%
Teacher awarded final marks	30%
Observation/checklists	28%
High school completion	22%

The Impact of AISI

Cycle 3 had a positive impact on students, teachers and parents across Alberta. This impact was the result of planned improvements built into the strategies, goals, and measures of successful AISI projects.

Data and Analysis

The impact of AISI in Cycle 3 was determined from a multitude of data sources and reported in the Cycle 3 Provincial Report.

Data were collected using provincial tests, local assessments, and surveys of students, parents and teachers. This information was included, along with descriptive summaries written by project coordinators, in the AISI Project Final Reports submitted by school authorities. The School Improvement Branch also surveyed project coordinators and participants of AISI workshops and conferences. The deliberations of the AISI Colloquium 2008, research studies conducted by international researchers and research conducted by the Alberta university partners also provided significant input.



Students

Students' learning and engagement improved, as well as their confidence, behaviour, and attitudes. Students expressed satisfaction with their own learning and with their AISI project.

What we heard about students

"I learned I have a voice and a right to give an opinion." Student in Project 40053

"Student behavior definitely improved again in year three. Office referrals declined and students showed an increased willingness to take responsibility for their actions and behaviors." Project 30216

"Establishing learning targets and creating assessment criteria ... enables students to better understand what they need to do to improve and it also reduces the anxieties associated with assessment by some students." Project 30520

"Students have developed the critical thinking skill criteria for judgment. This skill has allowed them to become more independent in their thinking and problem solving as they now have a basis for examining problems and questions and a means for reaching a judgment or conclusion. Equipped with the critical thinking skills, students question more frequently, arrive at conclusions based on facts or criteria." Project 30091

What the numbers say about students

Forty per cent of the projects had a positive impact on student achievement, measured by local assessments, including standardized tests.

Thirty one per cent of the projects had a positive impact on student satisfaction and behaviour, as measured by surveys.

Of the projects that used Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) as a measure of success, thirty per cent demonstrated a positive impact on the PAT results.

Teachers

Teachers expressed positive opinions regarding their own learning and satisfaction with their AISI projects. They increased their capacity to develop and extend the following effective practices:

Instructional strategies that improve student learning

Project management, coordination and leadership as principals, administrators, coordinators and members of project leadership teams

Professional development and collaboration as consultants, learning leaders, coaches and mentors; as members of professional learning communities and networks; and as participants and presenters at workshops and conferences

Parental involvement and communication in producing newsletter articles, websites, school council reports and report cards; conducting information sessions and celebration evenings; and engaging in personal contact through committees, interviews, and informal conversations

What we heard about teachers

“We are witnessing a transformation in the way that teachers regard their professionalism. As we learn from our past efforts, we are able to provide the necessary support to the learning community to effect real change.” Project Coordinator

“AISI has been the best thing that has happened in education with its goal for improving student learning. The world recognizes this initiative.” Project Coordinator

“Teachers have demonstrated an increased satisfaction with internal Professional Development through the Professional Learning Community model.” Project 30428

“There was a dramatic shift from ‘teaching’ to ‘learning’ with teachers being much more in tune with what the curricular outcomes were, where their students were at, and how to move them forward.” Project 30090

What the numbers say about teachers

Forty seven per cent of the projects had a positive impact on teacher growth and satisfaction with their projects, as measured by teacher surveys.

There was a gain of fifteen per cent in teacher growth and eleven per cent in teacher satisfaction over the three years of the cycle.

Parents

Parents expressed satisfaction with the impact of their AISI projects on their children’s learning experiences in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, assessment for learning, project based learning, differentiated instruction, and experiential learning.

What we heard about parents

Project teams reported that parents were involved in AISI projects in the following ways: school councils, parent information sessions, parent-student-teacher conferences, surveys, volunteering and attending the AISI conferences as part of project teams.

“Parents were involved through a ‘whole’ school approach, where they worked together with the school to promote healthy environments and healthy choices for their children. Through informative newsletters, school websites, parent information evenings, Family Wellness Fairs, Demonstration of Learning evenings, we worked to educate the parents and increase their knowledge in promoting wellness to their children.” Project 30055

“Parents were invited to be involved with the project, including organizing, planning, leading and participating with the strategies. 100% of school council members were involved in all five major AISI activities this year.” Project 30040

What the numbers say about parents

Thirty six per cent of the projects had a positive impact on parent satisfaction with their AISI projects, as measured by parent surveys.

There was a 6.5 per cent gain in parent satisfaction over the three years of the cycle.

Participants in Cycle 3 reported an increase in effective instructional strategies

Cycle 3 provided teachers, schools and districts with the support and encouragement to develop and enhance instructional practices that improve students’ learning. Some of these practices, or parts of them, were developed in earlier cycles of AISI and were more widely and fully implemented in Cycle 3.

Assessment – Information about students’ learning was used in “real time”: students used it to improve their learning, and teachers used it to improve their instruction. Teachers and students worked together to understand the outcomes in the Program of Studies, to develop criteria for quality work, and to give and use helpful feedback.

“Students are becoming partners in the assessment process.” Project 30431

“When I know what teachers are looking for it’s easier to do my work.” Student in Project 40053

Differentiated instruction – Teachers recognized that, since students have differing learning styles, interests, and readiness to learn, they needed to learn in different ways and to have a degree of choice in how they learn. Opportunities increased for students to make choices and to have flexible and differentiated learning experiences.

“Teachers ...have sound knowledge of student needs and are able, through differentiated instruction and a wide repertoire of teaching and assessment strategies, to meet those needs.” Project 30530

Technology tools – Many schools used interactive whiteboards, laptops, videoconferencing and cutting edge software to engage students and enhance their learning.

“Students have connected to sites from around the world to explore locations, people and resources that would be unavailable or prohibitively expensive to do in any other way. Digital technologies are used in planning, teaching, learning and assessing.” Project 30152



Balanced literacy – Teachers brought together the best of diverse approaches to literacy instruction, including phonics and reading strategies, into a balanced approach that accommodates different learning needs and rates of learning.

“Students...are benefitting from changed or enhanced literacy instruction as teachers are beginning to implement the various components of effective balanced instruction. Instruction is beginning to reflect an approach that moves students along the continuum of guided to independent learning.” Project 30250

Inquiry – Students’ projects went to a whole new level of learning as they formulated research questions, investigated widely, and communicated their learning in diverse ways.

“Students reported that using questions increased their learning because they wanted to learn more, they took time to think about what they wanted to learn. Questions can get deeper answers and some questions lead to new questions.” Project 30275

Manipulatives – Hands-on learning of Mathematics, using everyday and purpose-made materials, helped students at all grades to understand abstract concepts, from counting to algebra.

“The use of manipulatives when introducing abstract and symbolic elements resulted in the students understanding the concepts in a more real world sense.” Project 30268

Unanticipated successes

In addition to the improvements that were planned and achieved by AISI projects, project teams also reported experiencing other unanticipated successes:

- *increases in student empowerment*, capacity to learn, reflection and ownership of their learning
- *change in school and district culture*, including policy changes, advocacy for new approaches, and an increased confidence and sense of empowerment among staff
- *development of common language* and shifts in professional discussions

Celebrations of Success

Successes were celebrated and shared with the community in numerous ways, including:

- newsletters and media
- workshops, presentations, and conferences
- community events
- technology, including interschool videoconferencing, YouTube, and televised highlights

Sustainability

Project teams identified that the sustainability and integration of new learning was being assured through cultural change and increased capacity in:

- *teaching strategies* that become part of teachers' repertoire
- *student ownership and empowerment*, including taking responsibility for their own learning through goal setting and self-assessment
- *professional development* that is ongoing and collaborative
- *leadership* in the schools and districts, including distributed leadership

As well, sustainability was supported by the continuing use of purchased resources and technology tools.

Project teams identified the following factors as key to their project's success:

- *time and resources* to support all aspects of the projects
- *assessment* that is regular and ongoing and used by teachers and students
- *leadership* at all levels

Challenges

Some projects had aspects that did not work well and were reported as challenges by project teams. The following challenges were widely experienced. These challenges were evident in prior cycles and appear to be inherent in large-scale improvement initiatives.

Time – Project teams reported that there was often not enough time for teachers, lead teachers, facilitators and coordinators to plan, schedule, collaborate and do all the things that need to be done.

Professional development – Challenges included adjusting to change for some teachers, finding effective professional development models and differentiating professional development to accommodate a range of teacher knowledge, skill and experience.

Data and measures – Teams experienced some frustrations in acquiring or developing measures that were authentic and sensitive to each student's growth. Gathering data from the schools, as well as interpreting and reporting, it were also a challenge.

High school change – Project teams reported that changes in strategies or philosophies of teaching were easier to accomplish in elementary schools than in secondary schools. This was particularly noted in the areas of assessment and differentiated instruction.

Staff turnover – Changes in school or district staff, including leaders, and especially in rural areas, sometimes created problems with the continuity of projects.

Administrator as educational leader – Principal support and leadership influenced the success of AISI projects. The principal needed to be involved and to understand the project in order to encourage teachers, students and parents in the implementation of project strategies.

Parental involvement and communication – Involving parents beyond providing them with information about projects continued to be a challenge for many teams.

Knowledge mobilization – Project teams identified obstacles to transferring teachers' knowledge into classroom practice. These obstacles included the complexity of students' needs, insufficient time and ineffective professional development models.

Technology – While technology inspired engagement, there were frustrations with lack of access and with technology not working effectively.

“Over the past three cycles, some key ideas and strategies have had the greatest impact on meeting the goal of enhanced student learning. They include building and distributing leadership, fostering a culture of collaboration, shifting the focus from teaching to a focus on learning, and providing the opportunity for choice.” Project Coordinator

International Research on AISI

In the third year of Cycle 3, seven international researchers conducted a provincial review of AISI and produced a final report entitled *The Learning Mosaic: A Multiple Perspectives Review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)*. The review found:

- AISI constitutes a world-class and world-leading example of a system-wide educational strategy that inspires teachers and administrators and enhances their professional growth and enthusiasm.
- AISI sees new, research-informed practices within local communities then spreads them across districts and schools; and it diffuses existing knowledge as well as creating new knowledge.
- AISI embodies a change process that addresses the complexity and adaptability necessary in a fast-moving, knowledge-driven world...It achieves all this new and ground-breaking work with no discernible negative impact on the exemplary record of student performance as measured by provincial achievement tests, for which Alberta has become world-renowned.
- AISI has unfolded in a continuous culture of inquiry, openness, reflection and adaptation that is rare among government-sponsored innovations.

AISI has transformed and continues to transform

<i>from</i>	<i>to</i>
a project-driven and initiative-driven approach	a more embedded and continuous change process and strategy
a predictable, time-bound planning process of uniform funding cycles	a more flexible process of planning and development
a collection of disconnected or loosely connected projects	a province-wide network of improvement and innovation
a change process that has swung between bottom-up and top-down orientations in the first two cycles	a change process that balances and integrates these dynamics and also adds a strong, lateral peer-driven change dynamic in the third and fourth cycles
a strategy to spread and embed existing knowledge in order to enhance improvement and implementation	a strategy that also creates new knowledge in support of increased innovation

Recommendations from the Researchers

AISI's change architecture, theory of action, and sensitivity to issues impacting Alberta's diverse schools are unusually sophisticated and responsive. Yet even the best change initiatives can be strengthened. The research team made the following recommendations:

Develop improved ways of collecting data and compiling provincial achievement data that will make it possible to trace the impact of complex but distinct initiatives.

Incentives and supports such as AISI provides appear to be prerequisites for initiating change strategies, trying alternative approaches, understanding the complexities involved in changing systems, and collecting evidence to demonstrate effectiveness.

Create leadership and support systems for teachers and administrators involved in AISI projects to access existing data bases, request and receive data analysis services and design their own instruments and indicators of accountability that are appropriate to their project goals.

Extend the involvement of parents, community members, businesses, universities and other partners in AISI project content and processes.

Increase the impact on high schools with particular reference to increasing Alberta's relatively low rates of high school completion.

Invest in province-wide networks that cut across districts, that reach beyond annual conferences and that incorporate proven design principles of effective network architectures that have clear, positive impacts on system-wide outcomes for students.

Develop leadership skill and capacity among all principals and district-level leaders so that the effectiveness of AISI projects does not suffer when existing leadership capacity in particular schools and districts is not strong.

Embed AISI into Alberta Education as an integrated policy strategy. Do this without diminishing the attention, resources, advocacy and professional development regarding the distinctive approaches to professionally driven, locally adaptable and laterally networked processes of improvement and innovation that AISI has championed.



University Partners Research

AISI university partners at the Faculties of Education, University of Alberta, University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge analyzed successful AISI projects and identified promising practices in the following areas:

Differentiated Instruction – Differentiated instruction enhances teachers' ability to reach all learners and is of particular benefit to students with higher needs. Differentiation enhances students' self-confidence and engagement and helps them develop metacognitively and become self-directed. Differentiation is enhanced by technology and shaped by ongoing assessment for learning.

Character Development, School Climate, and Student Leadership – Participants consider meaningful questions about their school and community, clearly identify what they are hoping to achieve, develop common language and

establish common understandings of what constitutes "character". Meaningful parental and community involvement is essential, but it is recognized that the development of character and a healthy school climate cannot simply be about compliance. Projects develop student leaders, but also invite *all* students to contribute to a healthy school environment and they provide students with ongoing individual support and advocacy through mentorship.

High School Completion – At-risk students benefit from alternative programming and instructional modifications that accommodate academic, social, and psychological differences. Key strategies include: helping learners become active partners in the learning process; providing social and psychological support to help students desire to complete high school and achieve their goals; and forging partnerships

with the home to increase learner investment, commitment and accountability.

Leading and Sustaining School Improvement –

The principal is critical as the school leader and champion, as is frequent communication among district office personnel, community, parents, students and educators. Distributed leadership among AISI coordinators, lead teachers and school leadership teams contributes to capacity building. Sustainability depends on the commitment and care of the school community and is enhanced when schools and districts are professional learning communities.

Sustainability is ensured by creating structural, organizational and cultural changes. These include developing new approaches to leadership; adapting existing resources and accessing new resources; aligning project goals with the goals of the school, district, and previous projects; and valuing, promoting, and enabling teacher collaboration, leadership, learning and inquiry.

The Role of Parents and Community – The participation of parents and community members is crucial to student success. However, schools are challenged by how to best bring this about. Parental involvement included volunteering in school by helping to develop and implement AISI

projects and by sharing expertise, knowledge, talents and gifts. As well, parents were involved by participating in parent education, such as learning about new instructional strategies, supporting students at home, providing connections between students and the larger community, and by advancing beliefs, values, cultures and languages. How parents participate is related to grade levels, socio-economic realities, time, commitment, ethnicity, school culture, cultural beliefs, personal beliefs, gender, style and technology.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education – The most important themes were the improvement of specific and general academic potential; the involvement of parents and the improvement of communication between the home and school; the creation of a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students; and the education of teachers, staff and non-Aboriginal students about FNMI cultures, history and language. Also among the most important themes were letting students know that they are valued and major stakeholders in their own success; and providing FNMI students with historical knowledge and Aboriginal language acquisition so that they feel a deep sense of pride in their own culture.



Implications

The wealth of data collected, shared, analyzed and interpreted by AISI project teams, by AISI partners at the universities, by international researchers and by the School Improvement Branch makes it possible to identify significant implications about the AISI program, both in looking back over Cycle 3 and in looking to the future of AISI.

AISI has become a systemic educational change strategy in Alberta

The increasingly larger district-wide projects mean that virtually all schools, teachers and students are now involved. AISI is no longer separate from the ongoing operation of schools. The AISI program has energized professional staff to become lifelong learners who avail themselves of unprecedented professional learning opportunities and invest in new instructional strategies and emerging changes in education. Schools are increasingly operating as professional learning communities, with teachers collaborating on planning, sharing instructional strategies and resources, and expanding their repertoires of instructional practices. Leadership is shared among principals, coordinators, teachers and even students.

It is becoming increasingly evident that improvement over time is not only in terms of student learning in its many manifestations, but also improving teaching practice and system learning and organization.

AISI findings have informed Alberta Education directions, documents and initiatives in various areas, including FNMI, Technology, Mathematics, Early Learning, ESL, the Literacy Framework, High School Completion, and Workforce Planning. Examples of documents developed with AISI project findings include: *Supporting the Literacy Learner*, *Supporting ESL Students*, and *Managing School Transitions*.

AISI changes school culture

Of all the changes AISI has brought about, culture is the one most often cited by its participants. AISI has provided the means, the impetus and the opportunities for educators to become partners in their work. Funding provides the resources to make change possible. Annual workshops and conferences create opportunities for cross-district

collaboration among coordinators, lead teachers, administrators and others involved in changing education to improve teaching and learning. AISI's culture of collaboration, inquiry, openness, reflection, best practices, risk taking and innovation has contributed to a renewal and professionalization of teaching in Alberta.

When teachers, administrators and students talk the same language about learning, instructional strategies and types of evidence, there is a synergy that can only pay dividends on the AISI investment in the educational enterprise.

AISI supports innovation

AISI is a catalyst for change. It systematically introduced innovation, choice and risk taking into education in Alberta, making it a requirement of projects from the outset, and encouraging school authorities to try new approaches to address local needs and circumstances.

In Cycle 3, school authorities often applied strategies developed in Cycle 2 to new groups of students, but this did not necessarily involve innovation. Cycle 4 puts greater emphasis on innovation.

In this increasingly complex world with its ever accelerating changes, education partners must stay abreast of changes, hone and refine practices that are effective and incorporate these into instructional practices.

"AISI has had a huge positive impact. Three key areas are research-related learning, fostering a positive culture, and encouraging a culture of risk taking."

Project 40046

AISI empowers students and teachers

AISI empowers students to take ownership of their own learning, to be confident in their abilities, to take pride in their achievements and to feel that they belong in their school.

Students learn more effectively when they are actively engaged in meaningful activities that they enjoy and are involved in their own assessment.

AISI empowers teachers by supporting them in collaboration—sharing practices and experiences that enrich their instructional repertoires and supporting each other in dealing with ongoing challenges in teaching. For collaboration to work, it is necessary to provide time during the school day. Schools and districts do this through strategic adjustments to the timetable and calendar.

Teachers are also empowered as leaders—in their classrooms, among their peers, across their district, and sometimes provincially, nationally and internationally, through writing, research and presentations.

AISI builds leadership

AISI is a factor in the development of the next generation of educational leaders in Alberta. Many coordinators become principals, district consultants, central office administrators and superintendents with strength in instructional leadership that is essential for improving student learning.

Projects are more likely to be successful when the leaders, including principals and superintendents, embrace AISI as an opportunity to work with staff in a professional community focused on improving student learning.

AISI models and supports partnerships

AISI has led the way in establishing partnerships in Alberta among educational partners, government and school authorities, school authorities and universities, and between schools and parents. There is a strong and vibrant partnership among Alberta Education and its six formal partners in the ongoing support and direction of the AISI program. The AISI partnership models how jurisdictions can work together, enriched by multiple perspectives, toward the common goal of improving student learning.

The partnership between Alberta Education and school authorities is also strong. Government provides financial resources and ongoing support through workshops, information, annual conferences, and the work of School Improvement Branch managers. School authorities engage in action research, share their findings and provide lived examples of what is working and what needs attention in the field.

The partnership among the three Faculties of Education and school authorities is also benefitting both parties. AISI provides the mechanism for academic faculties to work more closely with teachers, allowing them to share their expertise with educators, to enhance the relevance and accessibility of their research and to engage in action research projects with schools. Greater engagement with the field also contributes to better awareness of emerging trends in instructional practices and identifies areas for in-depth study. Universities are also placing pre-service teachers in AISI environments for their practicum experiences, thereby contributing to better prepared novice teachers who experience a richer introduction to their chosen profession. Teachers benefit from greater access to research support, expanded opportunities for graduate level study and ongoing relationships with academics who concomitantly stay in touch with emerging changes in classrooms.

AISI enhances professional learning

AISI provides tremendous opportunity for professional learning. The evidence indicates that this learning is ongoing, embedded in the job and takes place on site. There are many variations of professional learning, much of it following a coaching model. Other variations include school visits, classroom walkthroughs, networks and conversations. These are in addition to provincial AISI workshops and the annual conference, as well as specific occasions for particular projects.

Capacity building that engages the entire teaching staff of a school is more effective than professional development for just a few teachers. If improving student learning is viewed as a school priority, it is more likely to take place. Provincial, district and school policy can help.

It is also important to provide differentiated professional learning opportunities for staff. For example, teachers who have been involved in AISI for a long time have different needs than those who are neophytes. While there is a role for experienced teachers to coach their younger colleagues, experienced teachers also want to delve more deeply into instructional matters.

Evidence of Success

AISI has contributed to the knowledge of how to measure the outcomes that define the success of a project. The current AISI approach uses available measures, such as provincial tests, local assessments and surveys, to measure success. This multiple approach to measuring learning gives us confidence in the evidence.

Without solid evidence of the impact of interventions on student learning and professional capacity, it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe observed changes to an initiative, especially an initiative of the province-wide scale of AISI.

Project teams faced the challenge of aligning project goals, strategies, measures and outcomes, as well as the challenge of acquiring the skills for analysis and interpretation of data.

As teachers became more skilled in assessment practices, they also became more aware of the strengths and limitations of alternative assessment instruments. Project teams were sometimes unable to establish baseline data before beginning their projects because adequate measures were not available and had to be developed or acquired in the first year. Student outcomes such as creativity, continuous improvement, risk taking, relationship building, implementation skills and 21st century literacy skills need clearer definitions and ways to be assessed.



The Journey Continues

AISI demonstrates that large-scale innovation in a province's education system is possible. It has made a significant contribution to change for students, teachers, schools and districts, as well as at the provincial level.

- *Students* are reaping the benefits of teachers' enlarged instructional repertoires. Students are empowered to take ownership of their learning and to delve more deeply into higher cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes.
- *Teachers* are learning to expand their instructional repertoires to meet the increasing diversity of student needs through strategies such as assessment for learning, differentiated instruction, inquiry, experiential learning and project based learning.
- *School* staffs have become much more collaborative in finding effective ways to help diverse students meet their learning needs. Participants in AISI—partners, teachers, administrators and others—are actively promoting the knowledge generated by AISI in the service of improving teaching and learning.
- At the *district* level, *school* authorities can be as creative and innovative as they wish. They have choice and flexibility in designing projects that meet local needs.
- At the *provincial* level, AISI findings and approaches are increasingly being incorporated into directions, initiatives and resource materials within Alberta Education.

A decade of AISI models how a large-scale reform initiative can be sustained by providing leadership, continued funding and ongoing support. Targeted funding provides the means by which staff can engage in capacity building activities, both in the school and at external events, such as workshops and conferences.

However, AISI must not become complacent. If it is to remain on the leading edge, AISI must aspire to higher levels of innovation. It must incorporate emerging knowledge and technologies; focus on student learning and effective instructional practices; and must document how and why instructional strategies positively impact student learning.

The AISI program has stood the test of time. The partners continue to reflect and act upon its strengths and challenges, and the strategic directions¹ for AISI present a multi-faceted path for AISI's future.



¹ Chapter 6 of the full report outlines strategic directions for AISI including a research agenda, AISI agenda for action, the colloquium, Cycle 4 handbook, and the Multiple Perspectives Review.

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