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AISI Handbook for Cycle 4 2009 – 2012

AISI Education Partners

December 2008



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Foreword

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) is a bold approach to improving student learning by encouraging teachers, parents, and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative projects that address local needs. Initiated in 1999 by the Alberta Government and its partners, AISI provides targeted funding to school authorities to improve student learning and enhance student engagement and performance. More than \$500 million has been invested in this initiative to continuously improve student learning in Alberta. After three successful three-year cycles of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (2000-2009), AISI is now in its fourth cycle, 2009-2012.

The purpose of this *AISI Handbook for Cycle 4* is to provide school authorities with the provincial and local requirements and processes for planning, funding, implementing, managing, evaluating, reporting and sharing school improvement projects.

The first three cycles of AISI ran from 2000 to 2009. School authorities (public, separate, Francophone, charter, and private) initiated about 1,700 projects to improve student learning that addressed local needs and circumstances. The summaries and reports of these projects are on the AISI website at <http://education.alberta.ca/aisi>.

School improvement focuses on improving student learning through fostering enhanced strategies at the school, district, and government levels. Essential elements to promote school improvement include leadership, instructional practice, school climate, assessment and accountability, building capacity through professional development, student and parent engagement, and integration of effective practices.

The transition from Cycle 3 to Cycle 4 is an opportune time to take stock of what has been accomplished and determine future directions for AISI projects. AISI has contributed to our understanding of innovation, renewal, complexity, sustainability, change and transformation. Nine years of results provide a wealth of information that has been accessed provincially, nationally and internationally. More importantly this information is available to help school authorities reflect, through processes of inquiry and research, about improvement of student learning relevant to their circumstances and environments. In addition, it helps them consider the opportunities that exist for this unique collaborative partnership in Alberta.

As school improvement projects require substantial effort by all involved, this handbook has been designed as a reference to assist school authorities in planning and implementing sustainable AISI improvement projects.

The handbook has seven sections. The first provides a framework for the initiative. It includes the goal, principles, operational procedures, and characteristics, and highlights the AISI partnership. Sections II to V describe the requirements for developing AISI projects and reporting annual results. Section VI provides AISI contact information and Section VII identifies the Cycle 4 AISI project forms that are available on the AISI Extranet Site.

New Areas of Focus and Increased Emphasis for Cycle 4

Directions for AISI Cycle 4 were informed by multiple sources. Feedback and suggestions from school authority AISI teams, AISI coordinators, superintendents, AISI partners, and Alberta Education staff informed the continuous improvement of AISI. As well, the AISI Colloquium held in October 2008 involved international researchers/experts, AISI partners, and representative school authorities who provided their research, experiences and insights related to AISI. These sources informed what was important to continue, to build on, to enhance, and to change for AISI Cycle 4.

The following were identified and have been incorporated in the AISI Goal, Principles, Characteristics, Operational Procedures and Handbook:

1. A new focus on **student engagement**.
2. A new focus on **shared leadership**.
3. A new focus on the **complexity of innovation** and **change processes**.
4. A new focus on **networks** for knowledge dissemination and the exchange or creation of information, ideas, and resources.
5. Increased emphasis on **knowledge dissemination** and **communication** plans.
6. Increased emphasis on the **involvement of parents, students, and the community** in the development and implementation of AISI projects.
7. Articulation of **types of projects** school authorities may develop, which encourage innovation, sharing and collaboration:
 - a. Innovative projects focusing on themes that are brand new to a school authority
 - b. Innovative projects that go into greater depth on previous themes, with new research, strategies, and measures
 - c. Innovative projects that are collaborative, across school authorities focusing on common goals
8. AISI project proposals will **reflect insights from related AISI projects**.
9. Increased emphasis on the use of **digital technologies and innovative approaches** for communicating, sharing, networking, and disseminating knowledge.
10. A revised Handbook for greater clarity and ease of use:
 - a. New **Operational Procedures Section** at the front of the handbook includes key information school authorities require at the outset.
 - b. **AISI terminology** section added to provide a common understanding of specific terms in the context of AISI projects in Alberta.
 - c. **Links** in the Handbook to appropriate AISI and other Alberta Education web addresses.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the leadership of the Education Partners Steering Committee (EPSC) for guidance in the development of this handbook, which forms the basis for the administration of Cycle 4 of AISI.

The AISI Education Partners consists of the following organizations:

- Alberta Education
- Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA)
- Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)
- Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)
- University Faculties of Education

The AISI partnership has resulted in the building of trust, collaboration, and teamwork among the seven education partners who represent diverse interests in providing education for children.



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I. Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)

AISI Framework¹

Goal

To improve student learning through initiatives that enhance student engagement and performance and reflect the unique needs and circumstances of each school authority.

Principles

1. AISI projects will focus on student engagement, learning, and performance.
2. Collaboration, shared leadership, support of those who will implement the projects, and meaningful involvement of the school community are essential elements for school improvement.
3. AISI reflects the complexity of innovation and change processes.
4. The school authority project(s) is/are part of the three-year planning and reporting process for purposes of the school authority's annual planning, reporting, and accountability processes.
5. AISI projects will have a balance of local and provincial measures that include approved quantitative and/or qualitative measures, appropriate to the project.
6. AISI project plans will reflect insights from research, literature, and related AISI projects.
7. The knowledge generated through AISI will be widely disseminated.
8. Networks that contribute to the goal of AISI will be created and/or enhanced for knowledge dissemination and the exchange of information, ideas, and resources.
9. Alberta Education will provide targeted AISI funding to school authorities.

¹ The AISI Partners established the goal, principles, and key considerations in 1999. They are included in the *Framework for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement* (AISI Education Partners Steering Committee, 1999). These have been updated and revised to reflect the evolving nature of AISI in Alberta. The entire framework is available on the website at <http://education.alberta.ca/aisi>

Operational Procedures

1. Project Development

- 1.1 Projects should be based on local needs identified through evidence (provincial and local data).
- 1.2 AISI projects are developed locally and will be based on any of the following:
 - a) Innovative projects focusing on themes that are brand new to a school authority
 - b) Innovative projects that go into greater depth on previous themes with new research, strategies, and measures
 - c) Innovative projects that are collaborative, across school authorities focusing on common goal
- 1.3 Projects can be multi-year within the cycle time frame.
- 1.4 AISI projects should be designed to have sustained impact on educational practices in schools.
- 1.5 Project strategies and measures must be aligned with improvement goals.
- 1.6 Each project proposal must include a budget.

2. Measures

- 2.1 The major focus of measures will be on student engagement, learning and performance.
- 2.2 With reference to measures, the appropriate balance within a school authority should be 60% locally determined and 40% provincially determined.

3. Funding

- 3.1 AISI funding is available to all Alberta school authorities (public, separate, francophone, charter and private schools) and includes the two Lloydminster school divisions (Alberta Regulation 51/97).
- 3.2 The funding entitlement to each eligible school authority for a school year is based upon the previous year's September 30th registered student count (ECS students counted as 0.5 FTE) times the per-student rate. The annual per-student rate is determined by dividing the total available funding for the year by the total "eligible" provincial enrolment count.
- 3.3 Annual funding will be provided to all provincially funded school authorities in Alberta (ECS to grade 12) eligible to receive AISI funding at the current (2008-2009) base amount of \$138 per registered student in grades 1 to 12 in public school authorities, and \$69 for Early Childhood Services (Kindergarten) students (50% of the funding for grades 1 to 12 in public school authorities). Private school authorities will receive

either 60% or 70% of public school funding based on the provincial funding agreement. Any additional amounts will be determined through the government budget process and are noted in the current Alberta Education Funding Manual for School Authorities.

http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/822819/21552_fund_manual_october_2008.pdf

- 3.4 Funding will flow to school authorities based upon approved AISI project proposals designed to improve student learning and enhance student engagement and performance.
- 3.5 School authorities may utilize AISI funding for school improvement projects for pre-school children and ECS to grade 12 students.
- 3.6 AISI funds may be used for all appropriate costs associated with the school improvement project, subject to provincial approval of the projects. The guidelines for budgets are: (a) a minimum of 15% for professional development, (b) approximately 5% for project management and administration, and (c) approximately 10% of AISI funding for related equipment and/or other capital.
- 3.7 With provincial approval, school authorities may phase out projects and submit new proposals or redirect funds to existing projects.
- 3.8 Funding flows to school authorities beginning in September of the first year of the cycle based upon project approval. For subsequent years, funding flows upon submission of the AISI Project Annual Report.

4. **Reporting**

- 4.1 School authorities are required to complete and submit to the School Improvement Branch the AISI Project Annual/Final Report.

5. **Knowledge Dissemination and Networking**

- 5.1 Alberta Education will act as the “clearinghouse” for project plans, reports, results, and resources.
- 5.2 School authorities and AISI partners will share responsibility for knowledge dissemination through networks and other means.
- 5.3 Networks that contribute to the goal of AISI can be local, provincial, national and/or international.

AISI Characteristics

AISI is characterized by the following 12 attributes.

1. **Student focused**

AISI communicates a compelling commitment to school improvement that aligns with the long-term vision of Alberta Education. Students are active and engaged learners. AISI projects continue to strengthen the focus on student learning and accommodate the diverse learning needs of individual students.

2. **Partnership**

AISI is a partnership among teachers, superintendents, trustees, business officials, universities, parents, and government. The AISI partnership is characterized by trust, collaboration, and teamwork among the education partners who share a commitment to improving education for Alberta students, who are the beneficiaries of this strong and diverse partnership. By working together, the partners continue to develop new relationships, strategies, and practices that provide long-term benefits to teaching and learning in our province.

3. **Collaboration**

Collaboration is an essential element for school improvement. Projects are developed and implemented with meaningful involvement of the school community. The active engagement of teachers, staff and students, with the involvement and support of parents and partners is critical to project success.

4. **Catalyst**

AISI is a catalyst for change. The common goal, targeted funding, partnership, positive climate, and supportive infrastructure act in concert to achieve significant change in teaching and learning.

5. **Flexibility**

School authorities choose strategies that enhance learning in the local context.

6. **Culture of Continuous Improvement**

AISI promotes a culture of continuous improvement that is evident in schools and jurisdictions that have a clear alignment between school improvement goals and classroom practices. Continuous improvement is a shared responsibility. Schools operating as professional learning communities actively engage both teachers and students in learning. Professional development and ongoing administrative support are critical components in realizing continuous improvement within schools and school systems.

7. **Evidence-based Practice**

Evidence that educational practices benefit student learning and performance, through the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, is foundational to AISI. The use of multiple methods and data sources gives Albertans confidence in the results. As the body of evidence

on successful practices grows, integration of these practices in new contexts will be the challenge and the promise of AISI.

8. **Research-based Interventions**

Solid research provides a reasonable expectation that improvement will occur.

Implementation of effective instructional strategies is core to AISI projects. AISI is a vehicle for testing the efficacy of these interventions in the Alberta context.

9. **Inquiry and Reflection**

A clear focus on student learning is the foundation for inquiry and reflection. Inquiry and reflection lead to improved understanding and thoughtful changes to instructional practice.

Analyzing strategies that worked and building on them lead to continuous improvement.

Strategies that did not work as expected can provide important information about what needs to change and what might be successful.

10. **Building Capacity and Integrating Effective Practices**

Professional development continues to ensure that teachers and students benefit from the emerging knowledge, practices, and technologies that are being developed through AISI.

Effective PD is planned, systemic, and sustained. Promising practices, tools, products, and processes developed and/or acquired through AISI will benefit Alberta's students in the future.

11. **Knowledge Dissemination**

AISI contributes to the body of knowledge about teaching, learning, and instructional improvement. The AISI family shares this knowledge widely through conferences, reports, the Clearinghouse, and provincial networking sessions.

12. **Networks**

AISI networks contribute to the exchange of information, ideas, and resources as well as communication and knowledge dissemination. Networks include face-to-face and digital interactions and may be local, provincial, national, and/or international.

AISI Terminology

1. Assessment

Assessment is the process of collecting information on student achievement and performance that includes a variety of assessment tasks designed to monitor and improve student learning. Information about student learning is gathered by teachers on an ongoing basis for a number of purposes in the context of the learning outcomes specified in provincial curricula. The primary purposes of student assessment are to facilitate the teaching/learning process through two inter-connected processes.

- a. *Assessment for learning* – Assessment experiences that result in an ongoing exchange of information between students and teachers about student progress. This information is intended to inform teachers about students’ learning and students about themselves and is not used for grading purposes.
- b. *Assessment of learning* – Assessment experiences designed to collect information about learning to make judgments about student performance at the end of a period of instruction. The information is intended to inform students, parents, teachers and others outside classrooms about student learning.

2. Baselines and Targets for Project Measures

Baselines provide evidence of performance before an AISI project begins. A baseline provides a benchmark to determine the impact of a project. The baseline data provides important information about the gap between the current situation and the desired goals for the project. Targets are results expected to be achieved by implementing the project. Annual targets are established for multi-year projects to determine progress towards the improvement goals. Targets should be reasonable and achievable.

3. Change Process

Change is a process, not an event. This is a complex process with developmental stages in systemic change or ways of thinking. As the new system becomes understood and applied, new ways of thinking and related practices are internalized and become the status quo. The change process is dynamic and non-linear in that there are not clear beginning and end points.

4. Communication

Communication is the process of imparting or interchanging thoughts, news, opinions, or information. It is through communication that collaboration and cooperation occur. Different audiences (e.g., school staff, school board, parents, community, etc.) may require different forms of communication. See the AISI Communications Toolkit <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/aisidocs/toolkit.aspx> for ideas for communicating about AISI at the local level.

5. Innovation

AISI provides targeted funds to try new things. School authorities are encouraged to try new approaches to address local student needs. Innovation is defined broadly to include research-based strategies that have not been used before in the school authority or its schools. Flexibility, risk taking, and thinking “outside the box” are encouraged.

6. **Integration**

Integration refers to educators incorporating new practices, strategies, learnings, and key findings into their instructional repertoires. Ideally there will be transferability of educational practice and student learning to other classrooms/situations and school staff beyond project participants.

7. **Knowledge Dissemination**

AISI teams are expected to share what they have learned. As educators try new approaches and learning/teaching strategies, they learn new knowledge and skills. Ways to disseminate new knowledge and practices include project documentation, workshops, conferences, events, promising practices for the AISI website, monographs, and research briefs, articles for the *School Improvement Scoop*, professional magazines, and journals. Effective communication strategies result in greater transference of new knowledge and longer term sustainability within schools, school authorities, and the province.

8. **Leadership**

Leadership occurs at all levels and should be shared. Building a common vision, and a committed team, establishing partnerships, creating high-achieving learning environments, and leading and managing change are all aspects of successful leadership.

9. **Learning**

Learning is an active process of gaining knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors. It leads to the development of new capacities, skills, values, understanding, and preferences. Learning is impacted through meta-cognition and by different motivational and affective factors; it is recognized as an active process that engages a person socially, emotionally, culturally and intra-personally.

10. **Networks**

Networking within the context of AISI entails a broad and shared commitment to finding and sharing information, research, innovative education practices, or in some cases, challenging pedagogical principles learned over time. Networking involves using a variety of strategies (locally, provincially, and internationally) to stimulate sharing and a purposeful dialogue with the intention of impacting educational practices in order to improve student learning.

11. **Parental Engagement**

Parental engagement in their children's lives and schooling is essential for successful learning. Parenting practices have important effects on children's social and cognitive outcomes. Children do better in school when parents monitor their behavior, are responsive to their needs, and encourage independence. Student learning and performance is improved when parents have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes as members of the AISI partnership characterized by trust, collaboration and teamwork among the education partners. This can occur through individual parent participation, school council participation and/ or involvement in AISI projects.

12. Performance

Performance is a demonstration of learning. Students can demonstrate what they know, understand, and can do in a variety of ways: oral language, writing, multimedia presentations, portfolios, visual displays, tests, projects, and public performances.

13. Professional Development

Effective professional development (PD) builds capacity and influences improved instructional delivery and educational programs. Professional development that works is focused on improving student learning and is typically ongoing, job-embedded, based on research, and integrated in multiple instructional settings. A comprehensive approach to PD is essential for successful implementation of AISI goals. See *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning* at <http://education.alberta.ca/media/325654/suppdoc7.pdf>.

14. Project Design

AISI projects have a systematic, well defined, and clearly articulated design. A comprehensive plan meets all project criteria: clearly stated purpose, goals, and student learning outcomes; background information; research base; involvement, engagement and support of school community; measures; instructional and communication strategies; and staffing and budget details.

15. Qualitative Measures

Qualitative data provide rich, transferable descriptions of individuals' experiences of educational phenomena, with a focus on process, meaning, and human behaviors as they occur in context. Sources of evidence might include: interview transcripts, written reports (e.g., policy documents; observation field notes), focus group transcripts, video/audio recordings (e.g., documenting classroom activities), artifacts/documents/portfolios (e.g., personal/professional journals; artwork).

16. Quantitative Measures

Quantitative measures use numeric data. Sources of evidence might include: standardized tests, local assessments (e.g., report cards, teacher marks, etc.), school records (e.g., attendance, student behavior, credits, course completion, etc.), provincial achievement tests, grade 12 diploma examinations, participation rates, high school completion rates, drop-out rates, Rutherford scholarship eligibility, transition rates, surveys (students, parents, teachers, public), and Provincial Accountability Pillar surveys.

17. Research Based

AISI projects should be based on system/school needs and use current research as a foundation for project design and direction. Research provides a solid base for what works in a variety of settings and with diverse students. Research syntheses, meta-analyses, and empirical studies are recommended as sources of evidence of what works.

18. School Community

In addition to students, parents and staff, school communities include authority administrators, business/community agencies, school board, and school council.

19. **Student Engagement**

Students are engaged when they are involved in their learning, persist despite challenges and obstacles, and take visible delight in accomplishing their work. Student engagement also refers to students' willingness, need, desire, and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process.

20. **Sustainability/Sustained Impact**

AISI projects are designed to have lasting impact on educational practices in schools. A plan outlining how to continue to benefit students and influence effective teacher practices in future years (beyond the AISI project) should be part of the project design. What is learned through research and project implementation should be systematically incorporated into schools and system-wide practices as an integral part of ongoing school authority funding and priorities. Sustainability involves transference and institutionalization of practices as part of the culture of a school and/or school authority.

II. Project Planning and Proposal Preparation

1. Project Development

AISI projects must:

- focus on student engagement, learning, and performance (Principle 1)
- support the improvement of student learning by encouraging teachers, parents and other education partners to work collaboratively to introduce innovative and creative initiatives based upon local needs and circumstances (Principles 2 & 3)
- be part of a school authority's three-year planning and reporting process (Principle 4)
- have a balance of provincial and local measures appropriate to the project (Principle 5)
- reflect insights from research, literature, and related AISI projects (Principle 6)
- include a plan for knowledge dissemination (Principle 7)
- utilize networks for the exchange of information, ideas, and resources (Principle 8)

- 1.1 In all stages of AISI project planning, implementation, and evaluation, the major focus must be on student engagement, learning and performance. Project strategies such as professional development are supports to achieve this AISI goal.
- 1.2 Since collaboration is an essential element for school improvement, project proposals must reflect the support of those who will implement the projects and the meaningful involvement of the school community. The school community consists of students, staff, families, school councils and agencies providing school services that affect the ability of children to be successful learners.
- 1.3 There is a need for “bottom-up” and “top-down” processes including consultation and commitment, and the need for overall authority planning and decision-making on priorities. In order to be successful, projects must be based on support at the school and community level. At the same time, the school authority must make the final decision about the overall direction and allocation of resources, in light of local context and identified needs of its school authority.
- 1.4 AISI projects are to be linked to the school authority's three-year planning and reporting processes. See the current *Guide for Education Planning and Results Reporting* (Alberta Education)
<http://education.alberta.ca/admin/resources/guidetoed.aspx>
- 1.5 Project proposals will reflect insights from current research, literature on school improvement, and other AISI projects. Alberta University partners completed thematic research reviews and literature synopses related to project themes. These review synopses are posted on the AISI website.
<http://education.alberta.ca/apps/aisi/literature/>

2. Funding Allocation Decisions

AISI projects must have a budget that reflects the use of the AISI targeted funding. (Principle 9)

- 2.1 Each project proposal must include a budget. The sum of the school authority's request submitted to Alberta Education for funding approval cannot exceed the total school authority AISI funding entitlement. All designated AISI funds must be expended on AISI projects.
- 2.2 The method of allocating AISI funds within a school authority and deciding upon projects to submit for provincial approval is a local decision. Decisions must be made on priorities to meet local needs and circumstances. These needs and circumstances could include:
 - district-wide priorities and/or needs (e.g., early literacy, numeracy)
 - grade/subject specific needs (e.g., elementary reading, junior high math, high school completion)
 - school-specific needs (e.g., high needs students)
 - local community needs (e.g., pre-ECS readiness programs for at-risk children)
 - a combination of the above
- 2.3 Authorities can partner with other school authorities to “pool” all or some of their AISI funding. For example:
 - Authorities A and B might share a reading specialist whose salary is paid by A and travel and materials by B (or A and B could share costs 50-50).
 - School X in School Authority A could arrange for School Y in Authority B to use its science facilities in exchange for use of Y's fine arts facilities.
 - Schools in adjacent authorities could provide joint professional development for their math teachers.
- 2.4 Authorities can combine their AISI funds with funds from other sources (internal or external) in order to implement larger or more comprehensive projects.
- 2.5 A school authority may submit one or more individual projects. However, the total funding required cannot exceed the total funding amount available to the authority for the given school year based upon the number of registered students times the AISI per-student rate.
- 2.6 AISI funds may be used for all appropriate costs associated with the school improvement project, subject to provincial approval of the projects. The guidelines for budgets are:
 - a minimum of 15% for professional development
 - approximately 5% for project management and administration, and
 - approximately 10% of AISI funding for related equipment and/or other capital.

- 2.7 Subject to the following considerations, authorities have a high degree of autonomy and flexibility in designing improvement projects and in allocating resources in order to foster school improvement:
- funding shall not be paid as bonuses to staff
 - per-capita allocations to schools are not allowed
- 2.8 Authorities are responsible to account for budgets and actual expenditures and to have management systems, processes and procedures in place that meet generally acceptable accounting principles and practices.

3. **Timelines**

- 3.1 The target date for submission of proposals for new projects to School Improvement Branch is April 30th. Years two and three of multi-year projects need not be resubmitted for approval; however, the budget for all projects needs to be approved on an annual basis

4. Project Requirements

Each project must include information on the following requirements:

Section A – Project Overview

- A1 Project parameters
- A2 Project description
- A3 School community involvement
- A4 Research
- A5 Improvement goals

Section B – Detailed Project Plan

- B1 Project measures
- B2 Plans for key strategies and processes
 - a. Instructional strategies
 - b. Student assessment
 - c. Project management and coordination
 - d. Professional development
 - e. Parental and community involvement
 - f. Knowledge dissemination and communication
 - g. Networking
 - i. Integration and sustainability
 - j. Project evaluation process
- B3 Staffing requirements
- B4 Budget and financial report
- B5 Attachments (optional)
- B6 Project contacts
- B7 Superintendent/CEO

Note: These sections align with the AISI Project Proposal/Plan template.

Please see the AISI Website for **support materials and resources for Cycle 4 project planning** and implementation.

Section A Project Overview

A1 Project Parameters

- a. This section provides specific information related to the project such as title, scope, student focus and themes.
- b. Projects may have single or multi-year timeframes. A three-year timeframe is preferable in order to develop meaningful and sustainable improvement in student learning.

A2 Project Description

- a. There must be a brief description of the project. This description must describe how this project is different from AISI projects carried out by the school authority in the first (2000-2003), second (2003-2006), and, third (2006-2009) cycles of AISI. These differences may include improvement goals, key strategies, new schools, new grades, new subjects, etc.
- b. It is important that new projects not maintain or be status quo with the previous cycle projects as AISI is about innovation and continuous improvement; however, a previous theme may be taken into greater depth with new research, strategies, measures, and approaches.

A3 School Community Involvement

- a. There must be meaningful involvement of the school community, including identification of who participated in the consultation process (e.g., administrators, parents, principals, school council, students, and teachers).
- b. The project proposal must describe the participants' involvement in the consultation, planning, implementation and evaluation processes.
- c. As collaboration is an essential element for school improvement, project applications must reflect support of those who will implement the projects and include meaningful involvement of the school community. In addition to students, staff and families, school community includes school councils and agencies providing school services that affect the ability of children to be successful learners.
- d. There is a need for “bottom-up” and “top-down” processes including consultation and commitment, and the need for overall authority planning and decision-making on priorities. In order to be successful, projects must be based on support at the school and community level. At the same time, the school authority must make the final decision about the overall direction and allocation of resources, in light of local context and identified needs of its school authority.

A4 Research

- a. Project proposals reflect insights from current research on school improvement. Previously completed AISI projects provide rich information and learning that can inform the development, implementation, and evaluation of new AISI projects. Alberta university partners have compiled literature synopses related to project themes as well as completed AISI project research reviews. These synopses and reports are posted on the AISI Clearinghouse.
- b. Alberta Education has established an AISI website to assist schools in identifying improvement research. School authorities and the university Faculties of Education have all contributed to the information base. The website is located at <http://education.alberta.ca/aisi>.
- c. The requirement to reflect school improvement research as foundational to project development and implementation ensures there is a strong possibility for success.

A5 Improvement Goals

- a. AISI projects are to be linked to the school authority's three-year planning and reporting processes. See the current *Guide for Education Planning and Results Reporting* (Alberta Education). Alberta Education updates this guide annually. <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/resources/guidetoed.aspx>
- b. Proposals must indicate the alignment among the goals, strategies, and measures.
- c. Each project must describe how its AISI goals and priority areas for improvement are related to the school authority's Three-Year Education Plan.

Section B Detailed Project Plan

Local planning, implementation, and ongoing support and assessment are critical to the success of each school improvement project. Sound initiatives can fail during implementation because they are taken for granted and not sufficiently supported. The success of a school improvement project depends on appropriate involvement of education partners in the design and implementation of the project, and ongoing support, both at the school and district levels.

Each project should have an implementation strategy with sufficient dedicated resources to adequately support the project.

Projects must plan for integrating effective practices after AISI project formal completion. Incorporating effective practices is essential in sustaining improved learning.

B1 Project Measures

- a. The fundamental purpose of measurement is to demonstrate or provide evidence of success for a project based on its impact on student learning. Measures for a project must be appropriate to the focus of each improvement project.
- b. Project strategies and measures must be aligned with improvement goals. The types of measures used should be determined by the nature of each improvement project, its expected outcome and the need to provide evidence of improvement. In other words, the measures must be appropriate to the nature of the improvement sought and should not “drive” the project design. Types of measures include local and provincial measures summarized in the table below. A list of measures can be found on the AISI website <http://education.alberta.ca/aisi>.

	Quantitative	Surveys	Qualitative
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardized tests • Local assessments (e.g. report cards, teacher marks, etc.) • School records such as attendance, student behavior, credits, and course completion • Others* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys (students, parents, teachers, public) • Others* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolios • Case studies • Interview transcripts • Focus group transcripts • Observation fieldnotes • Others*
Provincial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial achievement tests (grades 3, 6, 9) • Diploma exams (grade 12) • Drop-out rates • High school completion rates • Rutherford scholarship eligibility • Transition rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial Accountability Pillar surveys 	

** To be identified or developed during AISI project development*

Complete information related to provincial measures can be found at:
<http://education.alberta.ca/admin/funding/accountability.aspx>.

- c. AISI measures should focus on student learning outcomes (i.e., student performance and engagement).
- d. Projects must have an appropriate balance of local and provincial measures of performance that includes approved quantitative, survey and/or qualitative measures.
- e. Alberta Education encourages the use of readily available provincial measures, where appropriate and reasonable.

Quantitative measures of student learning include the grades 3, 6, and 9 provincial achievement tests, the grade 12 diploma examinations, and others such as participation rates for the achievement tests and diploma exams, and high school completion rates, which are generated from provincial data.

Survey measures to support projects could include the provincial surveys for students in grades 4, 7 and 10, their parents and teachers.

- f. School authorities locally determine other appropriate quantitative, survey and/or qualitative measures, dependent upon the nature of the improvement and local circumstances.
- g. Since each AISI project reflects the unique needs and circumstances within the school authority, there is no minimum or maximum number of measures. The number of measures should be sufficient to demonstrate “evidence of success” in terms of interim (progress) and final outcomes.
- h. As part of the School Improvement Branch (SIB) approval process, the proposed project measures will be reviewed and adjustments made in collaboration with the school authority.
- i. School authorities should exercise professional judgment to determine the baseline and targets for each project measure.
- j. Baselines are established by averaging the results of the previous three years for the targeted population or a comparable group with similar characteristics. Three-year averages provide a stable data for comparing projects results and are less influenced by the year-to-year fluctuations in results caused by uncontrollable factors.
- k. The degree of targeted improvement should be realistic and attainable.
- l. Improvement goals, baseline data, and targets are interrelated in project design. If the goals are vaguely defined or undefined, you will find it difficult to know what kind of baseline data to gather. In the same way, appropriate targets cannot be set for any measure if the baseline is inaccurate or not determined.

- m. **Qualitative measures** provide rich, transferable descriptions of individuals' experiences of educational phenomena, with a focus on process, meaning and human behaviors as they occur in context. Sources of evidence might include: interview transcripts, written reports (e.g., policy documents; observation fieldnotes), focus group transcripts, video/audio recordings (e.g., documenting classroom activities), artifacts/documents/portfolios (e.g., personal/professional journals; artwork).
- n. The "Current Situation" provides a baseline. The "Success Indicators" demonstrate how we know the "Desired Change" has been achieved. When reporting on these success indicators, plan to include a summary of qualitative evidence, rather than including all the raw data. For example, rather than including all the interview transcripts from the in-depth qualitative interviews conducted, include a summary of evidence-based themes from the data analysis.

B2 Plans for Key Strategies and Processes

a. Instructional Strategies

Projects must identify instructional strategies to be used to improve student learning. (i.e. technology integration, clarifying and sharing learning outcomes with students, differentiated instruction, etc.)

b. Student Assessment

AISI projects must provide annual evidence of student learning and performance. Assessment involves describing, collecting, recording, scoring, and interpreting information about students' learning. Assessment techniques include tests, exhibits, interviews, surveys, performance rubrics, observation, portfolios, etc. In addition to summative assessments (year-end assessments), there should be an ongoing exchange of information between students and teachers about student progress toward clearly specified learner outcomes (also called diagnostic or formative assessment). See the definitions of assessment *for* and *of* learning in Section I (p. 7).

c. Project Management and Coordination

Projects must be managed so they can succeed. This requires some type of support such as a project coordinator, consultant, or lead teacher. Approximately 5% of project funds should be spent on project management and support. The proposal should indicate who will be responsible for management, and the proportion of his/her time that will be invested in this activity.

d. Professional Development

School authorities must provide professional development (PD) as part of their project plan. PD is essential to the school improvement process.

- It is expected that professional development will represent at least 15% of project expenses. Professional development includes resources, materials, external consultants, sub costs, travel, accommodation, facilities, and other costs related to PD.
- Professional development that works is focused on improving student learning and is typically ongoing, job-embedded, based on research, and integrated in multiple instructional settings.
- A comprehensive approach to professional development is essential for successful implementation of AISI goals. See A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning for ideas. <http://education.alberta.ca/media/325654/suppdoc.7.pdf>

e. **Parental and Community Involvement**

There must be meaningful involvement of parents in planning the proposal as well as the implementation and evaluation of projects. Parental involvement has been found to be very successful in helping students succeed and can be an integral part of an AISI project. Business, community agencies and other groups can also play an important role in contributing to a project's success.

f. **Knowledge Dissemination and Communication**

Communication is sharing widely what is happening in AISI projects and what impact there has been on student learning. Potential audiences include parents, community members, school boards, media, and school staff within and beyond school authorities. Ways to disseminate new knowledge and practices include project documentation, workshops, events, conferences, promising practices for the AISI website, monographs, research briefs, articles for the School Improvement Scoop, the ATA News or professional magazines, journals, school bulletin boards, and newsletters.

g. **Networking**

Project leaders are encouraged to use networks for knowledge dissemination and the exchange or creation of information, ideas, and resources. Networking may include face-to-face and digital communication around shared issues/educational practices of specific interest to the individual(s) or group.

h. **Integration and Sustainability**

Integration refers to educators incorporating new practices, strategies, learnings, and key findings into their instructional repertoires. Ideally there will be transferability of educational practice and student learning to other classrooms / situations and school staff beyond project participants.

Projects must indicate how educators will integrate what is learned: how they incorporate new practices, strategies, learnings, and key findings into their instructional repertoires.

What is learned through research and project implementation should be systematically incorporated into schools and system-wide practices as an integral part of ongoing school authority funding and priorities. Sustainability involves transference and institutionalization of practices as part of the culture of a school and/or jurisdiction.

AISI projects are designed to have lasting impact on educational practices in schools. A plan outlining how to continue to benefit students and influence effective teacher practices in future years (beyond the AISI project) should be part of the project design.

i. **Project Evaluation Process**

Evidence is more compelling if it is corroborated through multiple sources. Projects will describe the evaluation methods and data sources they will use to determine the success of their project. Multiple methods (e.g., student assessment, surveys), data sources (students, parents, teachers), and levels (e.g., grades 1, 2, 3, etc.) are recommended.

B3 Staffing Requirements

Projects must identify the people who will be involved. Staff can include teachers and AISI coordinators, other professionals, teaching assistants, administrative and support staff.

B4 Budget and Financial Report

Each project application must include a budget. The sum of the school authority's request submitted to Alberta Education for funding approval cannot exceed the total school authority AISI funding entitlement. All designated AISI funds must be expended on AISI projects. If a school authority decides to fund a project beyond the provincial AISI funding, this fact should be specified in the submission.

It is recognized that school improvement is not a “quick fix” activity, but rather an ongoing process that requires collaboration, commitment, and sustained support. AISI's requirements of budgeting, reporting and accountability are an attempt to promote long-term efficiency and effectiveness, not short-term change.

B5 Attachments (Optional)

Supplementary materials that may be helpful in understanding the project may be attached in Excel spreadsheets, Word format, and/or pictures and video clips.

B6 Project Contacts

Key project contacts that can provide additional information about the project must be included.

B7 Superintendent/CEO Certification

The target date for submission of **AISI Project Plan Proposals** to School Improvement Branch is April 30th of each year.

The Superintendent/CEO shall certify that the project:

1. addresses an identified need
2. addresses goals, strategies, schools, grades, etc. that are different from those addressed in Cycles 1 (2000-2003), 2 (2003-2006), and 3 (2006-2009).
3. has the meaningful involvement of the school community, including school councils
4. has the support of those who will implement it
5. has a research base
6. has processes in place for ongoing monitoring during the cycle
7. identifies provincial and/or local (and quantitative and qualitative) measures that appear reasonable
8. has improvement targets that are achievable
9. identifies strategies that have a reasonable chance of achieving the improvement goals and targets
10. includes a workable plan for knowledge dissemination and sharing
11. identifies appropriate evaluation methods
12. has FOIP compliance regarding names in the proposal and/or attachments.

As part of the accountability process, the Superintendent/CEO must certify that the project meets requirements. Section II – Project Planning and Proposal Preparation provides the details of these requirements.

III. Review & Approval of Project Plan Proposals

1. Alberta Education's School Improvement Branch (SIB) is responsible for reviewing and approving project plan proposals from school authorities.
2. SIB undertakes its provincial role and responsibilities within a philosophy of openness, collaboration, trust, involvement, simplicity and alignment with the framework established by the AISI Education Partners Steering Committee.
3. SIB provides project approval criteria to school authorities.
4. SIB seeks clarification from school authorities and requests revisions, as necessary.
5. SIB makes a decision on project approval and notifies the school authority through the AISI Extranet system.
6. If there are significant areas of concern with a project plan proposal, SIB works to resolve the outstanding issue(s) by consulting with the school authority and clearly identifying the required revisions.
7. If a project plan proposal is rejected, the school authority may request SIB reviewers to provide a second review.

IV. Reporting, Evaluation, and Knowledge Dissemination

1. Reporting

- 1.1 **Evidence of success** is the net sum professional judgment of provincial and local staff of the amount of movement toward the set improvement target(s) based upon an analysis of all evaluative information on the progress of the project. Multiple data sources and methods are encouraged. A major consideration is that more than one year may be 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 by the school authority AISI team.
- 1.2 Each school authority must report AISI funding in the revenue section of the annual Budget Report and in the revenue and expenditure section of the Audited Financial Statements.
- 1.3 An AISI Project Annual Report (APAR) shall be submitted to SIB. The target date for submission is October 15th of each year. The Superintendent/CEO shall certify that the information provided in this AISI Project Annual Report (APAR) is accurate, reliable, valid, and, that all AISI requirements have been met.

1.4 Funding flows to school authorities beginning in September of the first year of the cycle based upon project approval. For subsequent years, funding flows upon submission of the AISI Project Annual Report.

1.5 The following Alberta Education reporting requirements exist.

<p>School Authority Financial Reports A line item in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Budget Report • Audited Financial Statements 	<p>April 30 November 30</p>
<p>AISI Project Reports AISI Project Annual Report (APAR) AISI Project Final Report (APFR)</p>	<p>October 15</p>
<p>Annual Education Results Report (AERR)</p>	<p>November 30</p>

2. Ongoing, Annual, and Summative Evaluation

2.1 School authorities decide upon their ongoing, annual and summative measurement and evaluation policies and processes as part of their planning, management, and assessment practices.

2.2 School authorities should make provision for ongoing evaluation on a natural cycle (e.g., quarterly or other regular basis decided by the school authority) comparing the baseline and targets (both interim and final outcome) to actual progress.

2.3 The *Annual Education Results Report* (AERR), due by November 30, requires a web-link to the authority’s annual report for each AISI project.

2.4 Evaluation practices should meet professional standards and be done in accordance with the targets, measures and evidence of success described in Section II of this handbook.

2.5 SIB will collaborate with each school authority regarding the success in each year of multi year projects.

2.6 If in the professional judgment of SIB and school authority staff, a project is deemed unsuccessful and the school authority does not wish to continue the project, the funding will not flow for that project in subsequent years.

2.7 In the case of discontinuing an unsuccessful project, the funds may be transferred to other existing projects or may be used for a new project once approved by SIB.

- 2.8 Funding for project proposals submitted and/or approved after September 1 will commence in the month following approval and may include “retroactive” funding if that was included in the project proposal budget and SIB decision process.
- 2.9 An authority may withdraw a project at any time if it discerns that a project is not meeting with apparent success and submit a new project proposal with the approval of SIB.
3. **Knowledge Dissemination**
- 3.1 Each school authority is encouraged to develop a means of sharing AISI project information and results (e.g., school authority AISI website).
- 3.2 Alberta Education has established, with its partners, the process and mechanism for a provincial electronic AISI Clearinghouse/ AISI website that includes information such as project descriptions, findings, results, conclusions and promising practices. <http://education.alberta.ca/aisi>
- 3.3 Each school authority annually provides information on its AISI projects such as findings, results, conclusions and promising practices to AISI website so that successes and non-successes can be shared.
- 3.4 School authorities are encouraged to use digital technologies and innovative approaches as well as conventional methods for communications and knowledge dissemination.
- 3.5 The AISI Education Partner Steering Committee coordinates and/or organizes various sharing venues and mechanisms such as partners’ meetings and conferences/conventions including:
- ATA Teachers’ Conventions
 - ASBA Annual General Meetings
 - ASCA Parent Conference/Annual General Meeting
 - AISI Conference

V. Annual Timeline

Provincial	Local	Date
Ministerial announcement that Cycle 4 funding confirmed		Oct. 20, 2008
AISI updates by SIB to school authorities relating to Cycle 4		December 2008 – January 2009
		2009 – on
	Development of local project guidelines, priorities, etc.	February to April
	Needs assessment, literature reviews, community consultation	
	Local selection of projects and project proposal preparation	
Target date for submission of proposals		April 30
Review and approval of Cycle 4 Proposals	Planning project implementation	May to September
Funding payments (monthly) to school authorities for approved projects	Project implementation	September to August
Workshops		Fall/Spring
	Submit APAR/APFR	October 15
SIB reviews and approves APARs/APFRs		October - December
	Submission of AERR which includes link to AISI report	November 30
AISI Annual Conference		February
SIB Visitations		Spring
CYCLE REPEATS		

VI. Alberta Education Contacts and Assistance

For assistance contact the School Improvement Branch (SIB) of Alberta Education.

Contact	Phone	Fax
SIB Office	(780) 427-3160	(780) 415-2481
Address:	School Improvement Branch 12 th Floor, 44 Capital Boulevard 10044 – 108 Street Edmonton, Alberta T5J 5E6 Email Anna.dinatale@gov.ab.ca Maria.crudo@gov.ab.ca	

The AISI website provides documents and resources related to project development, implementation and evaluation as outlined in the *AISI Handbook for Cycle 4 (2009 – 2012)* <http://education.alberta.ca/aisi>.

VII. Forms

Forms to support Cycle 4 project planning and reporting have been streamlined and are posted on the AISI Extranet Site. These include:

1. AISI Project Proposal/Plan
2. AISI Project Annual Report (APAR)
3. AISI Project Final Report (APFR)

Current word template versions of these forms are maintained in the AISI Extranet Site: <https://phoenix.edc.gov.ab.ca/login/default.asp>.