



## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** 14 June 2011  
**To:** Board of Trustees  
**From:** Tim Monds, Superintendent  
**Originator:** Emilie Keane, Associate Superintendent, Learning Services  
**Subject:** CYCLE 4 AISI YEAR TWO REPORT

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### Recommendation

That the Board of Trustees receives as information the Parkland School Division's AISI Project Year Two Report as presented at the Regular Meeting of 14 June 2011.

### Background

The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS I) is an 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 Alberta Education and its partners, AIS I provides targeted funding to school authorities to improve student learning and enhance student engagement and performance. After three successful three-year cycles of AIS I (2000-2009), AIS I is now in its fourth cycle, 2009-2012.

The focus of Parkland School Division's AIS I Project is the development of critical thinking as a means of improving student achievement and engagement in grades Kindergarten – 12.

Administration would be pleased to respond to any questions.

*Emilie Keane*

EK:jlf



**Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)  
Challenging Students to Think Critically  
PARKLAND SCHOOL DIVISION No. 70  
Progress Report**

*Presented to Board of Trustees 14 June, 2011  
By Leah Andrews, Director of Learning Services  
Resource Person: Diane Lander, Curriculum Facilitator*

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**REPORTING PERIOD: September 2010 – June 2011**

## **BACKGROUND**

Parkland School Division's (PSD) Cycle 4 Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) Project asks: What significant impacts does the embedding of critical thinking skills in teaching and learning have on student achievement and engagement? The goal is to improve student achievement and engagement in grades K-12 through the promotion of critical thinking. Intended outcomes are:

- Students are problem solvers and critical thinkers.
- Students are motivated to learn.
- Teachers are embedding critical thinking in their teaching practice.
- A common language around critical thinking exists in Parkland School Division.
- Students are well prepared for life and work environments.

In this, the second year of AISI Cycle 4, schools identified which of the division's two priority area(s) would be most appropriate for focusing the implementation of critical thinking at their site. i.e.:

- Teacher practice which provides developmentally responsive curriculum and effective assessment for all students Kindergarten through Grade 12.
- Kindergarten through Grade 12 students demonstrate skills of Citizenship and Social Responsibility.

PSD's critical thinking project focuses on professional development and implementation of the [Critical Thinking Consortium's](#) (TC<sup>2</sup>'s) critical thinking model. All schools within PSD are participating in the project, and each provides a minimum of one lead teacher who is a member of the AISI Cohort. To build capacity within PSD, members of the AISI Cohort participate in ongoing focused professional development sessions and networking, and in turn are responsible for developing a "critical thinking" environment in each of their schools.

TC<sup>2</sup>'s model promotes critical thinking through the creation of a community of thinkers, providing critical challenges as a means for students to uncover curricular content, explicit teaching of the tools (background knowledge, criteria for judgment, critical thinking vocabulary, thinking strategies, and habits of mind), and assessing for the utilization of the tools.

One aspect of the project involves teachers creating their own critical challenges with support from a TC<sup>2</sup> consultant. These critical challenges are made available to all PSD staff. [LearnAlberta](#) provides additional support in the form of readymade social studies critical challenges and *Modelling the Tools* lessons which were developed in collaboration with TC<sup>2</sup>. Additional support resources include the TC<sup>2</sup> publications. These teaching resources are used as exemplars to support teachers as they learn about the critical thinking model.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the critical thinking model is supported by divisional and school-based professional development. Implementation is evidenced throughout the district by division-wide, school-wide, and classroom-based critical challenges. Critical challenges are lessons which pose problems or tasks that engage students in thinking critically about curricular content.

### Professional Development (PD), Specific to 2010-2011

- Divisional PD consisted of seven full day workshops facilitated by a subject specific TC<sup>2</sup> consultant over the course of the 2010-2011 school year. Lead teachers worked together during these days to deepen their understanding about the critical thinking model and create critical challenges in Language Arts, Math, Social Studies and Science.
- For many of the sessions, lead teachers also brought classroom teachers to the working sessions, so they could also experience in-depth PD.
- In addition to having a TC<sup>2</sup> consultant on site, four of the workshops also featured subject specific facilitators from out of the province. Elluminate, an internet-based communication platform, allowed teachers to access facilitators that otherwise would have been inaccessible. For these workshops, teachers used Google Docs to create their critical challenges, which allowed the out-of-province facilitators to see their work as it was being written, and to offer constructive feedback during the writing process.
- Since the beginning of the project, lead teachers and facilitators have contributed to a collaboration site on *insidePSD*. Lead teachers use this space to ask questions, share their experiences and access common documents. They also post critical challenges that they develop, and in turn, are provided with feedback from a curriculum facilitator and a TC<sup>2</sup> consultant.
- As a component of an effective PD plan, lead teachers have continuous support and access to the TC<sup>2</sup> consultant and curriculum facilitators as needed.
- In addition to the divisional PD plan, schools create their own PD plans which include lead teachers acting in a leadership capacity to create a critical thinking environment in their schools. This year, many schools also brought in a TC<sup>2</sup> consultant to work directly with their teachers and educational assistants during division wide PD days.
- Closure was brought to the work this year with a yearend celebration, where lead teachers shared their school's critical thinking journey to date. They shared highlights, accomplishments and lessons learned. Lead teachers were able to take many of their colleagues' ideas back to their own schools for future consideration.

### Division-wide implementation

- At AISI lead teacher PD days, the TC<sup>2</sup> consultant models and shares critical challenges that teachers can use at their school sites, or adapt to meet curricular outcomes at their grade level.
- A Web space on insidePSD has been devoted to [critical thinking](#). In this space, all PSD staff can access many resources to support the implementation of critical thinking.
- Critical challenges created by lead teachers and curriculum facilitators are edited by a TC<sup>2</sup> consultant to ensure alignment with the critical thinking model. These lessons are accessible to all teachers through insidePSD.
- Learning Services has entered into a partnership with [Our Hidden Heroes Society](#), whereby Our Hidden Heroes supplies PSD, at no cost, lesson plans which address concepts in citizenship and social responsibility. In return, PSD adapts the lessons to embed critical thinking, has the lessons validated by TC<sup>2</sup>, and then delivers the adapted versions to Our Hidden Heroes. Lessons for grades 1 and 2 were adapted in 2009-2010, and lessons for grades 3 and 4 were adapted in 2010-2011. These lessons are accessible to all PSD staff through insidePSD.
- Learning Services has developed a critical thinking pamphlet for schools to share with parents.

### **School-wide implementation**

- Lead teachers develop school wide critical challenges that all classes participate in. A small sampling of the school wide challenges carried out this year follows.
  - Plan a nutritious hot lunch menu - The menus that were judged as best meeting the criteria were used for the school's hot lunches.
  - Design an effective calendar page - The pages that were judged as best meeting the criteria were used for the school calendar.
  - Judge anti-bullying messages for their effectiveness, then create an effective anti-bullying message of your own.
  - Create criteria for the perfect Christmas item of choice (e.g. sleigh, gingerbread house) and use those criteria in designing the item. This [Christmas Critical Thinking Project](#) is available for viewing on YouTube.
  - Math Fair- Students designed problems that met a given set of criteria which ensured the problems were accessible for a diverse range of students. The school then carried out the Math Fair.
  - Minute to Win it™ – Grades 7-9 Physical Education classes designed Minute to Win it™ challenges that met a set of criteria which ensured the challenges were accessible to all the Kindergarten to Grade 9 students in the school. The challenges were set up as stations in the gymnasium for a school wide celebration.
- [Ecole Meridian Heights School](#) has designated a space on their Website which features some of the critical thinking activities that are being carried out in school. This Web space documents evidence of implementation, provides exemplars of practical application for teachers across PSD, and provides information to parents.
- Schools inform parents about critical thinking through school newsletters and school council meetings. They also involve parents by promoting participation in various school-wide challenges.

### **Classroom-based implementation**

- Lead teachers create critical challenges to use in their own classrooms.
- Lead teachers provide support their colleagues in using prepared critical challenges, and in creating their own critical challenges.
- Lead teachers promote the use of published critical challenges. (i.e. LearnAlberta and TC<sup>2</sup> publications)

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout the schools in PSD, students are being engaged in learning through critical thinking. Results from division and provincial surveys, provincial assessments, parent and student focus groups and school reports will provide information that will help determine future considerations for 2011-2012, the last year of the cycle 4 AISI project. Reduced funding for AISI may have an impact on implementation at both the division and school levels.