

# Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta

## Preface

The Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA) was formed in 1958, and celebrated its fiftieth anniversary at a special general meeting held on 8 May 2008, in Calgary.

During the first part of the session, three speakers presented a historical overview of the life and work of the association. All three represented the Edmonton Society for Christian Education. This document consists of the written versions of their presentations at the anniversary meeting.

William Vanden Born spoke about the sixties. Part of that time he served as president of the association. A significant event during that period was the beginning of partial funding of independent schools by the provincial government, in 1967.

Lee Hollaar spoke about the seventies and early eighties. He served as the association's president part of that time and worked as voluntary executive director during the latter years. Much of his work consisted of building bridges with the provincial government and charting a course of action for the association.

Gary Duthler covered the period 1984 to 2000, during which he served as the first Executive Director of the association. He continued to build strong connections with provincial government officials. In addition, he worked at policy development for the association and became its public 'face'.

July 2010.

## **Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA)**

William H. Vanden Born

9 May 2008

My involvement with AISCA (then called the Association of Private Schools and Colleges in Alberta) began soon after I became a member of the board of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education (ESCE), where I served from 1962 to 1968. My name first appears in the AISCA records in 1962, and the last meeting I attended was in May 1969. During that period I served first simply as a delegate from the ESCE, then as Chairman of the Membership and Standards Committee, and later as secretary and as president. I have good memories of some of the meetings, and of many dedicated people who served on the board (especially such people as Ruth Dearing from Prairie High School in Three Hills and Burt Loken from what then was Camrose Lutheran College. Also of some of the dignitaries we invited to come and speak. An outstanding one was Herbert Coutts, then Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta (November 1967).

Reading through the history piece and the old minutes is a bit of a trip down memory lane, the times when I suddenly saw something I recognized from my younger past, and thinking “Oh yeah, I remember that!” As I began poking around in the documents, and especially when I was able to get a copy of a master’s thesis written in 1969, I became more interested, especially when I saw my name in print a few times in the documents. That brought back some memories, and it also alerted me to several events of which I have no memory whatsoever. It is really unfortunate that there seem to exist no photographs of either the people involved in the AISCA/APSCA from the earlier years, or from the meetings.

First a few words about the context in Canadian and American society in the fifties and sixties. One might ask: What was the most memorable decade in your life? What was the most memorable decade in the life of AISCA?

We tend to remember peaks of joy and peaks of tragedy most readily, whether public or private, in our personal or family lives or in the society or community we live in. Certain events, and the years during which they took place, simply are burned into our memory or, as in Isaiah, ‘graven in our hands’. We never forget them, and they can bring smiles or tears as we think or talk about them.

For me, it was the decade after our family immigrated from The Netherlands, it was the decade during which I started university, made public profession of my faith in Jesus Christ, did some courting and got married, and nearly finished my university education. All major and life-changing events. So much so, that a lot of events in north-american society passed me by and are not part of my memory at all.

The decade of the fifties has been called an amazing decade. It was a time of great change, a time of growth and prosperity. The decade during which ‘the past met the future’. People could actually own their own homes. There were fallout shelters, there was fear of communism, and the Korean war. There were plenty of jobs. In 1958,

American Express credit cards came on the scene. There were books like *Catcher in the Rye*, movies like *Ben Hur* and *The Ten Commandments*. There was television, and people like Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley, Rosa Parks, Nikita Krushchev, Fidel Castro. And there was Sputnik in 1957.

There were things such as UFO sightings, Cars such as Studebakers and Edsels, Frank Lloyd Wright, motel and fast food chains such as Holiday Inn and McDonalds. Lots of immigrants came to Canada.

For Canada, the fifties have been called its golden decade, a decade during which Canadian identity took firmer shape, during which Canadian literature became important. W.O. Mitchell wrote *Jake and the Kid*. Ellen Fairclough became Canada's first female cabinet minister (Secretary of State), under John Diefenbaker in 1957. Marilyn Bell swam across Lake Ontario in 1954. Canadian television was introduced in 1954.

The population of Edmonton and Calgary was about a quarter of what it is today, and the population of Alberta was about a third of today's.

The University of Alberta had 4000 students in 1952. The University of Calgary did not exist. The University of Alberta granted its first Ph.D. degree in 1953 and, in a way, came of age.

**And, the APSCA was born in the fifties, in the year of our Lord 1958.**

The sixties in Canada saw the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960, the last three hangings in 1962. It saw the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the new Canadian flag (1965), EXPO 67 in Montreal, the 100th anniversary of Confederation, the rise of nationalism in Quebec. 'O Canada' became Canada's national anthem (1967) and the Toronto Maple Leafs won their last Stanley Cup (also in 1967). Ernest Manning won his ninth consecutive majority in Alberta and the University of Lethbridge was founded.

Sadly, the sixties also saw the assassinations of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy.

My focus will be on the sixties; That is when the political breakthrough occurred with respect to public funding for private schools in Alberta.

In putting this presentation together, I benefited enormously from three different documents, two of which were provided to me by Duane Plantinga, your Executive Director, and I thank him for doing that. The first of these was a fairly complete set of minutes of twice-annual conventions (1965 to 1977) and of a number of executive meetings. Many of those sets of minutes are four or five pages long, single-spaced, with very detailed descriptions of the discussions that took place. The second was a 38-page summary account of the first 20 years prepared by Miss Ruth Dearing in 1987 at the request of Gary Duthler, then Executive Director of AISCA.

The third document is a 160-page M.Ed. dissertation by Stan Digout, *Public aid for private schools in Alberta: The making of a decision* (October 1969). The thesis provides an exhaustive and detailed account of the discussions and events that led up to the decision by the Government of Alberta to begin to provide a measure of financial support to qualified private or independent schools in the province. More about this later.

When the organization was first formed in early 1958. Dr. Harrison Villett of Alberta College, and Dr. John Collett and Dr. John Garden of Mount Royal College met to explore the possibility on 22 March 1958. A constitution was drafted and was formally accepted on 10 May. By 30 September the association had a charter membership of 19 different private schools. Things happened quickly, apparently.

The objectives of the association were stated as follows:

“The object and purpose of the Association is to (a) support and encourage high standards in the private schools of the Province, (b) to make known to the public the aims, ideals, and services of these schools, and (c) to strengthen understanding and cooperation between the private schools and other educational institutions, and between them and the government.”

It is worth noting here that gaining financial support from public funds was not among the objectives at the time.

To qualify for membership a school had to have been in operation for not less than three years, it must teach the Alberta curriculum or its equivalent as prescribed by the Department of Education, and, of course, maintain the standards of the association and pay the annual membership fees. As part of those standards, “each member school shall embrace and endeavor to reach beyond the standard requirements of the public school system, and shall have distinctive philosophies of education and additional purposes in education, religious and/or secular.”

Soon after APSCA was founded in 1958, it sent a brief to the Royal Commission on Education in Alberta. In it, the association does not ask for public funding, nor does it protest any action of the Department of Education, but it only wants “legal recognition”, i.e., clarification of the legal status of their schools. Only one of the 24 schools signing this brief was a Reformed Christian school.

Still earlier, in the early 1950s, the board of the then Calvin Christian School in Edmonton (in existence since 1949) made an effort to obtain financial assistance from the government. John Olthuis Sr. contacted Premier Ernest Manning by telephone to arrange a meeting to discuss such a possibility. It appears that the meeting did not take place but that at some point a High School inspector did visit with Mr. Olthuis. The early efforts were not successful other than in drawing the government’s attention to the matter.

There was, probably in 1952, a meeting between Premier Manning and Herman Wierenga, Klaas Visser, and John Verbrugge. I have a copy of a photograph of the foursome, as does Jim Visser, son of Klaas Visser. When I called Jim about it recently he told me that he remembers his parents returning from the meeting and saying that they talked theology quite a bit and that Manning was not so sure about a place for Christian.

The year 1961 seems to mark the beginning of renewed activity towards the goal of financial assistance.

Within the Alberta Teachers Association there appears to have been some concern about all this, because at their 1961 annual meeting a resolution was passed expressing their opposition to “the expenditure of public funds for either direct or indirect support of private schools which duplicate educational services offered by public or separate school districts.”

The question of public funds for private schools was raised in the Alberta Legislature (for the first time in recent years) in March 1962 when Earl Ansley and Ernest Watkins introduced a motion that would have entitled private schools to the same grants as public schools.

The reason for Earl Ansley's motion is not clear. There is no evidence to indicate that he acted on behalf of any private school group. According to Digout, quoting from a letter written to him by Louis Tamminga, the officers of the Christian Action Foundation, with me tagging along, met with Ansley at his home to discuss his position, which appeared to be mostly one of being disillusioned with the public school system and its monopoly on education in Alberta. I have no recollection of that meeting.

Ansley's motion was defeated 46 to 9, but the vote tally indicated that there were pockets of support for the idea, even among cabinet ministers.

In the APSCA, the first formally recorded activity in this regard took place at the 1962 Fall Convention.

Also in 1962, the Christian Action Foundation began to campaign actively to gain the support of as many MLAs as possible, both in Edmonton and Calgary. According to Tamminga, members of the Foundation met with almost every legislator in the province on some occasion, in some instances on numerous occasions.

Some time in 1962 I was elected to serve on the board of the Edmonton Society for Christian Education. And soon thereafter, in November 1962, I was asked to represent that board at a meeting of AISCA. It was an interesting experience. There were perhaps 40 people at the convention, with a wide variety of backgrounds, and representing 23 private schools, again with a wide variety of educational objectives and philosophies.

My first impressions of the association, for better or worse, were that it seemed to function a bit like a mutual admiration society, and not much more. I was young and idealistic and without a lot of experience, and I no doubt underestimated the association.

According to Stan Digout's records, I presented a resolution to the 17 November 1962 fall convention, on behalf of ESCE (apparently I had been asked to serve on the Resolutions Committee).

The resolution read as follows:

1. WHEREAS the right to educate their children belongs to the parents, and
2. WHEREAS the basic democratic freedom of parents to exercise this right to educate their children or have them educated in harmony with their conviction, provided that the employment of qualified teachers and the maintenance of prescribed standards of education are assured, and
3. WHEREAS education is more than the conveying of facts and is implemented within a basic concept of man within the universe, and
4. WHEREAS many parent wish to exercise their right to educate their children within a basic concept other than that prevailing in school systems presently operated with public funds in this Province, and
5. WHEREAS the Government provides for education our of public funds, and

6. WHEREAS supporters of public schools and superstores of separate schools receive their proportional benefits of such public funds, and
7. WHEREAS supporters of private schools do not receive such proportional benefits of public funds:

BE IT RESOLVED that according to principles of equity and justice public funds should benefit both public and private schools that meet the prescribed legal provisions and standards, and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the Government of the Province of Alberta should implement these democratic principles by granting to accredited private schools (as defined by the Department to Education Act, Revised statutes of Alberta, 1955, Chapter 95 and amendments and regulations pursuant thereto) their proportional share of public funds.

My sidekicks at the convention, as I recall it, were John Olthuis, a law student six or seven years younger than me, and William De Boer, about ten years older. I do remember very clearly that the brief presentation was followed by a resounding silence. The issue that we put on the table had to that point not been part of the objectives of the association or of discussions at the conventions the previous four years. It became quite clear in the discussion that representatives from the member schools were divided on the propriety of even asking for public funds. For some it was a case of a certain interpretation of the (American) political principle of separation of church and state; for others it was a fear of government control and associated loss of independence. In any case, the motion to adopt the resolution was defeated.

We tried a few more things:

A motion to refer the resolution to the executive of the association was approved.

A motion to ask the executive to meet with MLA Earl Ansley to assure him of our interest in his action was defeated. More about him shortly.

A third motion asked the executive to take immediate action on the resolution by approaching the government through the Department of Education and/or the Minister of Education, and that this be done so that the matter might be discussed at the spring session of the Legislature. That motion also was defeated.

So now what?

It is worth noting that several of the speakers who opposed the resolution spoke of steadily rising financial costs for their schools as playing a role in helping them change their views in subsequent months.

Members of the Calgary Society for Christian Education (who had opened a Christian School in 1963), spearheaded by Hank Verhoeff, worked hard at contacting every MLA they could, and a number of them met together at a luncheon in Calgary on 31 March 1963. Among those present were Anders Aalborg, Minister of Education, Arthur Dixon, Speaker of the House, and Fred Colborne, Minister of Public Works. This type of direct contact undoubtedly was valuable in paving the way for the later more formal approach taken by AISCA.

On 11 December 1963, Olthuis and Tamminga had an interview with Premier Manning on another matter, and at the end of the discussion The Premier inquired about the situation in the Christian schools. According to Tamminga, “this was apparently the first time the Premier heard some of our arguments and motives.”

At the 30 November 1963 convention (the earliest meeting for which I have seen a complete copy of the minutes, fortunately very detailed) the record indicates that the Committee on Membership and Standards (of which I at that time was the chairman) presented a questionnaire that was to be sent to the member schools, to be completed by teaching staff members and to be approved by the respective governing boards. The questionnaire dealt with a request that the government provide proportional benefits from public funds for private schools since we are educating Alberta young people, and was deemed to be in line with a resolution at the spring 1963 convention that the executive study the matter. The proposed procedure was approved.

At that same convention the association also adopted a resolution that had to do with the role of the provincial government in providing teachers’ pensions (for teachers in private schools).

At the following spring’s convention (2 May 1964) the earlier resolution requesting the Government of Alberta to grant to recognized private schools their proportional share of public funds was put on the table again and was duly approved, thus paving the way for a formal approach to the government by the association’s officers. Even then, there were lingering objections from some.

In May 1964 president Loken reported that a brief had been prepared for presentation to the government. Some of the information was that “there are at present 29 elementary private schools with 147 teachers, and 2905 students, and 13 private secondary schools with 176 teachers and 3309 student this year.” [total 42 schools and 6200 students]

Later on in the meeting, the body adopted the following resolutions, “BE IT RESOLVED that according to principles of equity and justice, public funds should benefit both public and private schools that meet the prescribed legal provisions and standards, And BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the government of the Province of Alberta should implement these democratic principles by granting to recognized private schools, as defined by the Department of Education Act . . . their proportional share of public funds.

There was a motion to table the resolution. That motion was defeated, and the resolution then was put to the vote and approved. Clearly, concerns and reservations continued to exist. The president noted, however, that the wording of the resolution would be included in the brief soon to be presented to the Cabinet.

The brief from the APSCA was presented to the Cabinet on 21 May 1964, by Dr. Gulbrand Loken, then president of the Association. He reported later that he thought the brief was well received, but emphasized that what had happened behind the scenes was far more influential in winning favour among government officials.

An example of this behind-the-scenes activity was that the Christian Action Foundation mailed its publication *The Christian Vanguard* to all Alberta MLAs for all of the five years prior to getting funding. They lobbied MLAs in order to create “a growing understanding in these men with respect to parental rights in education, different

philosophies of education, and injustices with respect to the present system of Government financing of education.”

Further meetings took place in Edmonton, by members of the Christian Action Foundation, for example, with Randolph McKinnon (20 April 1964) who later became Minister of Education, and Edgar Hinman, Provincial Treasurer. Hinman was considered very supportive in the quest for public aid for Christian Schools and, in fact, gave permission to be quoted publicly on his stand in favour of such aid.

By the fall of 1964 there were indications that perhaps some form of public aid for private schools was closer to reality. Through the efforts of the Advisory Committee on Private Schools and Colleges a number of concessions had been granted to private institutions, including the right of private school teachers to mark departmental examination papers, provision of school registers to private schools, and bus transportation privileges for private school pupils on a regular route. Also, by July 1964 APSCA had been informed that agreement had been reached on a pension plan for private school teachers. Another event was the passing of Bill 129 in which approval was given for payment of grants to private junior colleges in Alberta.

There is not much recorded evidence of activity on the issue of public funds for private schools during 1965. Late that year, however, some people from Calgary, Edmonton, and Medicine Hat (Hillcrest Christian College,) got together to prepare another brief to the government. The brief was presented to the Cabinet by John Olthuis and myself (allegedly, though I have no memory of it) on 31 January 1966, with copies being sent to all MLAs. The brief suggested grants-in-aid totaling \$166,000, or about \$150 per pupil,

Even before this brief was presented, Calgary MLA Donald Fleming had decided to present a motion in the Legislature. He had discussed strategy options with three other MLAs and with members of the Calgary Society for Christian Education. In addition, he had spoken about it at an open meeting of members of his constituency had obtained the approval of those present.

And so it happened on 3 March 1966:

WHEREAS the Government advocates the principle that every child in Alberta should be assured an equal opportunity for education, regardless of financial circumstances of place of residence, and

WHEREAS many parents, who desire their children to receive their education in an atmosphere and environment other than that of the public school system, have established private schools,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly urge the Government to consider means of extending a measure of financial assistance to private schools teaching the Alberta curriculum.

It appears that the resolution had been approved by the members in caucus, though no written record is available to document it. The majority of cabinet ministers appeared to be supportive, though the Minister of Education (Randolph McKinnon) was opposed. Education department officials apparently were split on the issue, with more being opposed than in favour. Donald Fleming did his share of lobbying with fellow MLAs. A number of cabinet ministers were supportive, including Premier Manning and Anders

Aalborg, a former minister of education (earlier he had been opposed). The most important speech in the Legislature almost certainly was that by Donald Fleming.

Digout devotes nearly ten pages of his thesis to the extensive debate in the Legislature. In the end, the vote on 29 March 1966 was 34 to 16 in favour, and the decision opened the door for direct public support of private schools in Alberta. Such support did not become law, however, until 31 March 1967.

Jim Visser and John Olthuis were in the legislature at the time the vote was taken. According to Jim Visser, Randolph McKinnon left the assembly when the vote was being taken.

In the Department of Education Expenditure Estimates, under the heading “Grants for Private Schools”, an amount of \$400,000 was provided for aid to private schools during 1967.

During the May 1966 AISCA meeting two significant points were approved for inclusion in proposals to the Minister of Education’s Advisory Committee on Private Schools:

1. In order to qualify for government grants a private school must have been in operation for at least two years. The time period later was changed from two to three years by the government’s advisory committee on private schools.
2. At the time of application for government grants a private school must have at least two classrooms with pupils, with not more than three grades per classroom. That was later changed also (by the government’s advisory committee) to a minimum of 30 pupils and two teachers, with not more than three grades per teacher.

With reference to the resolution regarding public funds for private schools that was passed by the Legislative Assembly earlier in the year, the association decided that it should express its sincere thanks to MLAs Don Fleming and Robert Simpson, who moved and seconded the resolution, and that it should express “our appreciation and thanks for their interest and concern for the work and place of the private schools in Alberta and for their presentation and successful guidance of this resolution through the Legislature.” That was carried..

So much for the AISCA conventions and their deliberations.

That is the way it was in the sixties.

# AISCA

## 50th Anniversary Celebration, Calgary, Alberta

Lee Hollaar

May 9, 2008

### Introduction

As I look about this room I see some familiar faces. Many, indeed most, are faces that have come to take up the torch for justice for parental choice in education. Truly much has changed. Not only the names and faces, but also the social climate, including the political climate has morphed. Perhaps nothing has been more instrumental to the changes over the last fifty years than society's general acceptance of new forms of pluralism. AISCA too has changed much.

In Greek mythology we encounter **Proteus**. Homer refers to him as the “Old Man of the Sea.” He could foretell the future and as that was prized he was often set upon to do so. He tried to escape the pressure or the task of forecasting. He would only answer to someone who was capable of capturing him and holding him. When seized, he would exercise another attribute of his: he would assume different shapes such as a seal, lion, serpent, leopard, pig, even water or a tree. Being versatile, mutable and capable of assuming many forms he was a hard fellow to capture—much less to hold! Proteus, possessing the gift of endless transformation, is a metaphor that describes people or organizations that change more easily—both in appearance or principles. But, alas, change is a constant!

There are many good lines which describe **change**. Some of these include:

*If the music changes so does the dance.* Hausa (Nigerian) proverb

*When a person is not as she used to be, she does not behave as she used to behave.* Igbo (Nigerian) proverb

*You change your opinions for some biscuits.* Haitian proverb

*All change is not growth; as all movement is not forward.* Ellen Glasgow

*The bigger the change we hope to see, the longer we must be willing to invest, work, and wait for it.* Andy Crouch

### The Story of Change

Congratulations on AISCA's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary! Much has happened since 1958. The AISCA story is indeed a story of celebration. A story of significant accomplishment! On the Canadian scene, in those early years, independent school supporters came together to pursue justice in education. Alberta was the place where things happened. Not in Ontario, not in BC. There was a political will to break some ground and give a degree of justice in the form of funding to independent schools. Perhaps not legal recognition vis-a-vis a particular piece of legislation like BC has now, but nevertheless, a full 10 years before BC got any funding, Alberta had had a breakthrough. The other provinces were merely talking about it. (And in the case of Ontario, they are still only talking about it!) In 1967 the first funding of \$100 per student began. Small by today's measure but it was more than a symbolic breakthrough, to be sure.

However, one needs to ask, did real legal recognition—albeit perhaps implied in funding—ever formally occur here? Maybe AISCA is still looking for it. Kind of like the prank a group of students played in Montana recently. They let loose three goats in the school. But before turning them loose, they painted numbers on the goats: 1, 2, and 4. School administrators spent most of the day looking for # 3. They never did find it! The missing animal may still be legal recognition, and we may not even be looking for it anymore. (And we hope never to find a smelly carcass in the furnace room that was forgotten, neglected and died long ago after people stopped searching for it.) In light of the current reality, is the public school system the only legislatively legitimated arm of government that qualifies for full public support? In the early days, legal recognition of independent school education as a contributor to the public good was important.

I arrived on the Alberta scene in 1973. I moved here from the US where there was strong antipathy towards independent schools, and particularly with the well developed “wall of separation” between church and state, towards the faith-based schools in which I worked. Knowing that I had been involved in some independent school advocacy organizations in the US, only a few months into my sojourn here I was asked by the Edmonton Society of Christian Schools if I was interested in attending an AISCA meeting. I remember walking to one of the upstairs classrooms of Alberta College. After only a couple of meetings I walked out of the January meetings as one of the officers of the organization. My previous experience for pursuing justice in education came from my experiences in Iowa, where like in Michigan; these movements were known by the telling names *Iowa Association of Non-Public Schools* or as in the case of Michigan, *Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools*. (The conversation in the US at that time had less to do with justice and asserting the claim of contributing to the public good. It had more to do with addressing teacher and principal certification and exam issues.) The attendance at the meeting was telling: representatives from Alberta College, Concordia College, Camrose Lutheran College, Prairie Bible Institute, and representatives from a number of independent school groups, the largest contingent came from the Christian school community, a couple of Jewish schools, the Adventist community, a Lutheran school, and a real independent, independent school that even had its own piece of legislation allowing it to exist, i.e., Tempo School.

With elementary, secondary schools and colleges in our membership and in attendance, the name Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta was apt. At the time, there were independent colleges among us albeit they were few in number and really had no other membership/advocacy group. They were concerned about a sustaining environment for their post secondary schools. They, like the independent elementary and secondary schools, had solid histories but were small in number and we needed to be united by our numbers. In reality, we were “NON-PUBLIC” together. And, in addition, some of these colleges did indeed offer some secondary education, and in the case of Prairie Bible, an elementary and secondary school program.

With some funding already flowing in 1973 [started in 1967], there was some implicit recognition for independent schools. However, from that first meeting, it was clear to me that the real issue and thrust of the conversation was to enshrine in law some form of legal recognition. The wisdom of the time was that while there was some funding flowing

to independent schools without legislation—and hence, could be changed or eliminated just as easily without the fuss of public debate in the legislature and the attendant press coverage, the preferred option was to seek some more formal enshrinement in the statutes of Alberta. And without such legal recognition, at times we took solace in the fact that we might not have received funding and the implicit recognition if we had had to go the route of formal legislation. (I recall the folks in BC and Ontario at the time, shook their heads. Our essential consolation was pragmatism—dare I say wisdom?—was that this might even be politically prudent as both of those other provincial independent school bodies were clearly seeking legislative remedy which was slower in coming and in the case of Ontario is still illusive.) But under the encouragement of John Ludwig, who had also served as a MLA, Bill 300, a piece of legislation was crafted. It would give us legal standing. It was trotted back and forth to the Alberta Legislative Assembly, this legendary bill (Maybe it is still kicking around.) was the official position of AISCA. In January 1976 the following motion was adopted:

*That AISCA reaffirm its support for Bill 300 and that our executive be instructed to promote as actively as possible, its official adoption by the Province of Alberta.*  
[Emphasis added]

So without an Executive Director, who did all of this trotting around? Notice, it was the executive which was instructed to promote this attempt to enshrine justice. As a member of the executive I was impressed, challenged and perhaps at times frustrated by the lack of time and political savvy on the part of the people like myself who were well intentioned but often ill-advised. Besides, we were all fully employed in our respective school settings. Alas, I remember a meeting that had been arranged with the Minister of Education in the Carillon Room in the Alberta Legislature Building. During the meeting one of our overstretched delegates who was sitting directly across the table from me fell sound asleep while the Minister was responding to our brief attesting to the importance of independent schools on the Alberta educational scene. We all noticed the dozer among us but the large table sitting in that room would have required me to have legs two meters long to awaken our delegate. (And I would have had I had the reach!) Not a good lobby strategy. However, we had commitment on our side!

Some of the very earliest minutes of my involvement with AISCA included references to the emerging idea called the ***Umbrella Concept***. In 1976 the door had been opened as Talmud Torah of Edmonton and I.L. Peretz of Calgary had concluded an umbrella agreement or “memorandum of understanding” with their respective public school boards. The umbrella concept was viewed by most as dangerous and dubious, fraught with many land mines. We were somewhat surprised and shocked when we were told of the arrangements made by the two Hebrew schools—again, not by formal agreement. Member schools regularly watched what was happening to the Hebrew schools half-way expecting them, like Proteus, to disappear beneath the waves of the huge public school boards. If they had, the rest of us would have said, Aha! Just what we expected. Talmud Torah teachers were now even members of the ATA and were unionized! That really can’t last! (Mixing a metaphor, remember those old, old maps of the explorers, where a dragon was inked someplace in the one of the earth’s oceans. It is related to the warning

inscribed on the Pillars of Hercules at Gibraltar on which say *Ne plus ultra* (“There is nothing beyond.”)

(Parenthetically, the umbrella idea morphed; the first edition of the Alternative School model, now rather common in Alberta, was part of much earlier discussion long ago in the province. I recall, as a representative of the Edmonton Christian Schools, meeting with the public system to explore some kind of arrangement—even while suspicious of others who did. When the Edmonton Public Schools of the day said they didn’t want us, we approached the Edmonton Separate School Board. The Catholics might have more sympathy for us. And they did. But they said they were not about to evoke a major turf war whereby taxes of properties of parents of the Edmonton Christian Schools would be assigned to the Separate system. (Personally, my wife and I designated our taxes to the Separate system as an act of solidarity with faith-based education.)

It was generally felt that public school boards would assume too many responsibilities which were considered essential to the distinctive type of programs offered by the mostly faith-based independent schools. In addition, AISCA was concerned that under an umbrella agreement “there is no guarantee of equal or consistent treatment by various public school boards.” This was based on the conversations of the mid-seventies of a number of independent schools with their area public schools, like Immanuel Christian School of Lethbridge and the Edmonton Society for Christian Education. We even pressed the Ministry for a “draft agreement” of the emergent conversations about various affiliation arrangements.

As the AISCA conversations increasingly dealt with elementary and secondary school issues, interest on the part of the colleges in AISCA seemed to diminish. In addition, with the appearance and struggles for recognition of institutions such as The King’s College, now The King’s University College, seemed to forge a conversation among the colleges themselves that continues and has resulted in some justice via both funding and recognition—and affiliation agreements, their own version of the umbrella concept, I guess.

Meanwhile, funding for elementary and secondary schools was increasingly accepted. As a step forward in the struggle for greater justice, the government was moved to attach the funding to a percentage of one specific foundation grant: SFPP if my memory serves me correctly. The initial announcement of grant-based funding created quite a furor. It seemed that every January or February when the per pupil education grants were released there was either a good news day, or a bad news day! Those, such as the public school trustees or teachers union made lots of noise and seemed to get lots of press and air time. The AISCA approach was more often than not, to keep our heads down and let the storm pass. For the most part, it seemed to work! You can imagine the excitement or frustration when the foundation grants were announced around January or February of each year. For example, in 1977 the funding moved from forty to fifty per cent of the basic foundation program grant per pupil. This was a long way from the statement made by the Alberta Education minister, the Honourable Mr. Aalborg in May of 1963: “No public funds for private schools unless they are ministering to a public need such as assisting retarded children.” [At the time just educating didn’t seem to meet the public need! That

did reflect a bit of the mindset of earlier days.] Even without the adoption of a Bill 300 or something like it, independent schools were in reality being recognized by the government of Alberta. And, to be sure, there were always the howling cries of the ATA and other voices who thought that independent schools did not contribute to the public good.

In the late seventies and early eighties, a number of new independent schools, mostly Christian day schools, were being established and coming on to the scene. Some of them were transplanted from the US and had a pronounced commitment to separation of church and state. There was some naïveté among these new upstarts. Further, some of them used an American-based curriculum called ACE: Accelerated Christian Education. Alberta Education had some real problems with this curriculum. AISCA's commitment to independent education was stretched, and occasionally stressed. The ACE curriculum of that day was too far afield for Alberta Education to give approval. (One such school was operated by a church community and involved a certain Stockwell Day, no less, in the leadership of the school.) AISCA's commitment to diversity was being put to the test. Existing members were excited by the new members. Greater diversity seemed to embody our foundational perspective. (And the Department of Education of the day seemed to require a more cookie-cutter approach to education. That has certainly changed.) Our minutes though captured our missional commitment. I quote:

“It was felt that underlying problems concerning this area [curriculum approval] still exist due to the fact [that] this is one of the fundamental issues concerning independent schools and their reason to exist...” Sept. 20, 1978.

Nevertheless, even diversity has to have some limits. Some of us were very concerned about the negative publicity that arose. One notable case was that of an independent, independent school operated by one Larry Jones, in Calgary in 1986.

Now back to the pursuit of legal status—perhaps, goat # 3. AISCA came to the decision that we needed to move very wisely and intentionally. Maybe established precedent and practices did seem to hold some legal warrant. Maybe we were better off with a softer arrangement where we were in fact moving right along with increases in grants while BC was just getting their foot in the doorway to public support with the passage of the Independent School act of 1976 and Ontario, then like now, got nothing—and continues to cope with the bombed out hulks of mis-calculated politics. But still in pursuit of legal recognition, an Edmonton area law firm which had dealt with some independent school issues was invited to give AISCA legal counsel regarding the legal status of independent schools in Alberta. The Melnyk & McCord report was referenced for several years thereafter.

A particular concern in addition to the practical dimension of legal recognition was the abiding presence of Section 133 of the School Act. This defined **compulsory education of all children under the purview of the public or separate schools**. The Minister of Education on April 23, 1981, proposed to AISCA:

“that a clause be added in that it would allow parents, upon signing a document, to take their children out of the public system. This would excuse the public

system from educating the child and place all the responsibilities for the proper education of our children with their parents.”

### **National Affiliation in Common Cause**

It was during this time when AISCA joined in a national conversation as FISC, the Federation of Independent Schools of Canada, was organized. I had the pleasure of serving as the second president. However, education being a provincial domain seemed to not have sufficient import for sustaining the national organization. (However, I did have the opportunity at one time of meeting with the federal Minister of Finance, a Jean Chretien.)

### **A Change of Attitude in the Minister of Education**

David King, an MLA from Edmonton, made a number of guest appearances at membership meetings of AISCA member schools, a practice regularly encouraged to our members. He early on stated his qualified support for independent schools. Simply stated, he preferred parents having options: **choice**. Later he spoke at an AISCA membership meeting. Such interactions were valuable. Later he became the Minister of Education. He valued flexibility in pursuing alternatives in education. It was the Honourable David King who announced that funding would eventually move to 80% of the SFPPF Grant at the pace of a 5% increase per year until that target was reached.

It was Mr. King’s intention that the 80% target would then occasion a study as to the appropriateness of funding beyond this point. To my knowledge, I don’t know if the 80% target was ever reached. If I recall correctly, the occasion for discussion began a little early, at 75% of the one grant. At 75% of funding of the one grant—and we always needed to mention that as it was not always understood--approaching the 80% funding, the Department of Education gave terms of reference for the undertaking of the Woods Gordon Study which assessed the **place** of independent schools prior to giving any further increases in funding—if at all. I represented AISCA on that study.

### **The *Alternative* School Model**

Meanwhile, a new word replaced the word **umbrella** in the minutes of AISCA. It was the word ***alternative*** school. The question began to arise why should there be independent schools in some jurisdictions like most of those that had existed to that point in the province and the new alternative schools with full funding such as the Logos School in Calgary. And the Minister of the day was encouraging the exploration of responsible alternatives. The alternative arrangement in Calgary animated the next school trustee election in that jurisdiction that a slate of *anti-alternative* trustees campaigned and were elected. And the Logos experiment came to an end. The alternative discussion was over for some time until it reappeared yet again in the arrangements of the **alternative school model**.

### **AISCA Employs an Executive Director**

Early on the minutes record the efforts and intention to increase the visibility of AISCA. Gary Duthler did a great job in taking us from a group of volunteers to a more consistent

and effective presence attended by interactive and important credibility. In “pre-Gary” days, our goal was to have a meeting with the Minister twice a year. And increasingly—perhaps even amazingly—we achieved that goal. And it did give considerable credibility. Those meetings really were very grass roots—another term used quite often.

It was recognized that advocacy work for independent school parents was too important to be done by volunteers only. So it was the Government Relations Committee of the organization I was working for at the time, the Edmonton Society for Christian Education, in 1976 recommended to AISCA “to employ a full time executive director for the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges of Alberta.” That recommendation was passed along to AISCA who amended that recommendation to be a “part-time Executive Secretary.” Pay was to be the princely amount of \$6 per hour!

As mentioned earlier most of the affairs of AISCA were carried on by the volunteer members of the executive. All briefs, correspondence, papers, and delegations were done by the executive. And much of the duty fell to the chair: John Ludwig, Dr. George Cormack, and then to me. Jumping ahead just a bit, after I became chair of AISCA in 1978, the tempo—no pun intended—increased. By the time we finally did get an Executive Director, Mr. Gary Duthler, I had been given consent and encouragement by the Society of Christian Schools of Edmonton to do some of the work of AISCA. They did not reclaim nor expect to reclaim remuneration for my time. (I think AISCA owes a debt of gratitude to the Edmonton Society for Christian Education for their strong commitment to justice and public policy.) While I enjoyed the contact with government, I always seemed to forget that my work kind of waited for me back at the ranch. But when Gary began his work as one-third-time, I had been volunteering upwards to about one-quarter time. Further, I was in a position as a principal in the Edmonton Christian School system to help make Gary’s appointment work as he needed employment for the two-thirds time. And so, he capably taught in the school in which I was principal until AISCA moved the position to full time.

In 1982 AISCA once again took renewed interest in employing an Executive Secretary, albeit part time. Ads were placed. And we got ONE application. But one good application is all one needs, right? And so on May 31, 1983, Gary Duthler was interviewed in the facilities of The King’s College. His wife Drika was present for the interview. A motion was made that Gary would begin working part-time on January 1, 1984. One of the expectations was that the position could be worked up to a full time position dependent “partly on the profile that the Executive Secretary can create in the first year or two. Creation of such a profile would include working with MLAs, public servants in the Department of Education and with professional organizations such as the ATA and the ASTA. It was assumed that the position would begin as a one-third-time position. Good for us, Gary accepted the generous offer. Or as Dwight Moodie, an AISCA board member put it (and for some reason it is recorded in the minutes) “Obviously Gary is not coming for the salary.” To underwrite this new venture, a coming of age after 24 ½ years of AISCA existence, fees were raised to \$4. And few complaints. AISCA seemed to have sufficient grass roots support that the membership was ready for this.

Gary quickly established himself in the Alberta educational scene. He had a natural and witty way of interacting. He understood choice in education and could articulate that very well. His comments, honed over the years, were considered and well received. They were thought-provoking and generally non-alienating. Our voice was now heard more readily in the marketplace of ideas. Many doors opened up to him. The Chair of the day, namely me, felt greatly relieved. And the work of pursuing many long term AISCA goals moved forward. Gary's extensive experience in the independent schools of Ontario was evident. However, unlike Ontario, his work here was bearing fruit immediately. Some of his interventions brought considerable profile and legitimacy to AISCA. That ethos still abides.

### **Some Interesting Challenges**

Then there was the case of what happened in a public school regarding anti-Semitic teachings of Jim Keegstra. For whatever reason, a number of voices picked up the event and assumed that this was a problem of some independent schools—a strong criticism was placed at the doorstep of independent schools. It still defies logic! Textbooks and practices were reassessed. AISCA and many of its member schools made presentations to what was sometime referred to as the 'Ron Ghitter Commission.' Its official name was The Committee on Tolerance and Understanding. In the pre-Gary days our minutes record the following:

*It was felt that we should make a presentation [to the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding] which affirms the mandate of promoting tolerance and understanding and explain what that means from our perspective. For example, the concept of multi-culturalism that makes little provision for religious concerns or alternatives to public schools in its mosaic needs to be challenged.*

### **Some Closing Thoughts**

Having long been an advocate of justice in education, including recognition of government's contributions to the public good through funding, partial funding then seems like partial justice. Justice is an interesting concept; justice wears different faces for different people. While justice delayed is justice denied (Gladstone) or as in the words of Barry Goldwater in the turbulent sixties: "... moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue," Yet perhaps we need to revisit Shakespeare's Hamlet where he said: *This above all else: to thine own self be true, And it must follow as night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man* (Hamlet I, iii, 75). Maybe we are all driven by the desire for funding. Can that be? Whatever words we use, is it really about the money? Maybe we need to admit that we have met the enemy and it is us! There is the Haitian proverb which says: ***You change your opinions for some biscuits.***

While visiting Alberta on behalf of FISA, the BC Federation of Independent Schools in June of 2001, we visited Alberta Education officials, we visited an alternative school, and we visited the offices of the Superintendent of the Edmonton Public Schools who subsequently came to BC—and is now the BC Minister of Education's agent in China. At that time we were told (and I have the memo given out) that "...as the alternate school is a public school, unlike when it was a private school, does not have the right to pick and choose whether they wish to accept a student into the program. Section 16(2) indicates---

the board may offer that program to those students whose parents enroll them in the program.” Again, on that same visit, the aspect of prime political importance is that of parental satisfaction. And it was clearly stated that the “component of parental satisfaction is at the highest levels due to access of choice.”

Admittedly, parents choosing alternative schooling for their children are exercising their proper freedom to choose. Again, that is a justice long pursued by the AISCA. In an allegedly pluralistic society with educational choices the larger public board indeed may allow—and probably does—the alternative school to carry on such instruction as would be of key interest to the preservation of their specific identities. Again, independent schools have always claimed distinction. If the relationships, however, become more assimilative in nature, they would alter and absorb the intrinsic uniqueness of the former independent school. If government is to uphold the ideals of democratic cultural pluralism, then continued improvements and safeguards must be made that allow “independent” school authorities the right of self-determination as legitimate and distinct interdependent social entities. However, could not one argue that a true commitment to pluralism, with access to the same levels of funding, would facilitate parental choice and probably better ensure the long-term viability of such independent schools, schools operated by boards of people who zealously pursue the embodiment of the claimed distinctives?

Clearly, the major driving force leading independent schools to seek alternative program status is the potential of increased funding. Independent schools are probably healthier when they are chosen by parents because of a commitment and conviction about the kind of education that their children need. However, it cannot be denied that access to fuller funding under the public school board does accord a blessing that allows many more people to benefit from alternative programs. It may, however, in the long run be to our detriment simply because the choice will no longer require the same level of conviction or commitment.

So what I am saying, we have seen the enemy and he is us. This new form of inclusive education has moved well beyond the model of “we” and “they”. This is a long way from the “non-public” school organizations some of which still exist in the US. But then, if we are still looking for goat # 3, maybe not. However, it would appear, given demographic realities and exposure to mass media, “they” are fast becoming “we” according to Eleanor Doctor, a lawyer supportive of independent school education and who has written much on this subject. In a postmodern world, differences are diminished. And that is not all bad. However, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance (Milton). I believe that responsible citizenship involves justice and it also involves a clear delineation of our purposes for existence. Are we, as independent schools, ensuring the continuation of these distinctives in our staffing, in conversation with our parents, in our professional development, in our boards? If not, we need to have some fear of the heavy hand of assimilation. Coming back to Proteus, are these changes of appearance? Or are they the more dangerous change of principle? But life in today’s globalized culture is all about risks, like in the book with the telling title, *Walking on the Bridge as You Build It*.

I will close with a story taken from Dr. Seuss: “Are you my mother?” the young bird asks. Having fallen from its nest upon hatching, it encounters a kitten, hen, dog, and a cow, and old car, boat, plane, and finally, a power shovel. At first glance each appears to be a potential mother but alas, each turns away from the seeking bird. So who are we, and who or what is our “mother”? This is not a random search for meaning. The nest in which we were born has left deep marks in our beings. It has shaped us into who we are. Independent schools need to have identity. The rights of parents to shape the nurture of their children. Maybe we can hope for an ending like the Dr. Seuss edition. The baby bird was not a cat, a dog, an airplane, or even a chicken, and when it finally saw its mother, it knew.

Keep searching for the vehicle that best reflects our root—outside of the public system, perhaps inside, if safeguards prevent the adoption out to kitten family. Or to mix a metaphor, where is goat #3 anyhow? Is he still alive?

## **Growing AISCA, 1984 – 2000**

Gary Duthler, Executive Director during those years

May 8, 2008

AISCA's challenge has always been to define and refine the role of the independent schools as viable and vital contributors to the education of Alberta's public. A number of examples highlight how this challenge was addressed during my tenure as Executive Director for the decade and a half beginning in the mid 1980s.

In 1983, when the AISCA board offered me the contract to be the first executive director of the association, they did so with the warning that they did not want me to "rock the boat." They were happy with the quiet, confident relationship the association had experienced with the Education Department and the Ministers in the past, and they looked forward to continuing that relationship. However, within a few months the educational scene in Alberta was tumultuous, especially for proponents of independent school choice, and rather than "rocking the boat," we were hanging on to the gunwales to keep afloat. The times had changed significantly: this was not to be a quiet sailing excursion but an exhilarating water sports event. While we never did learn to walk on stormy water we certainly learned to use the waves to propel our surfboards.

### *Committee on Tolerance and Understanding and Saving Public Education*

In response to the teaching of Jim Keegstra in the public school system, the provincial government had created the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding (CTU), with Mr. Ron Ghitter as its chair. The committee was charged with investigating how Keegstra's teaching could have found its way into the public schools system, but Mr. Ghitter made it abundantly clear that this would not be his focus. In a speech to the Alberta School Boards Association prior to the commencement of the Committee's work he declared that independent schools, especially those with a religious basis, by definition were institutions that fostered intolerance. He maintained this bigoted position – disguised as a tolerant one – throughout the hearings and deliberations of the Committee. Not surprisingly it also found its way into the Committee's first volume of the Final Report.

However, in spite of himself, Ghitter had to come to terms with the representations made by the independent schools under the leadership of AISCA; representations that argued strongly for a society in which diversity is celebrated; a society that does not need to homogenize or minimize differences in order in the name of tolerance. On November 14, 1984, Ron Ghitter was invited to speak at AISCA's AGM, and he toned down his anti-independent school rhetoric significantly, and by the time the final volume of the Committee's Final Report was written in 1985, the Committee admitted that there was a significant role for independent schools, including and especially religious independent schools, in a provincial education that both tolerates and celebrates the diversity of its citizens.

Nevertheless, the seeds of intolerance planted and cultivated by Ghitter took on new life in the summer of 1985 with the Save Public Education (SPE) campaign orchestrated out

of Calgary. Sheldon Chumir, a civil rights lawyer who later became a provincial MLA, was the campaign's key spokesman. SPE's message, proclaimed in full-page ads in the major provincial newspapers, was concise and pointed. Independent schooling may be a parental right, but it is not in the public interest that parents exercise that right. The province must stop all funding of independent schools and redirect to fund into the public schools as the only way to "save public education" as a democratic institution. All the arguments about elitism and intolerance that had found their way into the CTU's Reports were resurrected and put on steroids to smash the dangers posed by parental choice in education.

AISCA's response to the SPE campaign was to create a 4-page insert in the *Alberta Report*. Filled with positive, documented information about educational choice, it was an effective antidote to the hysteria SPE was trying to promote. Significantly, AISCA's executive director received a phone call from David King, the Minister of Education, and the AISCA Board received a letter from Reno Bosetti, the Deputy Minister. Both communications congratulated AISCA on its work and thanked us for not escalating the debate and for providing them with the information they could use to defend the provincial policy of support for choice in education.

(When Nancy Betkowski became Minister of Education in the following year, she often referred to her copy of that insert when the opposition raised questions about government policies relating to independent schooling.)

### *The School Act*

In the midst of the turmoil surrounding the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding the province began its work on revisions to the School Act. Sandra Smith, the legal advisor to the Deputy Minister on the School Act, also spoke at our AGM on Nov. 14, 1984, about proposed Principles for a New School Act which would address issues relating to parental choices and responsibilities.

During the following year Deputy Minister Reno Bosetti enlisted AISCA's help in defining and promoting the Department's "proposed position on private schools" which sought to include Church schools which up to this time had chosen to remain unregistered and outside of the legal provisions for schooling. At the Deputy's request, the Executive Director went on a provincial tour to discuss the proposals with representatives of the Church schools, an initiative which resulted in a meeting of their leaders with Dr. Bosetti. This meeting, moderated by AISCA's executive director, explored the role of government in education and promised the possibility of future cooperation.

The future for the new School Act looked promising, but then David King was replaced by Nancy Betkowski as Minister of Education and, before she could take control of her portfolio, the bureaucracy moved to redirect the tenor of the proposed legislation. Late in 1987, a new School Act was introduced as Bill 59. To the horror of public and independent educators alike, it reflected nothing of the discussions that had taken place in the public consultations. Bill 59 aimed to centralize all authority in the person of the Minister and in the bureaucracy of the Department, riding roughshod over local authorities in public education. For independent schools, there was no recognition of parental rights and the Minister was given arbitrary powers to register and accredit schools based on guidelines to be developed at a later date.

AISCA reacted immediately with a focused campaign of meetings with the Minister, the Deputy, Sandra Smith, and the Education Caucus of MLAs. The meetings demonstrated that the new Act was also a surprise to the politicians who seemed shocked at the uproar. The Minister, especially, seemed confused by the conflicting messages about the Bill coming from the bureaucrats and from the stakeholders, including AISCA. She promised to rethink the legislation, and AISCA stepped up the campaign for change with letter-writing workshops for its members.

The letter-writing campaign was significant in that it established AISCA as one of the most effective political voices in education. The 3% of the population represented by AISCA produced more letters on Bill 59 than all of the communications encouraged by the public boards and the Alberta Teachers Association. (Only the parents of children with disabilities were more vocal in demanding that their children's rights to an education would be recognized in the legislation.) The final result was that Bill 59 was withdrawn.

In May of 1988 Minister Betkowski had taken control of her Department and a new School Act was introduced as Bill 29, a document that reflected and re-established the preliminary work done under David King's leadership. It was a much improved document for all of education, but AISCA was able to note with some satisfaction that the section in the preamble that defines parental rights was a reflection of the wording in a brief the Association had presented on the issue, and the section dealing with Private Schools reflected almost verbatim the wording of AISCA's position paper.

In a short time, AISCA had recovered from the intolerant attacks of the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding and the Save Public Education campaign and had argued effectively for the inclusion of choice in the Alberta education framework. MLAs from all parties, including the New Democrats and Liberals sought out and respected our input on Bill 27. The Association's authority rested on its commitment to a mode of operation that was respectful, factual, informative and with a minimum of confrontation.

#### *Western Baptist Academy*

When Jim Dining became Minister of Education in September of 1988, he inherited an unpleasant situation from the Betkowski era. For several years the members of Western Baptist Church in Calgary, under the leadership of Pastor Larry Jones, had defied the Department of Education by refusing to register their school. The Department had prosecuted Pastor Jones in a case that had gone all the way to the Supreme Court which had upheld the Department's right to demand the school's registration. Pastor Jones continued to defy the Province, even in the face of a jail sentence.

Within days of becoming Minister of Education, Mr. Dining asked AISCA's Executive Director to intervene and try to find a resolution to the situation. After discussions with Pastor Jones and the Minister, the Executive Director brought Dr. Bosetti, the Deputy, to Calgary for a face to face meeting with Pastor Jones. After a long discussion between the two, the Executive Director proposed a resolution that had not been previously considered by either party. This proposal recognized and honoured Pastor Jones' theological position on the independence of his church school as well as the Minister's legal authority, with a minimum of accommodation or compromise needed by either party. To the surprise of both Dr. Bosetti and Pastor Jones, the proposal allowed them both to walk away from the conflict with integrity.

AISCA reaped considerable political credibility from this resolution of an apparent deadlock. Pastor Jones and his congregation rightly saw it as divine intervention: a story that needs to be told, but in another setting.

[An immediate, concrete demonstration of the Minister's gratitude for the resolution of the Western Baptist Academy issue was the reinstatement of independent school funding to 75% of the School Foundation Program Funding (SFPP) which had been held to 70% since the mid-1980s.]

### *Choices for Children*

The Association had grown significantly between 1984 and 1988 from a representation of about twenty-five school to a membership of nearly all independent schools in the province. Pressure was growing within the Association, with many of the schools arguing for a political campaign for more equitable funding. During 1989 and 1990 there was an extensive debate within the membership about what equity should mean for independent schools and how equitable funding might affect the independent nature of the schools. In September of 1989 the Board submitted a position paper on funding to the membership that set the stage for a common commitment to move forward with the theme "Equity with Integrity." A committee was given a budget \$1000 to devise a strategy and by the Annual General Meeting in October of 1990 the "Choices for Children" campaign was endorsed by the membership. 10,000 brochures, buttons and bumper stickers were produced and distributed and in January of 1991, we held our kick-off rally in Edmonton. [Unfortunately the expected press coverage was eclipsed by the launch of "Desert Storm" against Iraq, that same day.] Similar rallies were held in the other major cities across the province, and the membership took up the challenge to write their MLAs and visit them in their offices.

In all of this we continued to enjoy the good will of the Minister. Mr. Dinning addressed our Membership Meeting in May and also addressed the delegates who participated in our first Independent School Day at the Legislature in 1992. A small concession came in the form of special education funding which was added to the independent school grant that year.

In 1993 Halvar Johnson became Minister of Education, and the support from that office faded away. At the same time the Alberta Teachers Association and the School Boards Association went into action to oppose our efforts with a counter campaign of their own. AISCA held its course, and the Executive Director was in general demand on radio and TV talk shows as the campaigns became more political and, therefore, newsworthy. Another Independent Schools Day at the Legislature was followed up by an Independent School Fine Arts Day at the Leg and a number of MLA information dinners which also featured performances by students from various schools.

It was in this context, in 1996, that Carol Haley, the MLA for Three Hills, introduced a private members bill to urge the government to adopt a more equitable funding formula. Her proposal to increase funding to 100% of the basic instructional grant caused considerable tension within the government caucus, but an election was called before the bill came to a vote.

A year later, with a very unsupportive Gary Mar as Minister of Education and Ms. Haley representing a new constituency, she put her political career on the line and reintroduced

her private members bill. The level of debate within caucus was so high that the Premier and the MLAs demanded a compromise. With the support of AISCA, Ms. Haley accepted a tabling of her bill when the Minister promised the appointment of a task force to study the funding issue.

The Minister's Task Force on Private School Funding was chaired by MLA Ron Stevens and had representation from Independent Schools (Gary Duthler), the ASBA, as well as the general public. They toured the province, holding hearings in many communities, hearing hundreds of briefs and presentations. The opposition, especially from the ATA and the school boards (public and Catholic) was vicious, but independent schools were equally vigorous in their arguments.

In the end, the Task Force's recommendations, including those for increased funding, brought about a forceful debate within the government caucus. Both the Premier and the Minister of Education had predicted, just days earlier, that the Task Force would recommend a maintenance of the status quo and they were caught entirely off guard by the report. In the middle of that debate Stockwell Day, the Finance Minister at the time, was told to contact the AISCA Executive Director and to ask for an assurance that AISCA would not immediately press for further funding. With that promise obtained, the caucus finally voted to accept all the recommendations of the Task Force and the very effective Choices for Children campaign came to an end. Independent schools had not received all that they had hoped to gain, but they had persevered in the face of a highly mobilized and motivated public school opposition. Their political integrity (and what the Executive Director called a not-inconsequential divine intervention – another story for another day) had won the day. The most important breakthrough in the report of the task force is not the increase in funding itself, but the articulation in a government document of the principle that private schools serve the public good and *therefore* have a claim on equitable funding.

AISCA members owe Ms Carol Haley a huge debt of gratitude for her tenacity in bringing about this breakthrough in the funding issue.

#### *AISCA as Stakeholder in Education*

The Choices for Children campaign focused on a more equitable funding formula and was up front in the thinking of many of AISCA's supporters, especially the tuition-paying families. The AISCA Board, however, never lost sight of the other side of the campaign: equity with integrity. Work continued to demonstrate that independent schools, by virtue of their independence, could and should make significant contributions to the welfare of all students and educators in the province.

AISCA sought and obtained representation on the Council on Alberta Teaching Standards (COATS), curriculum committees, certification panels, and a wide variety of stakeholder panels. AISCA was also asked to participate on the Minister's Advisory Committee on Home Education and the provincial Education Week Committee led by the ATA. In all of these areas the status of independent schools was defended, but – more importantly – AISCA also gained status as a credible stakeholder.

When the Department of Education decided, in 1995, to get out of the business of evaluating independent school teachers for permanent certification, the Director of Teacher Certification approached AISCA to find a way to allow the Association to take

over that role. As a result, the AISCA-DSA program was first implemented in 1996. While the issue of the funding of this service remained unresolved for nearly ten years, the program marked the first official joint venture between the Association and the government.

In the summer of 1999 the Association successfully negotiated an agreement with the Government to create the AISCA-AISI office which allowed independent schools to participate in the initiative for school improvement in spite of demands by the ATA and the ASBA that we not be included. Independent schools have benefited immensely from the funding and, especially, from the encouragement to experiment with school improvement projects as part of AISI.

### *Alternative Programs*

One unexpected result of the outcome of the Minister's Task Force on Private School Funding was that a number of public school board, some of which had viciously condemned private schools in the hearings, within months changed their official policies toward the inclusion of religious alternatives and began dialogues with independent schools to explore their possible integration into the public school system as alternative programs as defined and permitted in the School Act. The Strathcona Christian Academy in Sherwood Park quickly came to an agreement with its public board and the Edmonton Society for Christian Education followed shortly thereafter, beginning a movement that has since seen many independent schools pursuing that option. This movement continues to affect the independent schools within AISCA. Whether in the long run the schools will find in these arrangements the goal of equity with integrity remains at this time an open question. From AISCA's point of view, a perspective shared by this former executive director, alternative programs present another option for parental choice, and there is certainly no little satisfaction that after a decade-long campaign for "Choices for Children" the public school systems of Alberta have now also recognized the importance of choices for their students in their schools.

### *The passing of the torch*

In April of 1999 I resigned from the position of Executive Director of AISCA because it was time to do so for some personal, but especially for some important professional reasons. After 15 years I was getting tired and losing some of the vision and drive required for the position, and it is always best to resign when you recognize these symptoms in yourself, well before your board and membership begin to notice them. My years of service were their own reward: it was an honour and privilege to be part of the most exciting coalitions of educators and educational institutions in this province. The fact that I was able to continue for a few years at the head of the AISCA-AISI project was a tremendous bonus. I am grateful for the trust and support of the various board members and of all the legions on each school's home front.

The Association has chosen well in appointing Duane Plantinga to continue to build on the work we have done together. He is more than equal to the task and I wish him all the blessings that I have experienced in this work.