

ISLES DISTRICT
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April 1, 2004

**MEMORANDUM FOR School Improvement Leadership Team,
Liberty Intermediate School**

SUBJECT: Summary of Pre NCA Team Visit, March 31- April 1, 2004

On behalf of the visiting team, thank you for welcoming us to the school and sharing your work in school improvement with us. You provided us the information we needed to accomplish our goals for the visit. We also want to thank you for the overwhelming hospitality you provided with the meals and refreshments throughout the day.

The following is a summary of the visit including sections on team members, schedule, findings and next steps.

Team Members

The visiting team was made up of the following individuals: Ann Brown, School Improvement Liaison, Isles District; Cyndi Johnson, Social Studies Liaison, Isles District; Sue Shank, Special Education Liaison, Isles District; and Chenea Foster, SILT Co-Chair and Teacher, Lakenheath Middle School.

Schedule The following summarizes the time and tasks completed by the visiting team members:

Wednesday, 31 March 2004

0730	Arrival of team at LIS/Organizational Time
0800 – 0815	Introduction to staff
0815 – 0850	Team Organizational Time
0850 – 1030	In-brief with SILT Team
1030 – 1200	Classroom visits/Organizational Time
12:00 – 1300	Working Lunch provided in Counseling Center
1300 – 1500	Classroom Visits/Interviews
Evening	Review of information gathered

Thursday, 01 April 2004

0825 – 0915	Student Meeting
0915 – 1200	Classroom Visits and Interviews
1200 – 1300	Lunch provided in Counseling Center
1300 – 1430	Team Work Time
1430 – 1500	Out-brief with Principal and SILT Chairs
1500 – 1530	Out-brief with Faculty in Information Center

Findings

Liberty Intermediate School exhibits a positive culture and warm climate for student learning. It has an attractive, landscaped campus. It is noteworthy that many positive efforts were given to the building of the positive school climate and facilitating the transition to become a grade 4 and 5 school. The “BE” school wide discipline plan provides a general structure yet allows for individual teacher implementation of rules within their classrooms.

The staff is aware of and understands the school improvement process and has an understanding of how their goal was chosen. Teachers discussed how communication applies to all math classes and how bully proofing relates to communication. Teachers have ownership in the essence of the goal dealing with math communications and bully proofing. Some specialists have an understanding of how it can be implemented in their particular subject area. The School Improvement Leadership Team (SILT) exhibits a high level of involvement in the school improvement process. The committee chairs gave knowledgeable presentations. The staff is overwhelmingly complimentary about the leadership for school improvement. Teachers report they receive information about school improvement through monthly faculty and team meetings, while parents report the use of emails, web pages, and individual teacher efforts; such as classroom newsletters. The school Intranet website provides a valuable resource for highlighting student success and is a good resource for teachers.

Teachers and students report a high level of respect and admiration for the school administrator. Students with whom we spoke reported that learning is fun and all teachers care. This is a “happy place” say students, parents and staff.

Instructional methods vary from class to class and subject to subject. Observations in 30 classrooms showed a high level (85%) of students on task. A variety of activities and instructional strategies were being used from flexible groupings (53%), independent learning (34%), differentiated instruction (23%), guided practice (20%) to direct instruction (23%). The students interviewed reported that Social Studies is their most difficult subject and Science their favorite. They especially enjoy when subjects are taught which employ real world connections to their learning such as simulations, projects and contests. There have been many positive comments from interviews with students, parents and teachers regarding the JASON Project.

PTO is to be commended for the support shown to LIS. Support includes purchase of supplies and equipment for implementation of the school improvement initiative. There is evidence of reciprocal community outreach for all school programs.

School improvement efforts at Liberty IS are very organized and efficient. The staff uses data to support their decisions about their growth needs. It is evident from observations that there have been many efforts made to display good student work throughout the school, in the math gallery, and the TV show in the lobby. There is a built in system to rotate this work; however, teacher participation is not universal. Evidence of the school improvement goal was visible through displays in 53% of the classroom observations and 17% of the class lessons in progress.

Liberty IS is in year three of the five-year school improvement process. As such, this year they are working to refine their interventions and raise them to a higher level, moving all from their comfort level to a “stretch”. The Math communication skills goal at Liberty IS was chosen based on TerraNova content area data, TerraNova Objective Performance Summary, perceptive surveys from parents, students and teachers, and results from surveying teachers of former students about those students scores in various content areas. The Safe Schools Intervention was chosen based on identified needs through use of surveys from staff, students and parents. Locally designed assessment was conducted using best practices including peer review, field testing, pilot group and revision. They are to be commended for the study, research and design of their Math Communications Notebook.

The current Compensatory Education Program at LES provides services during regular instruction time.

A results-based staff development plan has been established for the interventions as they are currently stated. Study groups with the option for credit are excellent ways to provide staff development and to motivate staff involvement.

Next Steps

General:

- Follow the guidance provided in DS Regulation 2090.1 for Compensatory Education.

School Improvement Process

General:

- Take the strong foundation you have established in math and expand the communication focus to the other curricular areas.
- Students interviewed were well informed of the school improvement plans.

Profile:

- Include the mission statement in the profile. Explain how the environmental scan data in the profile was used to refine the mission statement.
- Point out that even though the profile does not contain 3 disaggregations, you have learned the value of disaggregation and are using them to analyze data.
- If Objective Performance data is used to make decisions, also show this data in the in briefing.

Mission:

- Clarify which mission statement is the current one.
- Reword a student version of the mission statement using student friendly language.
- Be prepared to explain how the school mission guides decision making at your school.

Goals and Activities:

- Even though the goal is generic enough to be applied school wide, activities need to be clarified to demonstrate how the implementation of the goal will look in each teacher’s classroom.
- Consider adding additional activity steps at the higher levels of Blooms Taxonomy. This includes having the staff review work toward a common prompt, clarifying what makes some work better than others, and then determining ways to increase student achievement.

- Increase the use of simulations, engaged learning activities, and projects in order to give students the opportunity for real world application of their learning.

Assessment:

- Continue with plans to use local assessments to determine progress at more frequent intervals.
- Investigate validity and reliability for scoring local assessments through work toward interrater reliability. Consider double blind scoring by all staff members, recording scores given and determine if there is at least 80% agreement on scores.

Interventions:

- Ensure that interventions and activities toward interventions address the issue of transfer across curricular areas.
- Clearly define the activities to tell how they are to be implemented.
- Activities for implementation of the interventions should contain clearly defined teaching, modeling, expecting, practicing and supporting activities for students.
- Consider linking an additional intervention to the thinking and reasoning skills (Slide 32 of In briefing). One option might be school wide implementation of the module for questioning: “The Three Story Intellect.”

Staff Development:

- Continue specific sharing sessions for best practices to better utilize the expertise of all staff.
- Continue developing strategies to bring new staff on-board such as training videos, best practices notebooks, etc.
- Devise ways to determine what staff development needs exist.
- Expand staff development activities to address all levels of need including on-going support.

Integration of DoDEA Initiatives into Improvement Efforts

Math Matters

- Much evidence exists through the display of math projects and the use of math journals that “Math Matters” at LIS. Artwork directly connects to the DoDEA theme.
- The Math Communications Notebook is a useful tool.

Next Steps:

- Strengthen the connections between math communication and other curricular areas.

DoDEA Reads

- Staff and students interviewed report widespread use of *Reading Counts*.
- Students report they get to choose their own books.
- Community partnerships reflect “Read Across America Day” activities, reading buddies, volunteer readers, and reading support through Language Arts Reading Support.
- Community partnerships, especially the PTO, provide a wealth of resources available for readers.
- Students report the well-equipped and inviting library promotes their desire to read.

Next Steps

- Tighten schedules to ensure the DoDEA recommended 120 minutes of literacy instruction per day.
- Consider the use of flexible groups to support literacy instruction.

Expectations for Quality Instruction Based on DoDEA Standards with Respect to Aligned Assessments to Inform Instruction

- Interviews revealed that there is a tendency to design lessons around the text rather than the curricular standards.
- Use of Communication Arts Assessment would provide information for focused classroom instruction.
- The use of continuous assessment for small groups is evident. This is used to inform instruction.

Next Steps:

- Increase the use of the backwards design when developing standards based lessons.
- Analyze the results of all system wide assessments and seek implications for classroom instruction.

Expectations for Quality Instruction Based on DoDEA Standards with Respect to the Needs of All Students (Equity)**Findings:**

- Interviews indicate that multicultural materials and activities are used in classrooms.
- The small school setting gives teachers the opportunity to be attuned to their students' needs and interests.
- In several classes, the needs of individual students were met through differentiated instruction.

Next Steps:

- Continue the use and expand of differentiated instruction in order to meet the needs of all students.

Evidence That School Culture/Climate Promotes Expectations for Highest Student Achievement**Findings:**

- A dedicated one-hour math period is scheduled for every classroom that allows for uninterrupted daily instruction.
- In observations during the two-day visit, computers were in use in 25% of the classrooms.
- Most classrooms were bright and inviting. There were numerous displays of exemplary student work in most of the classrooms. There was evidence of student-produced work that incorporated the use of technology.
- There is an organized community involvement in the mentoring program.

Next Steps:

- Increase the use of computers in all curricular areas throughout the instructional day.
- The display student work demonstrates integrating technology.

Cc: Superintendent, Isles District
Assistant Superintendents, Isles District