

North Central Association
Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement

**Report of the Visit of the
NCA CASI Team**

To
Liberty Intermediate School
Unit 5185, Box 50
APO AE 09461

on
April 27-29, 2005

Submitted to
Mr. William Hunter, Principal

on
June 1, 2005

Copies To:

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The views, opinions, and findings contained in this report are those of the authors and should not be construed as an official Department of Defense position, policy, or decision unless so designated by other official documentation.

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PREFACE

This school was evaluated using the NCA CASI/DoDEA school improvement process as the primary basis for team observations and comment. The NCA CASI representatives visited with representatives of the military community and conducted the NCA CASI standards compliance review. The full team spent three days in the school. During this time the team met with the school improvement team, parents, and students; visited classes; examined the learning climate; and consulted with teachers both individually and in group meetings. A conference with the administration and an exit report with the staff took place at the conclusion of the visit.

This report summarizes the extensive discussions that took place with teachers, administrators, students, parents, and members of the school improvement team during the visit. The comments and suggestions shared with the school community during these sessions will provide the leadership with information and guidance as the school begins the school improvement plan revisions.

The team thanks the Liberty Intermediate School (LIS) staff and specifically the School Improvement Leadership Team (SILT) for their professional preparation in advance of our visit. The materials made available to the team prior to the visit were both comprehensive and informative. The team met with the SILT at the beginning of the visit and received a very comprehensive presentation on the school improvement journey. The stateside representatives of the team formally met with Brigadier General Mark T. Matthews, 48th Fighter Wing Commander; Colonel Neal McElhannon, 48th Mission Support Group Commander; and Eileen Williamson, School Liaison Officer; they provided a valuable overview of the base and its mission. At the conclusion of the visit, the team again met with the SILT representatives to discuss the steps the school will take to move forward in their school improvement efforts.

The team wishes to thank the students, staff, and community for their hospitality during the visit. Special appreciation is extended to the SILT, social committee, and teachers for their preparation of meals and refreshments for the team's workroom. Special thanks to the Parent Teacher Organization for the food they provided on the last day of our visit.

TEAM ROSTER

Chairperson:

Minnesota NCA State Director (Retired)

Co-Chairperson:

Assistant Superintendent
Western Heights Independent School District

Augmenter:

Principal
Croughton Elementary School

Augmenter:

Social Studies Teacher
Alconbury High School

Augmenter:

Counselor/Teacher
West Ruislip Elementary School

Augmenter:

Reading Recovery/LARS Teacher
Feltwell Elementary School

**SECTION I
GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL
LIBERTY INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL**

Principal: William Hunter
 Principal’s Tenure in the School: Four years
 Principal’s E-mail Address: bill.hunter@eu.dodea.edu
 Grades: 4-5
 Total Enrollment: 361

	<u>Enrollment Per Grade</u>	<u>Sections Per Grade</u>
Grade 4	175	8.5
Grade 5	186	8
Professional Staff:	31.5	
Number of Staff New This Year:	3	

Setting

Liberty Intermediate School is one of three elementary schools on RAF Lakenheath, and one of five schools in the Lakenheath/Feltwell complex. The school has undergone many changes in the past five years. It is unique in its configuration, as it exclusively serves fourth and fifth grade students. Currently, the school population consists of eight fourth grade classes and eight fifth grade classes, with a total of 361 students and 31.5 full time staff.

Liberty Intermediate began as an annex to Lakenheath Elementary School, and then became an independent school in 1997 (servicing three fourth grade and eight fifth grade classes that were primarily composed of students from Lakenheath Elementary School). At its conception, Liberty was intended to be a fourth and fifth grade school, hence the inclusion of “Intermediate” into the school name. At that time, the school consisted of two wings and the gymnasium/cafeteria.

In school year 2000-2001, Liberty became solely a fifth grade school, as the fourth grade classes (reduced to two in number) were returned to Lakenheath Elementary School. In 2002, a new wing of 12 classrooms was added to the existing school. In SY 2002-2003, all seven fourth grade classes (which had been located at Lakenheath Elementary School) became part of the Liberty Intermediate School population, swelling the expected student enrollment to 413. This not only increased the school population, but also gave the students two years of site-level continuity. Prior to the moving of the fourth grades, the incoming students were given a tour of the new building, and incoming faculty from Lakenheath Elementary School were invited to join Liberty’s professional development training sessions which pertained to school improvement.

Students

There are currently 361 students attending the school. The majority are children of US Air Force members; 98% are Air Force and 2% are civilian. Of the Air Force sponsored dependents, 79% of sponsors are enlisted, 17% are officers, and 4% are civilian. Enrollment by ethnicity is as follows: 69% White, 14% African American, 10% multiracial, 5% Asian, and 2% American Indian/Alaskan native.

Program

The programs and services that are available to students include regular classrooms for grades four and five, host nation, communication impaired, learning impaired, gifted education, English as a second language, READ 180, information center services, counselor services, psychologist services, nursing services, physical education, music, and art. One grade four class is designated as “Spanish immersion.”

Students participate in extra-curricular activities including art club, book club, chorus, German, homework support, intramural sports, kindness patrol, sign language, outdoor adventure club, Spanish, and xylophone band.

Staffing and Organization

There are 16.5 regular classroom teachers (11 females and 6 males). Fifteen other professional staff members are assigned to the school—14 females and 1 male (not including a long-term female substitute filling in for the vacant physical education position).

The school has 16 classrooms in grades four and grade five as well as a gymnasium/cafeteria, specialist classrooms, information center, computer lab, nurse’s office, counselor’s office, and administrative offices.

School Environment

There is a warm, kind, and courteous environment in the school. The staff is supportive of each other, and the administration is viewed as a major contributor of support in all areas of the school. Students reflect the support and high expectations of the staff and administration. Parents are actively involved in the school in many different ways and are visible throughout the school. The school plant is arranged in a way that enhances the friendly atmosphere. There are numerous examples of student work, recognition programs, and SIP activities displayed in classrooms and hallways. The cafeteria has a child-centered configuration, with round tables for students to sit wherever they wish. There is a large play area with equipment concentrated in a small space.

SECTION II DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Overview

The school improvement leadership team (SILT) consists of a chairperson, three subcommittee chairs (math communication, safe schools, and school home community partnership), and the building administrator. The SILT presented an overview of the school improvement plan (SIP) to the team. This included a detailed description of the school goal, “All students will improve math communication skills in a safe school environment conducive to learning across the curriculum.” It also included profile information, essence of the goal, demographic data, intervention information, assessments, student performance data, a staff development plan, and next steps.

The SILT has worked hard to create a collaborative atmosphere and to ensure the involvement of staff, students, and community in development and implementation of the SIP.

Involvement in the School Improvement Process

Findings

- Under the direction of the SILT, the entire faculty and student body are aware of and committed to school improvement activities. SILT members ensure that new faculty members are briefed on the SIP during their first week of employment.
- The math communication notebook (intervention) is a useful tool used throughout the school to implement the goal of math communication. Notebook activities incorporate vocabulary development as well as application of problem-solving strategies. Students report that the notebook helps them understand how math is used in practical ways.
- There is ample evidence that specialist classes are incorporating the SIP goal across the curriculum. Special needs staff and students are aware of and involved in SIP activities.
- Surveys are used extensively to gain input from students, parents, and faculty.
- Students are able to clearly communicate SIP initiatives.
- The kindness patrol and peer mediation groups are effective strategies for actively engaging students in the SIP process.
- The SILT produces and distributes a newsletter specific to school improvement activities. In addition, the school publishes Tiger Tales that includes a section dedicated to school improvement. The school website incorporates a SIP page that includes the school’s mission statement and various multimedia presentations in support of school improvement activities.

Next Steps

- The SILT should consider increased inclusion of community members, parents, and students to enhance the future development of SIP activities. Examples include representation on existing committees and use of parents to assist in scoring of local assessments and compiling/analyzing

survey data. Community members could also be utilized as resources to promote school improvement activities. A website link to an “electronic suggestion box” would be beneficial for parent and community input to the SIP process.

- The SILT is encouraged to get students involved in decision-making by implementing a student government organization. A suggestion box for students (located in the information center) would provide an additional opportunity for student input.

Leadership for the School Improvement Process

Findings

- The SILT has provided strong leadership and direction for SIP development. The team continues to monitor implementation of the SIP and is receptive to recommendations for continuous improvement. It is evident that the SILT’s high level of enthusiasm contributes to the overall commitment and involvement of the school faculty.
- The administration positively supports the SIP. Ample time is provided at faculty meetings for school improvement reflection and follow-up.
- The principal, as instructional leader, provides guidance to faculty in best practices, standards-based instruction, and research-based methodologies. He communicates a firm knowledge of and respect for the overall process of systemic change. Students and parents are highly complimentary of his personal involvement, visibility in classrooms, and accessibility.
- Shared leadership and ownership is promoted by allowing staff members to share their knowledge and expertise. For example, faculty members with specialized skills in areas such as technology usage, bully-free schools, and data collection are encouraged to present these techniques to their colleagues.

Next Steps

- Everyone involved in the SIP at all levels (site level and District Superintendent’s Office) needs to be consistent in the use of SIP terminology (e.g., goal, essence, intervention/strategy, assessment, and documentation). NCA CASI requires that all goals be student-centered and performance-based.
- The NCA CASI software needs to be used as a training tool in developing the SIP. The SILT would benefit from continued training and experience with the NCA software suite.

High Expectations for School Improvement

Findings

- The school has created a locally-developed assessment (rubric) that is aligned with the math communication goal. The rubric is used to clarify student performance indicators for math communication.

- The “4 B’s” are used as a strategy to communicate the rules of the school. The “School Rules” chart clearly defines the various contexts in which the “4 B’s” may be applied.
- The school uses the Colorado School Climate Survey as a comprehensive measure of student knowledge about bullying and its effects.
- A substantial amount of data is available to guide the faculty in developing the SIP.
- Parents report that the school has high expectations for students. They believe that teachers strive to meet the individual needs of all learners and that instructional programs are structured to provide students with meaningful support and feedback.

Next Steps

- The faculty is aware of the importance of data-driven decision-making at all stages of the SIP. Consider establishing a data committee to develop consistent methods for data collection and analysis, including the use of technology tools to streamline the process.
- The following areas of data management should be addressed in accordance with NCA CASI guidelines:
 - Data displays and graphs should be consistently formatted for ease of interpretation and comparison.
 - Triangulation of data is necessary at critical stages in the SIP (including rationale for goal selection and documentation of success).
 - Achievement results need to be disaggregated into relevant subgroups beyond gender and grade level.
 - Accurate terminology should be used for reporting student performance; e.g., quartiles, percentages, percentile ranks, and performance levels.
 - Standard units need to be used for documenting progress.
- Use of cohort data could be informative, as 60% of the students have attended the school for two consecutive school years.
- To facilitate vertical articulation, the school should share student performance data with the elementary and middle schools.
- All assessments should be directly aligned with instructional standards and used to inform instruction. The school could benefit from targeted professional development in this area.

School Culture and Climate in Support of School Improvement

Findings

- Student work is prominently displayed in all areas of the school. Bully proofing rules are posted throughout the school building. These artifacts are clearly related to the SIP goals.
- School recognition activities (i.e., bulletin board displays and award programs) are aligned with the SIP goal and strategies.
- There is strong commitment from teachers and students in promoting a productive and safe school climate based on the “4 B’s.” Examples include the kindness patrol, HA HA SO, acts of kindness, and peer mediation.

- There is ample evidence that the faculty is dedicated to implementing the math and bully-free goal across the curriculum. Math communication notebooks are used in many of the classrooms; observations of classroom lessons indicate that teachers provide direct instruction in both goal areas.
- Students appreciate and are actively engaged in math activities across all curricular areas using the math communication notebook. Students view the notebook as a useful tool.

Next Steps

- The bully proofing program has evolved into a total school climate of caring and respect. Continue to promote and infuse this program school wide as part of the school's culture.
- There is evidence of a deep level of commitment to and ownership of the school improvement process at the school. In the next cycle, the faculty is encouraged to advance to the next level of data-driven decision making and goal selection to facilitate site-level ownership of the school improvement process.

SECTION III GENERAL APPRAISAL

Next Steps for School Improvement

Findings

- The SILT has successfully provided leadership and guidance to faculty and students in support of the SIP and DoDEA initiatives. They consistently support and acknowledge the achievements of the entire staff that in turn supports a high level of commitment to the school improvement process throughout the school.
- The school has used the math communication notebook as a functional strategy to promote internalization of math vocabulary and problem-solving skills. Students share the faculty's enthusiasm for this innovative, practical tool.
- The SILT and administration enthusiastically encourage staff members to share best practices in their respective areas of expertise, which contributes to the school's overall climate of collegiality.
- Parents value the school's dedication to high expectations for all learners, and they support the school's successful efforts to meet each student's individual needs.

Next Steps

- The complex nature of the school improvement process demands consistent use of SIP terminology. Goals should be student-centered and describe what students should know and be able to do. Interventions/strategies should outline what the students will do to work toward the goals. Assessments should be rigorous and directly linked to student performance goals.
- The school could benefit from additional assistance in the management and analysis of data. The SILT should consider establishing a data committee and incorporating technology tools to streamline the process. The NCA CASI rubrics could be used as self-evaluation tools and as indicators of quality elements for use of data within the SIP.
- The faculty and administration are to be commended for their school wide efforts to promote a caring and respectful environment that has become embedded within the school's culture. In the next cycle, the faculty is encouraged to select student performance goals that are quantifiable.
- In the next SIP cycle, the faculty is ready to advance to the next level of data-driven decision making and goal selection to facilitate site-level ownership of the school improvement process.

DoDEA Instructional Quality

- An innovative instructional environment is evidenced by team teaching, looping, math clustering, Spanish immersion, and flexible grouping in the curricular areas. The compensatory education program is a crucial component in providing support to students in need of additional reinforcement in the mathematics area.
- Evidence of differentiated instruction via project-based learning and use of learning centers is visible in some classrooms.

- Observed “best practice” models include co-teaching, flexible scheduling, active participation strategies in some classes, and the use of humor to encourage student participation.
- Quality student work products are recognized and displayed throughout the school and classrooms.
- Collaboration within grade levels is evident by sharing of materials and ideas to promote student achievement. Common planning periods are used for this purpose.
- Selected mathematical learning modules are self-paced, allowing students to progress based on completion of specific skills.
- The information center is used as a hub of learning; books and resources are available for all subject areas.
- There is a concerted effort by staff to move toward differentiated instruction in mathematics through the use of technology-based programs.
- Frequent use of assessments is incorporated to drive instruction for individual students and/or groups.
- Infusion of technology is applied at all levels in the school. A well-designed school web site is available to all staff, students, and school community members.

DoDEA Curricular Standards

- The staff is aware of DoDEA standards. These curricular standards have been a topic of discussion at faculty meetings, standards-based posters are displayed in all classrooms, and all teachers have copies of the curriculum standards binder.
- Evidence of standards implementation was observed in some classrooms.
- School personnel are aware of the need to align instruction with the standards.
- The next step for school administration is the implementation of existing plans for curriculum mapping and linking instruction to standards.

DoDEA Initiatives

- DoDEA initiatives are widely supported by staff, students, and the school community. This is evidenced by posted materials and displays throughout the school.
- A pervasive theme of the school is “Math Matters at Liberty... just ask a student.”
- Evidence of the Math Matters initiative is exemplified by the Math Gallery, a bulletin board display in the central entryway, and “Math Corner” articles in the Tiger Tales newsletter that feature parent/student shared problem-solving activities.
- The school has a “Math Match” volunteer program to assist staff and students in mathematics support.
- There is a Math Buddy program using student mentors from the high school.
- DoDEA READS is implemented at the school level through a very successful Reading Counts program, READ 180, and a yearly “Read Across America” event to involve school community members.

Other Characteristics

- The school culture is child-centered and caring. Students, staff, and school community members alike were observed interacting in respectful, responsible ways. Students who are new to the school are welcomed by a student “buddy,” and the Friendship Bench is used to promote positive student interaction.
- The school’s motto “Step Inside . . . Experience the Pride” describes the positive, “can do” atmosphere of the school and the value of self worth.
- The Bully Proofing Program and the associated “kindness patrol” are excellent examples of total student and faculty involvement in the mission of the school.
- Strong parent commitment is evident at this school through the Parent Teacher Organization’s support in academic areas such as the Accelerated Math software program, math communication notebooks for all students, STAR assessment software, and Reading Counts assessments.
- The military command provides support for the school. A mentor program comprised mainly of military members is an integral part of the school.
- After-school programs are geared to the whole child; the range of clubs includes German, Spanish, art, intramural sports, exercise, homework support, reading, outdoor adventure, yearbook, chorus, kindness patrol, xylophone band, and sign language classes.
- The school is well staffed, with 16.5 classroom teachers, 15 specialists, and four paraprofessionals employed to meet student needs.
- The facility is immaculate and well maintained. The contracted cleaning team is to be commended for its commitment to these efforts.
- The level of volunteerism is exceptional, with volunteers accruing over 8,000 clock hours from the beginning of the current school year.
- Parents applaud the school for using highly efficient methods of communication. They report that they receive prompt notification of special circumstances such as tragedies or other unusual events. E-mail and newsletters are viewed as effective communication modes. Parents also commented that the level and amount of communication to students is developmentally appropriate.
- The school is well supplied with instructional materials to support the curricular standards.
- Parents report that their concerns are addressed promptly and effectively. To quote one parent in particular, “The teachers and the principal not only listen to our concerns, but they act upon them.”

Limitations on the Distribution, Use, and Scope of This Document

It is the official intent of the Board of Trustees of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement that this report on the evaluation of the school be considered a privileged document, to be submitted directly to the administration of the school. The distribution of the report and its availability for public consideration beyond that point rest solely in the hands of those administrators. Neither the chairperson nor the other members of the evaluation team are authorized to release any of the information contained in this report without the express approval of the administration of the school.

The primary purpose of the evaluation team has been to examine the educational setting of the school, including courses of study, learning materials, student needs and interests, staffing, and facilities. A particular focus of the team has been to evaluate the development and implementation of the DoDEA/NCA SIP.

It has not been the purpose of the visiting team to evaluate individual members of the school staff. The use of this report as an official assessment of any staff person's professional competency would be in violation of the process and the intent under which the school evaluation was conducted. Such use would be inherently invalid since at no time during the team visit has the team been concerned with the evaluation of individual staff member performance.

Additionally, it has not been the purpose of the visiting team to prescribe a specific company's instructional materials or programs. The team has attempted to evaluate the school's learning materials in light of the needs of the students being served and the relationship of the materials to the goals and objectives of the school. Any references to specific instructional materials contained in the team report are merely for consideration by the school. The school staff exercises the responsibility of selecting learning materials appropriate for the learners.

The members of the evaluation team have utilized their best professional judgment in drawing the conclusions reported in this document. The team members are not to be held accountable for any injudicious or unauthorized use of this document.

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