

North Central Association
Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement

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

To
Rainbow Elementary School
Unit 28614
APO AE 09177

on
February 22-24, 2006

Submitted to
Charles L. Callahan, Principal

on
March 20, 2006

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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 would like to express appreciation to the logistics team and the entire staff for their warm welcome and collaborative efforts to host the team. Materials documenting the school's journey through the cycle were clear and well organized. The snacks, breakfast, and lunch were nutritious and beautifully presented. We enjoyed all the student work in the hallways and classrooms and the warmth and candor of the staff.

TEAM ROSTER

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**SECTION I
GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL
RAINBOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Principal: Charles L. Callahan
 Principal's Tenure in the School: Five
 Principal's E-mail Address: Chuck.Callahan@eu.dodea.edu
 Grades: PreK-6
 Total Enrollment: 209

	<u>Enrollment Per Grade</u>	<u>Sections Per Grade</u>
Pre-Kindergarten	33	1 Sure Start, 1 PSCD
Kindergarten	25	2
Grade 1	35	2
Grade 2	29	2
Grade 3	21	2
Grade 4	20	1
Grade 5	28	1
Grade 6	18	1

Professional Staff: 26
 FTE of Professional Staff: 24
 Number of Staff New This Year: 5

Setting

The school is located at Barton Barracks, a former German Army post that predates the Second World War. The school and the host town of Ansbach are located in the German state of Bavaria about 25 miles west of Nuremberg, about two hours north of Munich. Construction of the post began in 1936 and was used by the German Army as a depot for heavy armor during WWII. After the war, the post was taken over by US forces and continued to be used for US Army heavy equipment depot and as personnel headquarters until the mission was changed to a flying mission in 1990. From 1992 until September of 2005, Barton Barracks has been the home of the 235th Base Support Battalion. It is currently the home of US Army Garrison.

Students

The school serves 209 students in pre-kindergarten through grade six. Eighty-nine percent of the students are dependents of Army personnel, 1% dependents of Air Force personnel, 10% dependents of DOD civilians, and 0.5% foreign nationals.

The student body consists of the following populations and percentages: 64.5% European-America, 18.7% Hispanic, 12.6% African-American, 1.4% American Indian, and 2.8% Asian/Pacific Islanders. Fifty-eight percent of enrolled students are male, and 42% are female. Ninety-seven percent of the students ride a bus to and from school.

Most of the children are from homes of US Army personnel who have recently been or are now deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq in support of Operation Afghanistan or Iraqi Freedom.

Program

The building is architecturally attractive and well designed for the student population (PreK-6). The two-story structure houses administrative offices, 13 general-purpose classrooms, a multi-purpose room (combination cafeteria, gym, and assembly room,) and information center. Rooms/labs are assigned to computers, art, music, host nation, English as a second language, language arts and reading specialist, Reading Recovery, talented and gifted, Read 180, special education, counselor, nurse, and supply.

Staffing and Organization

The school consists of 13 classes in Pre-K-6. A total of 26 professional staff members guide the education of the students. The building is staffed with 1 administrator, 1 counselor, 3 front office personnel, 12 classroom teachers, 3 special education teachers, art, music and physical education teachers, an information specialist, nurse, host nation teacher, an English as a second language teacher, an educational technologist, a language arts and reading/Reading Recovery specialist, gifted education teacher, and 6 paraprofessionals.

School Environment

The school is well cared for, pleasant, and welcoming. The staff is proud of the fine “child-centered” educational environment they are able to offer to students. Close partnerships with the command and parents enable the school to serve as a stabilizing force within the community in the lives of its students, parents, staff, and teachers in the time of deployment. The school stakeholders are supportive of each other and the process of schooling and learning. The school clearly demonstrates its pledge to the learning process to honor its families in the military.

SECTION II DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Overview

The school began a new cycle in 2001-2002 by developing a school profile using NCA software. Teachers, parents, and students were surveyed, and school data were gathered and reviewed prior to the selection of a school goal. Progress was hampered somewhat by changes in personnel both at the school and district level during the school cycle.

In 2002-2003 the school chose the goal “All students will improve the quality of their writing in all subject areas.” Staff agreed, “The essence of quality writing is characterized by the Six Traits of Writing Plus One.” Subsequent school improvement plans and supporting in-service activities addressed the implementation of the traits and scoring rubrics.

The staff is to be commended for working together on a common goal, making adjustments to the local assessment tool as deemed necessary, and beginning to use data to drive instructional decisions. The team wishes to congratulate the school on its efforts.

Involvement in the School Improvement Process

Findings

- The staff members are professional and collegial, and they readily share information to support student success.
- The small school size affords many opportunities for staff involvement in the school improvement plan (SIP). Some teachers serve on more than one committee, and all teachers fully embrace the assessment tool of 6 Traits of Writing Plus One.
- There is abundant evidence of writing across the content areas, e.g., LARS, READ 180, Reading Recovery, art, music, physical education, gifted education, school nurse, educational technology, host nation, English as a second language, and learning impaired.
- The composition of the school improvement leadership team (SILT) is well balanced to ensure that school-wide decisions represent the needs of all programs and grade levels.
- Student Council supports the goal through activities, i.e., “Letters to the Front” and “Poems in the Pocket.”
- Parents are represented and serve on the school SIP teams. Their involvement includes planning events and providing resources that focus on the school goal.
- The school informs parents of activities in support of the goal through weekly newsletters and electronic distribution of SIP team meeting minutes.
- Students are aware of and engaged in the school goal on a daily basis, i.e., daily announcements, use of the writing rubric, and focus on writing.

Next Steps

- Continue to provide opportunities and designate time for cross-grade and interdisciplinary collaboration in support of the school goal.

Leadership for the School Improvement Process

Findings

- The administration has established a culture of shared-leadership and decision-making ensuring “buy-in” and “ownership” of the SIP. All stakeholders are involved in school improvement efforts.
- The administration provides structures and encourages involvement in school improvement efforts: collaboration between teachers and specialists, time for vertical and horizontal articulation, opportunities to develop inter-rater reliability, in-service, and other resources.
- Teachers expressed appreciation and admiration for the leadership of the SIP chair. Staff reported highly supportive and knowledgeable leadership.
- The SILT does an excellent job informing new teachers about the SIP and training them how to implement the writing rubric. Teachers new to the school are expected to demonstrate initiative and responsibility toward meeting the school goal.
- School Improvement Teams worked hard to coordinate their efforts and ensure student success.
- Teachers and staff made considerable effort to engage in school-wide involvement in support of student achievement.
- The school invites parents to attend in-service activities, review the SIP, serve on teams, and develop an understanding of the writing rubric, e.g., open house, special meetings.

Next Steps

- It is important to formalize support structures that will endure after the completion of the current SIP cycle, focusing on data-based continuous school improvement. Consider developing, displaying, and communicating a timeline of the identified annual action plan activities to inform and engage the staff.
- In year one of the next cycle, review all student data collected from the previous three years and identify potential goals based on triangulated data.
- Disaggregate the data on all assessments to identify subgroups in the student population that may require additional interventions, (<40th percentile, gender, ethnicity, grade level.)
- During the next cycle, the school is urged to collaborate and define the essence of the school goal. This must occur prior to aligning school-wide interventions, strategies, and local assessments in order to fully apply the NCA process.
- Continue to acknowledge the efforts and celebrate the achievements of teachers and students in support of SIP.

High Expectations for School Improvement

Findings

- There is an expectation that students write frequently in a variety of ways. Parents have noticed that their children are writing more and note improvement. Students report that teachers expect students to do their best work.
- Student writing samples, displayed throughout the building, serve as a model of high-expectations.
- Students and parents report teachers offer individualized and supplemental instruction as needed.

Next Steps

- As the staff continues to use a rubric for writing, primary teachers are encouraged to make the rubric reflect “kid-friendly-language,” and post rubrics in many areas of the classroom. Upper grade level teachers are encouraged to modify the rubric to inform writing instruction, e.g., narrative, informative, persuasive, descriptive.

School Culture and Climate in Support of School Improvement

Findings

- The staff members express pride in their learning journey as they collaborate and reach consensus about the writing assessments.
- Teachers report that during the last two years, they understood their responsibilities related to the school action plan. They said they use results from the writing rubric to inform and guide instruction.
- Teachers report the school improvement process is rejuvenating to their professionalism.
- Evidence of a variety of student writing is displayed in the hallways, e.g., poetry, reports, biographies, “Kidspiration” projects.
- Electronic message kiosks depict the school improvement plan and illustrate supporting activities.

Next Steps

- Consider using instructional celebrations, e.g., writing fair, Young Authors, and poetry readings to draw parents into the school, engage them in the instructional program, and form strong home-school partnerships.
- Consider moving and maintaining current student assessment data from the school common drive folder to teacher desk-tops to help direct classroom instructional decisions. This may require reorganization of resources.
- Collaboration concerning current research and best practice, as they relate to school wide interventions, will promote continued improvement of instruction.

SECTION III GENERAL APPRAISAL

Next Steps for School Improvement

Findings

- The team found evidence of formal and informal staff collaboration, shared-decision making, and consensus building. School structures supported the time and resources necessary to focus on the school action plan and progress towards achieving the goal.
- The SILT effectively gained the commitment of stakeholders during the last two years, and successfully engaged them in the school improvement process.

Next Steps

- As the next cycle of re-commitment and updating the school profile begins, review student achievement data from the last three years, triangulate the data, disaggregate the data to identify specific subgroups within the population upon which to focus interventions, and then select a goal.
- To ensure that the goal is accomplished, it must be aligned with standardized and local assessments, and the assessments must focus on the same set of skills.

DoDEA Instructional Quality

- The team observed evidence of a variety of instructional strategies used in classrooms. These included cluster grouping, pairs, cooperative groups, whole group instruction, centers, differentiated instruction, and developmentally appropriate practices. These strategies ensure that students with differing abilities and learning styles are challenged.
- Students identified as performing below the 40th percentile were assigned a staff mentor.
- The Literacy Place writing and assessment components, supplemented with technology, are used for school-wide writing instruction.
- Teachers support and share materials and expertise with each other on an informal basis. Consider ways to enhance opportunities to continue these practices through structured common collaboration time within and across grade levels and specialist areas.
- There was evidence of data sharing to enhance student achievement.
- The team observed innovative instruction in a variety of specialist and support staff programs.

DoDEA Curricular Standards

- The team observed, and students reported, teachers refer to the DoDEA standards in the classroom and relate and/or integrate them into instruction.
- DoDEA standards were posted in some classrooms and in some hallways throughout the building.

- Early childhood teachers use checklists, and some teachers use a variety of authentic assessments, to ensure that students are meeting the DoDEA standards.
- Through the use of many DoDEA initiatives and other support programs, expectations are established that ALL students will meet or exceed DoDEA standards.

DoDEA Initiatives

- In support of DoDEA Reads, there is a well-established mentoring program for students who score at or below the 40th percentile in reading.
- Early childhood training for kindergarten teachers provides support to ensure all kindergarten students are successful.
- The “Reading Buddies” program supplements early literacy development in pre-school and Sure Start classrooms.
- The team observed strong support for school-wide reading program. That support included READ 180, Reading Recovery, LARS, and Accelerated Reader.
- “Kidspiration” and “Kid Pix Deluxe” are integrated into the kindergarten curriculum in support of DoDEA Reads and literacy development.
- There was evidence of on-going technology training to support instruction.
- Math Matters posters highlight the math problem-solving process used within this school.

Other Characteristics

- The school and staff use technology to disseminate information to parents and the community. Consider expansion of the use of technology to address other needs, i.e., web pages describing classroom-based activities, homework, and desk-top assessment information.
- There was considerable evidence that staff openly share ideas. Some teachers said that they would “rather change grade levels than schools” due to the professionalism of staff.
- Classrooms and hallways are warm, clean, inviting and reflect school pride.
- Both parents and students indicate they are pleased and excited about the amount of student work posted in hallways and classrooms.
- Continue to recognize and validate staff contributions and strengths in support of a positive school climate and staff professionalism.
- There is strong support for the school from all command levels, e.g., unit sponsorship and the “Commander’s Council of Readers.”
- “Reading Starts with Us” is sponsored by the information center designed and is to bring reading to families of young students.
- The information center has many resources to support the mission and goal(s) of the school. Consider ways to maintain and enhance the present collaborative efforts to further solidify the information center as the “hub of the school.” Also, consider ways to expand and enhance professional reference materials in support of the SIP.
- The friendly atmosphere and small size of the school provide a sense of intimacy and belonging, almost like a family. School support for the local community is outstanding, especially during times of deployment. The school proudly serves as the center of the community.

- Students expressed their delight in a variety of school activities, i.e. Commander’s Council of Readers, School Spirit Days, and the principal dressing funny and changing the color of his hair.
- Parents were satisfied with the school’s “open door” policy and the level of communication. They appreciated web pages, progress notes, phone calls, and emails.
- Parents said the school administration responds quickly to resolve issues at the lowest level. Further, they felt the administration is in touch with the community, listens and cares, is friendly, and knows every child by name.
- The parents describe the office staff as welcoming and helpful.
- Parents said the teachers were honest, upfront, and welcoming. “Teachers really care for children,” “the friendliness of teachers rubs off on the kids,” and “kids are able to be kids.”
- At the beginning of the school year students and families are welcomed by the PTSA, administration, and staff via a barbeque. Personal orientations are provided for new families.
- The level of parent involvement in this school is outstanding. The PTSA has a program to match the needs of the school with many parent volunteers.
- For a small school, there is a wide variety of clubs and activities, i.e. Cooking Club, Math Olympiad, Student Council, and “Whacked on Classics.”
- A student stated, “At Rainbow Elementary School, it’s fun to learn.”

Team Recommendation

The visiting team is pleased to notify the Department of Defense State Committee that Rainbow Elementary School has met the NCA CASI requirements regarding school improvement.`

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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