



Glenda Ritz, NBCT
Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction

Indiana State Board of Education
Request for Freeway School Accreditation
Board Date: May 1, 2013

School: Project Libertas School C751

Education Director: Megan Howey Hughes

Address: 2125 E. 54th Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46220

Grade Span: K-8

Public/Private: Private

Current Enrollment: 40

Targeted Population: Project Libertas is a small, non-denominational, independent elementary and middle school in Marion County that attempts to create a thriving learning environment that hinges on individualized instruction, student voice, and community engagement.

Identity: The school serves families primarily from Center Township, but we attract families from all over Marion County and have 40 students enrolled, kindergarten through 8th grade. Of these students, 75% are Caucasian, 20% are African American, and 5% are mixed race. We plan to enroll 60-75 students for the 2013-2014 school year. Our marketing strategies are designed to help us reach families across racial, ethnic, and socio-economic levels. We estimate that at least half of our families are low to moderate income earners.

Curriculum: The Common Core Standards are embedded in our K-8 curriculum. We surpass the Indiana standard that Common Core be implemented in kindergarten through 2nd grade by 2013-2014 - we adopted the use of Common Core school-wide during the 2012-2013 school year. For each primary area of study (reading, writing, math, word study, social studies and science), Project Libertas teachers focus on Common Core/Indiana academic standards being met for each grade level. Each unit of study that we create is mapped to include teaching points, a calendar for the unit, assessments, and the academic standards addressed.

Testing History: N/A



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Staffing: Most teaching staff are currently licensed. Additional teachers hired as enrollment grows will be licensed. Criminal background checks have been completed.

Waiver Requests: The only statute that we wish to suspend is IC 20-30-5-8. We wish to incorporate basic safety instruction into our 8th grade social studies or physical education curriculum instead of having a separate safety education course.

Issues: None

Recommendations: Full Five-Year Freeway Accreditation

Petition for Accreditation as a Freeway School
by Project Libertas

Submitted by:
Megan Howey Hughes, Principal Teacher
on April 15, 2013

Project Libertas, an independent school in Indianapolis, is seeking Freeway School Accreditation through the state of Indiana. Freeway accreditation will provide another layer of accountability and widely recognized credibility to our school.

I. School Entity

Project Libertas is a small, non-denominational, independent elementary and middle school in Marion County. We admit students regardless of race, color, religion, gender, and national or ethnic origin. In fact, our vision is to end the predictive value of race, class, gender and special capacities on student success in our school and in our communities. Our school was founded when a group of highly committed parents and teachers decided to continue the instructional model and community-centered focus of the Indianapolis Project School - a charter school - after its closing in 2012. We began the school year teaching in borrowed space with donated school supplies and materials, and have worked tirelessly to transition to a more permanent space while building a school with a strong foundation, leadership, teaching staff, and curriculum. The Bloomington Project School serves as a mentor/sister school as we build our foundation.

Our school was founded by parents who believe strongly that our core beliefs and curriculum create a learning environment that is the best fit for their children. They are so invested in the school that parents serve as our janitorial and cafeteria staff this year, volunteer to assist teachers on a regular basis, drive the bus route to take students home, and teach "Passions" classes (more on Passions classes under *Our Curriculum*). Our teachers have worked diligently to create a thriving learning environment that hinges on individualized instruction, student voice, and community engagement. We work with our students and families to ensure each child's academic and social success.

We believe that children come to school with unique gifts and skills. Our mission is to uncover, recover, and discover these gifts and talents to allow each child to thrive. Our goal is for Project Libertas students to know themselves well as learners and understand their role in making our world a better place. We strive to create a culture where all are important and valued by nurturing, positive relationships with all members of the community.

In addition, we use the following guiding beliefs to shape our curriculum and decision-making:

- Empowering students to be contributing participants in their education, their community, and the diverse society in which we live. The keystones to change rely upon the creation of a learning community that provides students with experiences that are immediately relevant.
- Knowing yourself well, which is the pathway to knowing and understanding others well and is the pathway to the kind of collaboration that can solve problems and bring people together for the greater good.

- Valuing the contributions of all members of the learning community. A school works best for each student it serves when the culture of the school is both inclusive and inviting.
- Judging our success based on the success of our students, particularly those with the highest needs and the most challenges.
- Tailoring our practices to serve all children, including our own. We will identify all obstacles and barriers to success and work collaboratively to systematically dismantle them. There is no reason to fail.
- Celebrating and honoring our families and their communities by valuing our students, their diverse histories, and their ancestral backgrounds.
- Creating a culture where all are important and valued by nurturing, positive relationships with all members of the community.
- Infusing environmentally responsible practices into our school's culture and curriculum.

II. Demographic Data

Beginning in August 2013, Project Libertas will be located within the Jerusalem Apostolic Church building at 2125 E. 54th Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46220. This location is easily accessible by bus route and centrally located to allow relatively easy access from all over the city. Our school serves families primarily from Center Township, but we attract families from all over Marion County.

We currently have 40 students enrolled, kindergarten through 8th grade. Of these students, 75% are Caucasian, 20% are African American, and 5% are mixed race. We plan to enroll 60-75 students for the 2013-2014 school year. Our marketing strategies are designed to help us reach families across racial, ethnic, and socio-economic levels. We did not ask families to submit financial data for the 2012-2013 school year, but we estimate that at least half of our families are low to moderate income earners. Financial data will be required for the 2013-2014 school year and beyond as we are adopting a formalized sliding scale tuition structure. A family being able to apply Choice Scholarships towards tuition at our school directly impacts our vision to end the predictive value of race and class on a student's academic success. We anticipate that these scholarships will allow us to enroll families that wouldn't have been able to otherwise afford an independent school even with a sliding scale structure.

III. Our Curriculum and Compliance with Common Core Standards

The Common Core Standards are embedded in our K-8 curriculum. We surpass the Indiana standard that Common Core be implemented in kindergarten through 2nd grade by 2013-2014 - we adopted the use of Common Core school-wide during the 2012-2013 school year. For each primary area of study (reading, writing, math, word study, social studies and science), Project Libertas teachers focus on Indiana academic standards being met for each grade level, Common Core or otherwise. Each unit of study that we create is mapped to include teaching points, a calendar for the unit, assessments, and the academic standards addressed.

We use the following instructional models/programs:

Reading and Writing Workshops – Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University

The workshop model couples focused, whole class, mini-lessons with individualized reading and writing instruction through on-going student/teacher conferences. The curriculum offers units of study for each grade level in reading, writing, and word study. These units of study clearly lay out a sequence of teaching points, instructional resources to use, how to couple reading, writing, and word study instruction, and ties to common core standards. This model is intended to engage students through reading and writing topics that they enjoy while providing specific learning objectives in each lesson. This method of instruction is used across the country (and world), and has been adopted by many schools and districts in Indiana as a primary method of language arts instruction. The Reading and Writing Project has spent the last few years adapting their entire K-8 curriculum to better address the Common Core Standards and they indicate this alignment within their curriculum. Project Libertas teaches English Language Arts to the entire school using this model.

enVisionMATH

We use the standard enVisionMATH curriculum to teach K-8 mathematics. As with the other academic areas, we ensure that Common Core standards are being taught and assessed throughout the year for each grade level. In addition, students apply math skills to engaging, hands-on projects such as designing and building raised bed gardens.

Project Zero – Harvard University

Founders of Project Libertas and The Bloomington Project School developed a concept called “P3” – which stands for place-, project-, and problem-based learning. P3 uses an instructional model developed by Project Zero to teach social studies and content literacy (science) standards by engaging students in designing and carrying out projects that address social and scientific issues that matter to them. This model is inquiry based and identifies the steps for teachers to use to develop high quality lessons and projects. Community members, teachers, students and families come together each fall to create a broad question (ex: “What is community?”) that students and teachers use to guide their learning that year. Units of study are handcrafted by our teachers to couple students interests with academic standards. Students have P3 and Content Literacy multiple times each week.

In addition, students also have the following classes:

Passions

In addition to the academics listed above, our students engage in Passions classes like Debate, Exploring our World, Chess, Meditation and Yoga, Strategic Games, Science Experiments, and more. Teachers and community volunteers offer courses that they are passionate about, and students get to choose their classes. Passions classes allow children to engage in high-interest topics that enhance their academic and social growth.

Physical Education and Art

In the 2012-2013 school year, all students had P.E. and Art weekly. We would like to expand our offerings to include Music in the 2013-2014 school year.

IV. Plan for Academic Honors Diploma

We are a K-8 school, therefore this component does not apply to us. We intend for our 8th grade graduates to leave our school prepared for the academic rigors of high school.

V. Demonstrating Growth in Attendance and Student Performance

Project Libertas intends to meet the performance requirements of a Freeway School, including an increase of 2% or more in attendance and ISTEP performance each school year until the average rate is 85% and a 1% increase each additional year until the average rate grows from 85% to 90%.

We will use the following strategies to meet these standards:

Academic strategies

- Continually assess students' academic progress in all academic areas and use this assessment data to shape and guide both classroom and individualized instruction.
- Ensure that all students are making academic progress and are on track academically. Students that are below grade level in any content area will receive additional support through tutoring, additional classroom instruction, and additional resources for parents.
- Ensure that Common Core Standards are incorporated into the curriculum.
- Provide opportunities for students to become accustomed to the format and language of standardized testing prior to taking the ISTEP.

Attendance Strategies

- State the attendance expectations clearly to families to empower them to maintain a high attendance standard.
- Help families establish carpools and other mechanisms to support families that need help getting their children to school.
- Work with community partners to develop a before- and after- school program, thus allowing families flexibility in drop off and pick up times.
- Explore the possibility of leasing or buying a van or bus to help with transportation needs.

Additional measures to measure student achievement and growth include frequent running records and DRA reading assessments; daily, weekly and end of unit math assessments; writing assessments including the Indiana Partnership for Young Writers writing continuum; and other age-appropriate and content-appropriate assessments in social studies and science.

VI. Addressing Character Education (including Honesty and Respect), Hygiene, Alcohol and Drugs, Diseases Transmitted Sexually, and Abstinence and Restraint.

We believe that the social curriculum is often as important as the academic curriculum. Our Principal Teacher and one other teacher have been formally trained in the Responsive Classroom model, and the Principal Teacher has trained the rest of the staff. Responsive Classroom helps teachers and students create a classroom climate of responsibility and accountability for actions. Students and teachers develop school and classroom agreements that we follow all year. Students are held to logical consequences if they fall outside established norms.

We also work with outside organizations like the Peace Learning Center to provide students with experiences to help them know themselves well, build a positive school culture, and be leaders in the school. In addition, we use high quality resources provided by organizations like Teaching Tolerance and Rethinking Schools to help our students work together across their differences and to connect our curriculum to the real issues that students face in their lives.

Topics like hygiene, alcohol and drugs, sexual health and sexual education will be incorporated into our science and physical education curriculums according to Indiana state statutes in a grade appropriate manner.

VII. Students with Special Needs

Because our curricular model contains a significant amount of individualized instruction, our teachers are able to quickly notice struggles that students may have. We have daily communication folders and schedule family conferences to work with parents to support their child. Teachers meet weekly and create plans to meet the needs of struggling students. If a parent determines that they would like their child to be evaluated for special education, we have established ourselves with the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) Private/Parochial Special Education Team. This group is also already providing services for students that qualify. Currently, about 15% of our student population already has an IEP. Students with IEPs receive the accommodations or additional support outlined by their plan, whether through IPS service providers or classroom teachers.

VIII. Suspended Statutes and Rules

The only statute that we wish to suspend is IC 20-30-5-8. We wish to incorporate basic safety instruction into our 8th grade social studies or physical education curriculum instead of having a separate safety education course.

IX. Integration of Technology

Technology is frequently incorporated into instruction. Students use computers daily as part of math instruction to practice fluency and maintenance. Because our math

instruction is closely tied with “real world” issues, students also use computers to find applicable data on a regular basis.

In addition, students practice word processing skills, engage in research through Internet searches, and use computers as tools in the writing process. PowerPoint, Prezi, and PowToon are all utilized for presentations. Students have access to Google Drive and are able to access information they save there regardless of where they are.

As our school grows, obtaining and integrating additional technology will be a priority for us.

X. Ensuring a Safe and Disciplined Learning Environment

We believe that good learning cannot occur if a child does not feel safe or have an orderly environment in which to learn. As discussed in section VI, we use Responsive Classroom as our classroom management system. This approach instructs teachers to model desired behavior and use reinforcing, reminding and redirecting language to guide student behavior. It encourages teachers and students to decide on logical and natural consequences to misbehaviors. It helps students feel a part of classroom decision-making. It also provides a structure for what to do when students are acting outside of the rules, including taking a “break” (removing oneself from the class to refocus). If a student repeatedly misbehaves, a family conference is scheduled and a behavior plan may be put in place. These are rare and involve all stakeholders (teacher, parents/guardian, and child) defining the desired behaviors and creating an incentive for the child to follow the expectations. For extreme misbehavior, suspension and expulsion may be required. The school’s Family Handbook outlines our discipline procedures. It is distributed at the beginning of the school year and soon will be available on-line.

We have safety procedures in place to ensure emergency preparedness and implement security measures regarding how people enter and leave the school building. We conduct tornado drills, lock-down drills and monthly fire drills. All staff members have a copy of the emergency plan. This is reviewed annually and with any new staff.

XI. Staff Development

Staff development is a priority for our school. We use a rigorous and planning-intensive curricular model and want to ensure that our teachers have the support that they need to be successful. Our staff meets weekly for two hours; this time is used for professional development, cooperative skill building, and to collaborate on school matters. We use Critical Friends Group protocols, developed by the National School Reform Faculty and School Reform Initiative, to structure our time together. Beginning next year, all staff will develop goals to help them improve as practitioners, which will then be supported by the Principal Teacher. In addition, the Principal Teacher conducts classroom observations.

Future goals for professional development include having all teachers formally trained by Responsive Classroom, the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project, and Project Zero. We would also like to bring in local experts in math, reading, and writing instruction to support our teachers' professional growth.

XII. Number of Instructional Days

Our school operates on a balanced calendar and is in session for 180 days. In addition, we have two make-up days scheduled.

XIII. Electronic State Data Reports

Our staff is experienced in and used to tracking and maintaining academic and attendance data, both digitally and manually. We have the technology to produce and submit Student Data Reports, and a Principal Teacher with experience in collecting and distributing data.

Appendix A

Policy on Expanded Criminal History Checks for Current Staff Members and New Applicants

Project Libertas is committed to protecting the security, safety, and health of employees, students, and others, safeguarding the assets and resources of the school, and assuring individuals in responsible positions are worthy of the trust they are given. Therefore, Project Libertas has adopted a policy requiring expanded criminal history (ECH) checks for job applicants applying for both certificated and non-certificated positions. ECH checks will also be required for individuals who seek to enter into a contract to provide services to the school or are employed by an entity that wishes to do so if that individual will have direct and ongoing contact with children.

Policy:

Expanded criminal history checks shall be required prior to an individual being hired in any role that would put them in direct contact with children or hold responsibility within the organization. This policy applies regardless of whether or not a competitive recruitment process is used. Expanded checks include:

(A) search of the records maintained by all counties in Indiana in which the individual who is the subject of the background check resided;

(B) search of the records maintained by all counties or similar governmental units in another state, if the individual who is the subject of the background check resided in another state; and

(C) check of:

(i) sex offender registries in all fifty (50) states; or (ii) the national sex offender registry maintained by the United States Department of Justice;

OR a:

(A) national criminal history background check (as defined in IC 10--13--3--12); and

(B) check of:

(i) sex offender registries in all fifty (50) states; or

(ii) the national sex offender registry maintained by the United States Department of Justice.

Project Libertas will notify job candidates of the ECH check requirement. Project Libertas will conduct an ECH check for any finalist applying for a position with the school, or will hire an applicant pending successful fulfillment of a qualifying ECH check. This check must be completed no later than three months after date of hire. Each finalist will be required to provide written consent for Project Libertas to request the ECH check. Failure to disclose criminal convictions requested during the application process may result in disqualification for employment or termination of employment.

The applicant/employee will be required to cover the costs of the criminal history check. Project Libertas cannot require an employee to pay for an expanded criminal

history check more than one time in five years. Project Libertas reserves the right to conduct a limited criminal history check on any employee at any time.

Results from an ECH check will be considered in a manner pursuant with IC 20--26--5--11. All results of the ECH check will remain confidential, will be maintained by the school administration, and will be disclosed only to authorized employees who have a need to know in the performance of their job assignments.

Appendix B

Staff Member	Role/Experience	Teaching Area/Subject	Licensure/ Degrees	Background Check Complete
Megan Howey Hughes	2012-13: Teacher; School Director (Principal Teacher) 2013-14: Full-time School Director	2012-13: K-8 Language Arts 2013-14: NA	Current Indiana Teaching License; K-6 General Education Masters Degree: Education Leadership (will pursue administrative license in 2013-2014 school year). Bachelors Degree: Business Administration, minor in Psychology	yes
John Gulyas	Teacher	2012-13: K-8 Social Studies 2013-14: Middle School Teacher	Current Indiana Teaching License; Middle/High School Social Studies Bachelor's Degree: Political Science, minor in history. JD from Indiana University School of Law-Indianapolis.	yes
Owen Harrington	Teacher	2012-13: K-8 Math 2013-14: Elementary School Teacher	Expired Elementary Education teaching license - North Carolina Bachelors Degree: Sports Management, minors in Business and Broadcast Communication	yes
Nick Selm	Teacher	Art and Physical Education K-8	Bachelors Degree: Studio Art, minor in History	yes
Liz Dunigan	Instructional Aid		Has completed university coursework - English Literature	yes

Additional Notes:

- 1) We plan to hire one more licensed teacher and one more aid for the 2013-2014 school year.
- 2) Our classrooms are multi-age. For the 2013-2014 school year, we will have a K-2nd grade classroom, 3rd-5th grade classroom, and 6th-8th grade classroom.
- 3) All current Indiana teaching licenses are included at the end of this document.