

Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for Asociacion Escuelas Lincoln

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AdvancED is the unified organization of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE).

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the Asociación Escuelas Lincoln demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

Standard 1. Vision and Purpose

Standard: The school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Lincoln School's mission is clearly articulated and describes a compelling purpose for the school; the mission statement serves as a guide for the action of administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The purpose of the school is to provide an education based on a United States accredited curriculum with the objective being to provide academic excellence and to develop ethical, responsible, and globally conscious world citizens. The school interprets this mission broadly and includes an emphasis on the social and emotional dimensions of the school community.

The school's leaders are committed to a shared purpose and mission. There is evidence that a singular focus on the mission as an American school has allowed the school to flourish providing a sense of common purpose as well as financial stability. Conversely, there are stakeholders in the school community who may feel less included because of cultural or language barriers. Discussions with a wide range of stakeholders about what it means to be an American school trying to create global citizens would likely provide an opportunity for a rich mission-oriented exchange.

Faculty and staff report goal-setting exercises at an individual and departmental level that often form the basis for evaluation and progress in curriculum development. Broader institutional goals are generally not documented or widely disseminated. Consequently these goals are not an evident part of the daily and annual pattern of work at the school. Shaping a desired future for the school and communicating that vision routinely among all stakeholders represents an opportunity to move forward as there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding the distinction between mission and vision and the extent to which the broader school community participates in the creation of the school's vision.

The mission of the school is evident in the teaching and learning process. The administration and board focus considerable effort in regard to faculty recruiting, retention and evaluation and teachers generally seem well-suited to the purposes and objectives of the school. Small class sizes further enhance the realization of the

mission and facilitate the caring relationships between teachers and students that are central to the school's success. An orientation for new faculty further strengthens this dimension of the life of the school. There is an opportunity to enhance these efforts especially with respect to those teachers who are not familiar with the American educational system.

The school employs a variety of means for effectively communicating its mission and philosophy. Parent meetings, the website, emails and newsletters were noted as particularly effective in this regard. The superintendent recently moderated a mission-focused discussion with the senior class using that gathering as an opportunity to educate and gather feedback.

The school maintains accurate data regarding enrollment and the demographics of the school community. This information is disaggregated into constituent groups by nationality and educational background providing a sound basis for interpreting the mission and planning. Various stakeholder groups share a broad understanding of the school profile and that awareness contributes to special efforts in supporting students and families.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The school's stakeholders support the mission as evidenced in interviews and survey responses on the National Study of School Evaluation Survey.
- The mission and philosophy are posted in visible areas of the school and described in detail on a robust website.
- School personnel demonstrate commitment to the school and enthusiasm for the opportunity to be a part of the school community.
- The school makes a deliberate and successful effort to build community at all levels. Parents and students report a strong sense of welcome into the school community and a deliberate effort is made to incorporate new students whether they enter at the beginning or middle of the school year.
- The current faculty and administration have commendable tenure at the school lending stability and continuity.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Ensure the commitment and focus of the school on its mission remains a priority through periodic review of all aspects of the mission by stakeholders.
- Assess the mission statement in light of the school's transient student population: how can Lincoln continue to realize a broad mission and deliver tangible results given the pattern of student enrollment?
- Use the vision statement to guide planning for the future direction of the school.
- Use targeted surveys to collect feedback systematically and to benchmark results over time.

Standard 2. Governance and Leadership

Standard: The school provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Lincoln School's governing board is especially effective with respect to aligning policies and procedures with the school's mission and maintaining a partnership with the superintendent for the benefit of the school. Board members are well-versed in Lincoln's distinctive purpose and culture, the issues that require their attention, and the need for strategic approaches to advancing the school's mission.

Of particular note, the board, working with the superintendent, has guided the school to financial stability through fluctuating enrollments and uncertain economic times. The board has further made capital improvements in the school's campus that have rendered tangible differences in the teaching and learning environment. Board members have had a clear and appropriate role in shaping policy while also routinely providing support and feedback to the superintendent. With the school stable and healthy, the board now has an opportunity to lean forward and develop a vision for teaching and learning at Lincoln, taking into consideration the rapid pace of change in the world and how leading schools will respond to and shape the future.

In both governance and the daily leadership of the school, Lincoln exhibits a culture of integrity and diligence in meeting the requirements of applicable laws, standards and regulations. The tone for the school is established by the board with the administrative team holding itself to high ethical standards with regard to finance and management.

The daily leadership of the school is fully delegated to the superintendent and his administrative staff. The school has established a culture that honors learning and uses the multiple talents of teachers and students to meet its mission. There are high expectations for student and staff performance and these expectations are effectively maintained even when individual circumstances call for extra support. In interviews and classroom observations, the school staff demonstrated a commitment to building formative relationships with students that foster academic achievement and personal growth. Students recognize this as a distinguishing aspect of Lincoln's culture and were excited to share with members of the visiting team their enthusiasm for the school and their experience here.

School and staff performance has been improved by gathering and responding to feedback – most recently gathered through the NSSE survey – and through professional development. Lincoln benefits by a culture where continual improvement is a norm and is supported by both the leadership and faculty interaction. Evaluation processes for teachers are functioning well and providing the kind of guidance that continually challenges the staff to establish and meet goals. Divisional leadership at each level plays an important role in this process and is generally perceived as supportive.

To move forward and improve from its current position of strength, the school will need to determine factors critical to its success in meeting the needs of students in the future and then develop strategies and plans for accomplishing well-defined objectives. This process will represent a change in the school's current practice of informal planning and will require a more formal, explicit, and data-driven approach to developing improvement goals and building consensus among all stakeholders. This leadership challenge will keep Lincoln vigorous for years to come and allow the school to join the leading cohort of pre-kindergarten through grade twelve schools internationally.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The board of governors provides effective leadership and oversight for the policy and practice of the school.
- The administrative leadership of the school maintains high ethical standards and sets a caring and compassionate tone for the school community.
- Students and staff indicate they feel valued and important.
- The school translates high expectations for student learning into classroom practices while effectively instilling in students important qualities of character.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Engage a school-wide conversation focused on the requirements of excellence in the future and specifically what this will mean for Lincoln. Include all stakeholders working in concert with board and administrative leadership.
- Formalize and communicate a plan for institutional advancement with a central focus on improving student learning.
- Report routinely to all stakeholders on progress in meeting school goals.

Standard 3. Teaching and Learning

Standard: The school provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The mission of Lincoln School provides a clear focus relating to teaching and learning for the administration, instructional and support staff, students and stakeholders. Many stakeholders indicated they feel that teaching and learning at Lincoln School is something "to be proud of." They realize that while accountability is a must, educating children must go above and beyond test scores. Lincoln School is a diverse school that voices recognition of the need to emphasize equity and the need to deliver a quality education for every child in a caring environment. Lincoln School is committed to provide each student with an excellent educational experience PreK-12.

Stakeholder interviews reveal that the school has a dedicated staff which includes the superintendent, school administrators, teachers and support staff who all go “above and beyond” to meet the needs of students. Interviews at the building level indicate that teachers work in grade and content-level teams to provide both horizontal and vertical articulation of the curriculum. These efforts create a positive climate for learning. Also contributing to the positive climate for learning is the school and board’s commitment to maintaining small class sizes and providing generous resources. The school believes in allocating and protecting instructional time to support student learning and professional development. Professional development, based on identified student needs, is emphasized at different levels and provided by teachers, administrators, and outside presenters. However, professional development appears to lack coordination.

The QART observed engaged learners, but also observed students in many classes involved in conventional teacher-centered instructional style tasks with all students involved in the same assignment. Teachers and students have access to library and media services with large collections that are maintained and current. Both libraries maintain web pages that are linked to online databases and connect to websites. Access to the educationally sound websites provides students unlimited resources and information.

The school has recognized the need for technology improvement. As technology is acquired, it should be seamlessly integrated into the curriculum. On-going, job-embedded professional development should be provided for teachers. A method for monitoring the impact the technology instruction is having on student achievement should also be developed as new technology is acquired in accordance with the school’s technology plan.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Teachers are committed to meeting the needs of each child in a caring environment.
- Students are given individual feedback using a variety of methods to help improve their performance.
- The school provides opportunities for students to excel academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.
- Teachers are provided with a variety of staff development opportunities aimed at improving student learning.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Provide additional opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations.
- Develop and maintain a system for consistency within the curriculum or curriculum mapping process.
- Increase the use of technology for teachers and students through daily use.

- Integrate a variety of flexible grouping strategies in order to move away from teacher-centered, whole class instruction to more research based strategies that emphasize rigor and higher order thinking skills as evidenced by student work products.
- Develop a consistent process for monitoring instruction and implementation of school improvement initiatives.
- Provide staff development in research-based strategies to support teaching and learning.

Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results

Standard: The school enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

As reflected in Association Escuelas Lincoln's standards assessment report, the school uses a variety of assessment strategies and tools designed to generate data/information useful in improving student learning. In addition to teacher designed rubrics, examinations, and quizzes, summative and formative assessment activities are made up of research projects, dramatizations, performances, in class debates, and presentations. Additionally, the school relies upon standardized and external assessments of student learning as generated through testing protocols which include International Baccalaureate Diploma examinations, Advanced Placement Program testing, PSAT and SAT testing and at the elementary levels, Iowa Test of Basic Skills testing and the "Explore" testing program in grade nine. To date, these testing efforts have been used primarily to make improvements in curriculum design, examples of which include the adoption of a new mathematics program at the elementary level, introduction of the Six Plus One Writing Traits program, greater focus on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary, and at the middle school level, the introduction of a creative writing class designed for student's who excel.

Several factors, including significant time delays in receiving standardized test results, the transient nature of student enrollments which witness turnover as great as 30% of the student population per year, the relatively rapid turnover in expatriate teachers, and language issues all challenge the school's ability to generate, interpret, and appropriately apply standardized testing data.

A number of systems are used by faculty to report, in English, testing results and student learning progress to parents, including quarterly, summative "report cards," and at the middle and high school, four mid-term, formative reports; "Grade Quick" has facilitated such reporting efforts. External and standardized testing scores are in some cases discussed during the twice yearly parent conference sessions but more typically are sent home by post.

Interviews with faculty, parents, and administrative team members reveal that while the school makes impressive efforts to employ a variety of tools and protocols designed to generate data regarding student learning. To date, most of these efforts have been limited to informing curriculum and program changes and it appears that even these efforts lack the support of a system wide, coordinated data management effort. Much of the data generated does not impact classroom teaching because it is neither available nor organized into informational reports. The information, when available, is rarely timely enough to guide teach-assess-re-teach-reassess cycles.

The administration and faculty are to be commended for their efforts, in the face of significant challenges and distractions, to provide a variety of currently employed assessment activities to measure student learning success. In this regard, the school's practices, compared to most international schools of equal merit, are noteworthy. However, the school's efforts, in order to become more productive, must be expanded to include standardized testing that will provide new, state-of-the-art assessment technologies giving almost immediate results that are directly available to classroom teachers, and can, therefore, be used to inform and guide teacher strategies.

Additionally, the administration should work with its faculty to design systems to ensure that once generated, assessment data will be translated into useful, readily available information designed specifically to improve student learning. To support this effort, specific professional development opportunities should be provided in the use of assessment data to drive educational decision-making at both the system-wide and classroom levels.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- A variety of assessment activities are employed by the school in an effort to generate information regarding student learning
- The faculty uses both summative and formative testing strategies.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Design systems to ensure that, once generated, assessment data will be translated into useful, readily available information designed specifically to improve student learning.
- Provide specific professional development opportunities to administration and faculty in the appropriate use of assessment data to drive educational decision making at both the system-wide and classroom levels.
- Provide test results to parents in Spanish and English.

Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems

Standard: The school has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The Lincoln School employs qualified professionals capable of fulfilling their responsibilities as prepared, knowledgeable and experienced educators in their area of expertise. Faculty members are hired through a number of overseas recruiting agencies, through personal interviews and/or via telecommunications. The faculty has sufficient opportunities for continuous professional development activities that focus on meeting the vision, mission and propose of the school.

Teachers are evaluated using various summative and formative assessments which include class visits and one-on-one conferences with the principal which include goal setting and a discussion of learning and teaching achievement. Teacher retention is moderately high which is largely due to the working conditions, school environment and quality of life in Buenos Aries, but there is some turnover each year.

Fiscal management and accounting is guided by accepted accounting practices. Books are audited on an annual basis. The school has managed successfully though a period of financial uncertainty to gain sound financial health. A substantial financial reserve and the prospect of growing investment income both attest to the healthy condition of the school's fiscal position.

In addition to an exemplary faculty and staff, the school is distinguished by its physical facilities. Recent construction and renovations have allowed for spaces that effectively serve students' learning. In particular, a new gymnasium and plans to renovate the Middle School evidence the commitment of the board and administration to facilities equal to the school's academic reputation.

Beyond construction and renovation, the campus is remarkably well maintained. Buildings and grounds alike are cared for by a highly competent maintenance staff. Students and faculty obviously take pride in their campus as well. Litter is virtually non-existent. The beautiful location of the campus, overlooking the river while also providing a view of the skyline of the city of Buenos Aires, further enhances the overall the physical environment of the school reflecting a broader school-wide commitment to excellence. The administration is considering making additional accommodations to a greater number of classrooms for those who may have permanent or temporary handicaps in getting around campus. This would further enhance a campus which already provides ramp access to several areas.

The school's broader focus on student well-being is reflected in well-staffed counseling offices. Counselors serve each division as well as providing guidance in college selection – an area of particular strength as noted by students. In recent years, the school has added staff and programs to support students with special learning needs.

Lincoln School provides a safe and supportive learning and working environment for the members of its community. The appointment of a security manager has enhanced the safety and security on campus for everyone. While security efforts are substantial, a complete crisis management plan to augment the current fire

evacuation plan is needed. In addition, a written security improvement plan would be in order.

Broadly speaking, school personnel report that the resources needed to accomplish the mission of the school are more than adequate. This results from a commendable budgeting philosophy that builds the school's financial plan around what will be needed for success rather than what will be simply sufficient to remain solvent.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The Lincoln team of dedicated and professional educators provides a caring and supportive learning environment for their students
- An efficient program of fiscal management is maintained.
- A highly effective college planning program meets the needs of the student population.
- State of art athletic, library, media, arts and laboratory facilities are available.
- The transition of students arriving and leaving Lincoln is supportive and nurturing.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Provide a more systematic means of communicating professional development opportunities for faculty.
- Appoint a full time K-12 technology director to better serve the growing demands of improved technology and accessibility for students and teachers.
- Develop a written school security improvement plan.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

Standard: The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The Lincoln School has committed itself to ensuring all stakeholders are provided with the opportunity to give and/or receive information about student performance and general school information from pre-kindergarten to grade 12. Communication with stakeholders is offered through an open house, monthly coffees, weekly newsletter, teacher web pages, Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and email communications. Surveys indicate that students, teachers and parents feel that there is effective communication among all stakeholders. The school web site offers extensive and valuable information related to curricular and extra curricular information and the vast majority of the stakeholders use the website as their primary source of information. Within each division, teachers have the opportunity to collaborate and discuss educational issues to better meet the needs of the students ensuring consistency with the mission of the school. However, in the absence of

formal policies and systems, Spanish speaking members of the community do not appear to enjoy equal access to the informational efforts of the school.

The parent community, through both survey data and interviews, indicates that student academic information (quarterly report cards and progress reports) is effectively communicated and explained and that evaluations reflect various assessment models, which suggest that teachers hold student accountable for high academic expectations.

The Lincoln School has created a culture of open and honest communication in which all stakeholders feel that they have an opportunity to express their concerns and to offer suggestion for school improvement. Students especially feel their opinions and suggestions received by teachers are important and are respectfully addressed.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Lincoln provides various effective channels of communicating information to all stakeholders.
- The respect and pride for the school among all stakeholders appears genuine with a unified focus on student academic and social development.
- The school web site is excellent! It is very informative and user friendly, and the virtual school tour is exceptional.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Provide a means to communicate more effectively with the Spanish speaking parent stakeholders about school information and or student performance.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Standard: The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The goals of the Lincoln School target student learning as the priority of the school. The mission addresses three major goals for students: provide a United States education, ensure academic excellence, and promote ethical, responsible, and globally conscious world citizens. In interviews, stakeholders showed strong support of the mission of the school. A team of teachers reviewed Standard Seven as part of the preparation of the Standard Assessment Report (SAR) and used available data to assess the standard. Planning for school improvement is accomplished through division and individual teacher goal setting and planning.

The school used the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) to survey parents, students, teachers, and support staff. The survey provided the school with important qualitative data about the quality of the instructional program, support for student learning, school climate, parent/school relationships, and resource management. Standardized assessments such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in grades three through five and the Cognitive Abilities Tests (CAT) in grades three through eight, are given to elementary and middle school students. Grade nine students are assessed with the "Explore" testing program and grade ten students take the Differential Aptitude Test (DAT). High school students are assessed using International Baccalaureate Diploma examinations (IB), Advanced Placement (AP) testing, and/or the PSAT and SAT assessments related to college credit and admissions. The use of other information sources in regard to instructional and organizational effectiveness is limited. A comprehensive profile of student performance data was not available to use to evaluate the results of school improvement initiatives. The use of quantitative data is available and is used by the divisions, but the use of school-wide data for goal setting and planning for continuous improvement is limited.

The components of continuous improvement are employed by the board, superintendent, and division administrators to address school goals. A consensus-building process involving board members and administrators is used to define the school mission, goals, and strategies to improve the work of the school. Teachers and division administrators identify school improvement needs using assessment data. The division administrators engaged teachers in division planning using student standardized assessments and the NSSE survey of stakeholders. An example of division planning strengthening the mathematics curriculum.

In interviews, it was evident that stakeholders were not familiar with the process of comprehensive continuous school improvement planning and its components of defining and reviewing the mission, gathering and using a variety of data for decision making, developing a written action plan, and evaluating results. The components of continuous improvement implemented by the division administrators have resulted in improving student learning. By aligning school-wide improvement initiatives and developing a written continuous improvement plan, the school will achieve its goal of academic excellence.

A written, continuous improvement planning process with the following strategies and action steps is not fully developed: a reasonable time frame to implement the plan; identification of the person(s) responsible for directing the implementation of the actions; a means for evaluating progress toward goals; and the resources needed to engage in and sustain a continuous school improvement process. Such a written school-wide continuous school improvement plan should be completed.

The school administrators and staff convey a commitment to meeting the school's mission and goals. The ability of the school to fully achieve its mission and goals is limited because of the need for additional professional development and training in continuous school improvement planning for administrators and the leadership team. The desire of the superintendent, administrators, and teachers to provide a high quality of education for students supports the need to engage the staff in a school-

wide continuous school improvement process and the development of written school-wide improvement plan.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The mission and goals are focused on student learning.
- The school generates a variety of both qualitative and quantitative assessments.
- The decisions and actions of the board and superintendent are aligned with the school's mission.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Develop a written school-wide continuous improvement plan using the processes used by the board and superintendent to engage all the staff in planning for continuous school improvement.
- Provide professional development to administrators and school leadership teams in developing and writing a continuous school improvement plan, in the use of data for decision making and measuring results, and in effective school improvement strategies.

Summary of Findings

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review team commends the school for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted.

The respect and pride for the school among all stakeholders is genuine with a unified focus on student academic and social development.

The Lincoln School has an efficient program of fiscal management which has maintained state of the art athletic, library, media, arts and laboratory facilities.

The board of governors provides effective leadership and oversight for the policy and practice of the school while the administrative leadership maintains high ethical standards and sets a caring and compassionate tone for the school.

The school makes a deliberate and successful effort to build a sense of community at all levels.

Recommendations

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review team identified the following recommendations for improvement. The team focused its

recommendations on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall school effectiveness.

Align school-wide improvement initiatives; provide training for the school leadership in comprehensive continuous school improvement, and develop a written continuous improvement plan with the components of vision, profile, plan, and results to achieve the school's goal of academic excellence.

Design systems to ensure that once generated, assessment data will be translated into useful, readily available information designed specifically to improve student learning.

Also, provide specific professional development opportunities to administration and faculty in the use of assessment data to drive educational decision making at both the system-wide and classroom levels.

Conduct a review of the design and delivery of the core curriculum (science, math, language arts, social studies, Spanish) to consistently meet the ever changing needs of transient students and teachers including through the use of technology-based instruction.

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the strengths and address the recommendations noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.