



For Immediate Release  
April 20, 2007  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

## *Baghdad Primary School Nears Completion*

by Norris Jones  
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**BAGHDAD, Iraq** – Youngsters in north Baghdad will soon be able to attend school right in their own community.

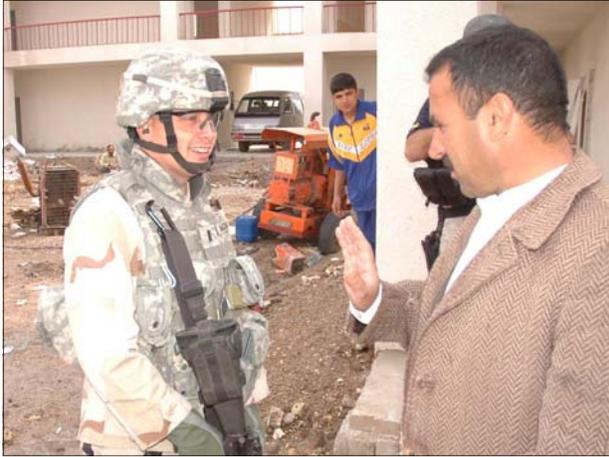
Local Iraqi leaders identified the need for a school and the U.S. military unit there funded it. Construction on the 1250-square-meter two-story facility was started last year and should be completed mid-May. Currently, it's 95 percent finished.

Andy May, project engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Gulf Region Central District, has been overseeing a variety of essential service projects in Baghdad Province over the past four years.

"I've been involved with many things, but the school is right at the top of the list," said May. "We're making a difference in people's lives. You can see it in the pride the Iraqi workers have continued to display throughout the construction of that facility. It's their children, nephews and nieces, and other kids residing in that



Project engineer Andy May, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, checks a banister in the new primary school nearing completion in north Baghdad Province. (U.S. Army photo by Norris Jones)



Lt. j.g. Robert McCharen praises one of the workers for their quality workmanship in building a new primary school in north Baghdad Province. (U.S. Army photo by Norris Jones)

neighborhood who will be going to school there.

"They know how important that structure is and what it will mean to their community for decades to come," he said. "For many families the nearest school was simply too far for their children to go. Now, a whole new chapter of opportunities is opening for them."

Lt. j.g. Robert McCharen, who is the USACE officer in charge of the area, says the 23-classroom facility will be capable of handling up to 900 students, both boys and girls ages 6 through 12 years old. It also contains a 90-square-meter four-room guardhouse.

He noted his office is currently managing 19 projects in north Baghdad Province including new water compact units providing drinking water to local villages, electrical networks, and the new Husseiniya primary healthcare center that's open and providing medical care to families there.

"The contractor at the new elementary school has gone the extra mile. You can see the quality workmanship in the tile floors, the professional masonry touch in each room, down to the plumbing in the restrooms. The community should be very pleased," he said.

McCharen leads a team of five Americans and seven Iraqi engineers. "I couldn't ask for a finer group. One of our goals



One of the youths who will be attending the new school. (U.S. Army photo by Norris Jones)

each day is learning a new Arabic word. It helps us not only communicate but better understand the culture here. When I go out to the projects, it's fun to speak a little Arabic with them, it helps break the ice."

When construction on the school is completed, 414th Civil Affairs Battalion plans to enhance the project through the Commanders Emergency Response Fund by purchasing blackboards, chalk, desks and school supplies for the students.

Cpt. Holly Hanson, a 414th detachment team leader, said "local residents continue to tell me how important this school is to their families."

Gulf Region Division has constructed or renovated over 960 schools throughout Iraq – providing quality learning environments for more than 500,000 students.



Polishing the new floors along with some electrical and masonry work are among the final items remaining to be finished to open a new primary school in north Baghdad. (U.S. Army photo by Norris Jones)

**Note:** For additional information, contact Norris Jones, Public Affairs Specialist at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region Central District at (540) 665-2644 or [Norris.Jones@tac01.usace.army.mil](mailto:Norris.Jones@tac01.usace.army.mil). For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, email [cegrd.pao@tac01.usace.army.mil](mailto:cegrd.pao@tac01.usace.army.mil) or visit our Web site at [www.grd.usace.army.mil](http://www.grd.usace.army.mil).