



External Review

Jones County School District

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Introduction to the External Review Process

Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools, and designed primarily to distinguish schools adhering to a set of educational standards. Today the accreditation process is used at all levels of education, and is recognized for its ability to effectively drive student performance and continuous improvement in education.

Institutions seeking to gain or retain accreditation must meet AdvancED standards specified for their institution, demonstrate high levels of or improvement of student performance if applicable, and provide evidence of stakeholder satisfaction with the operation of the institution. The accreditation standards focus on conditions and processes within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards, student performance, and stakeholder feedback.

Institutions participate in an External Review by a team of highly qualified evaluators who examine the institution's adherence and commitment to the accreditation criteria. The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation as it energizes and equips the leadership and stakeholders of an institution to achieve higher levels of performance and address those areas that may be hindering efforts to reach desired performance levels. External Review is a rigorous process that includes examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of instruction, learning, and operations.

The AdvancED External Review Team used the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators and related criteria to guide its evaluation, looking not only for adherence to standards, but also for how the institution functioned as a whole and embodied the practices and characteristics of quality.

Using the evidence at their disposal, the AdvancED External Review Team arrived at a set of findings contained in this report. The report is presented in three sections: Findings, Conclusion, and Addenda.

Findings

The Findings section presents the External Review Team's evaluation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators. It also includes Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement identified by the External Review Team, observations of the Learning Environment, as well as Required Actions.

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

Standards help to delineate what matters. They provide a common language through which an education community can engage in conversations about educational improvement, system effectiveness, and achievement. They serve as a foundation for planning and implementing improvement strategies and activities and for measuring success. AdvancED's Standards for Quality were developed by a committee comprised of effective educators and leaders from the fields of practice, research, and policy who applied professional wisdom, deep knowledge of effective practice, and the best available research to craft a set of robust standards that ensure excellence and continuous improvement. The standards were reviewed by internationally recognized experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research.

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, conclusions concerning Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards, and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team. Indicators are evaluated and rated individually by the External Review Team using a four-level performance rubric. The Standard Performance Level is the average of indicator scores for the standard.

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction

Purpose and direction are critical to successful institutions. A study conducted in 2010 by the London-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that "in addition to improving performance, the research indicates that having a sense of shared purpose also improves employee engagement" and that "...lack of understanding around purpose can lead to demotivation and emotional detachment, which in turn lead to a disengaged and dissatisfied workforce."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution commits to a shared purpose and direction and establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the institutions' vision that is supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.			3.0
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •District purpose statements - past and present •Survey results •Documentation or description of the process for creating the district's purpose including the role of stakeholders •Written District Quality Assurance Review procedures and documents that monitor its schools' adherence to the district purpose and direction •Examples of communications to stakeholders about the district's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook) •Observations •Copy of strategic plan referencing the district purpose and direction and its effectiveness •Accreditation Report 	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.2	The system ensures that each school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Survey results•Written District Quality Assurance Review procedures and documents that monitor schools' adherence to the district purpose and direction and that of the school•Examples of school purpose statements if different from the district purpose statement•Examples of written stakeholder communications or marketing materials that portray the school purpose and direction•Accreditation Report•Observations•Interviews	3
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Observations•Interviews•District Quality Assurance Review plans that document two-way communication on district and school effectiveness and learning, thinking, and life skills•Examples of schools' continuous improvement plans•Survey results•Accreditation Report•Statements or documents about ethical and professional practices•Statements of shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning•The district strategic plan	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.4	Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Examples of schools continuous improvement plans•District Quality Assurance Review plans that document two-way communication on district and school effectiveness and learning, thinking, and life skills•Survey results•Observations•The district strategic plan	3

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

Governance and leadership are key factors in raising institutional quality. Leaders, both local administrators and governing boards/authorities, are responsible for ensuring all learners achieve while also managing many other facets of an institution. Institutions that function effectively do so without tension between the governing board/authority, administrators, and educators and have established relationships of mutual respect and a shared vision (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998). In a meta-analysis of school leadership research, Leithwood & Sun (2012) found that leaders (school and governing boards/authority) can significantly "influence school conditions through their achievement of a shared vision and agreed-on goals for the organization, their high expectations and support of organizational members, and practices that strengthen school culture and foster collaboration within the organization." With the increasing demands of accountability placed on institutional leaders, leaders who empower others need considerable autonomy and involve their school communities to attain school improvement goals. Leaders who engage in such practices experience a greater level of success (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Similarly, governing boards/authorities that focus on policy-making are more likely to allow school leaders the autonomy to make decisions that impact teachers and students and are less responsive to politicization than boards/authorities that respond to vocal citizens (Greene, 1992).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has leaders who are advocates for the institution's vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders. The institution's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Standard		Standard Performance Level	
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.		3.0	
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •Observations •Staff handbooks •Accreditation Report •District operations manuals 	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Governing authority minutes relating to training •Communication plan to inform all staff on code of ethics, responsibilities, conflict of interest •List of assigned staff for compliance •Proof of legal counsel •Governing authority training plan •Assurances, certifications •Accreditation Report •Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies •Observations •Interviews •Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest •Governing code of ethics 	3
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Communications regarding governing authority actions •District strategic plan •Examples of school improvement plans •Roles and responsibilities of school leadership •Roles and responsibilities of district leadership •Observations •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Survey results regarding functions of the governing authority and operations of the district •Maintenance of consistent academic oversight, planning, and resource allocation •Agendas and minutes of meetings 	4

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Examples of decisions aligned with the district's strategic plan •Examples of collaboration and shared leadership •Examples of decisions aligned with the school's purpose statement •Interviews •Survey results •Observations •Examples of decisions in support of the schools' continuous improvement plans •Examples of improvement efforts and innovations in the educational programs •Examples of decisions aligned with the district's purpose and direction •Accreditation Report 	3
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accreditation Report •Interviews •Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys •Survey responses •Communication plan •Observations 	2
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation •Accreditation Report •Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation •Job specific criteria •Observations •Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice throughout the system and student success noted 	3

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The superintendent is highly regarded and trusted to provide leadership in promoting the district's vision and purpose of success for all students.

2.1

Interviews with school staff, parents, community members, and school board members confirmed the External Review team's original impressions about the superintendent's passion for Jones County. His personality and communication skills provide a sense of trust among all stakeholders that he is devoted to all students and staff. He wants an "environment of dignity in everything we do," which has contributed to Jones County School System's reputation as an ideal place to work and rear a family.

2. The highly-regarded school board, both well trained and also aware of its role as a policy-making organization, operates within personal agendas to provide a support system for the schools.

2.2

Interviews with the superintendent, administrators, teachers, parents, and community members all validated the work of the board as being uniquely supportive--providing leadership and fostering trust while blending the roles of policy makers and community activists. The board goes as a group to each school twice each year to hear a data presentation and observe instruction first hand. They walk the campus, not as evaluators, but as a unified board wanting to be fully informed before making decisions. They see themselves as a support system for the schools and as the eyes and ears of the community. They believe in knowing firsthand what is going on.

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

A high-quality and effective system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership" (Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of quantifiable and intangible characteristics, which include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The school's curriculum and instructional program should develop learners' skills that lead them to think about the world in complex ways (Conley, 2007) and prepare them to have knowledge that extends beyond the academic areas. In order to achieve these goals, teachers must have pedagogical skills as well as content knowledge (Baumert et al, 2010). The acquisition and refinement of teachers' pedagogical skills occur most effectively through collaboration and professional development. These are a "necessary approach to improving teacher quality" (Colbert et al, 2008). According to Marks, Louis, & Printy (2002), school staff that engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective schools, "supports teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations. Teachers give students feedback to improve their performance.

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.	2.67

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The system's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Survey results•Lesson plans•Observations•Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices•Accreditation Report•Descriptions of instructional techniques	3
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Curriculum guides•Common assessments•Observations•Interviews	3
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the approved or prescribed instructional strategies and programs•Interviews•Observations	2
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Curriculum maps•Documentation of collection of lesson plans, grade books, or other data record systems•Interviews•Observations•Professional development offerings and plans tied to the prescribed education program, instructional strategies, developmentally appropriate practices, and student success	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees•Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings•Interviews	2
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction•Interviews•Samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student learning	2
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to district and school beliefs and values about teaching and learning•Interviews	2
3.8	The system and all of its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of their children's learning progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days•Calendar outlining when and how families are provided information on child's progress•Parental/family/caregiver involvement plan including activities, timeframes, and evaluation process•Interviews	3
3.9	The system designs and evaluates structures in all schools whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports that student's educational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Curriculum and activities of structures for adults advocating on behalf of students	3
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Sample report cards for each program or grade level and for all courses and programs•Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•District professional development plan involving the district and all schools•Crosswalk between professional learning and district purpose and direction•Interviews	3
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•List of learning support services and student population served by such services•Interviews•Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning•Data used to identify unique learning needs of students	3

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

Institutions, regardless of their size, need access to sufficient resources and systems of support to be able to engage in sustained and meaningful efforts that result in a continuous improvement cycle. Indeed, a study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Pan, 2003) "demonstrated a strong relationship between resources and student success...both the level of resources and their explicit allocation seem to affect educational outcomes."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, to meet special needs, and to comply with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staffs who are well qualified for their assignments. The institution provides a safe learning environment for students and staff. The institution provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard		Standard Performance Level	
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.		3.0	
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.1	The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ, and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, and educational programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accreditation Report •Interviews •Documentation of highly qualified staff •Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for the district and schools 	3
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs, and system operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Examples of school schedules •Accreditation Report •Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources •Examples of school calendars •Interviews 	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities and learning environments•Interviews•Observations•Accreditation Report•Example systems for school maintenance requests•Survey results•Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements	2
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•District strategic plan showing the areas of budget, facilities, quality control, and other strategic systems•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Financial Reports and Facilities Plan	4
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Observations•Evaluation procedures and results of education resources•Survey results•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Data on media and information resources available to students and staff•Technology Plan and Board Minutes	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model •Survey results •District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level •Accreditation Report •Interviews •Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness •Observations 	3
4.7	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Observations •Interviews •Survey results •Accreditation Report •Examples of improvements made to education program and delivery models based on results of program effectiveness evaluations •Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education •Counselor Meeting Minutes 	3
4.8	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Survey results •Accreditation Report •Budget for counseling, assessment, referral, educational and career planning •Interviews •Description of referral process •PILLARS Grant 	3

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. With over 90 percent of the district staff having worked in the district for more than five years, the district administration clearly values the retention of a highly qualified staff.

4.1

Interviews with administrators and staff confirmed the excellent reputation of the Jones County School District as a positive place to work which has resulted in large numbers of applications for each position and little turnover. Teachers interviewed shared the importance of working in a district that “truly looks out for one another.” The HiQ Report and interviews noted that 100 percent of the teachers are highly qualified. Retention of quality staff helps ensure consistency and continuity of instructional programming as well as enhanced organizational effectiveness.

2. The superintendent’s expertise in fiscal management is allowing the district to take available dollars during the years of austerity cuts and still ensure student success.

4.4

The Executive Summary and Superintendent's Report described the loss of \$20 million over the last five years, and yet the district has been able to increase their reserves, eliminate furlough days, not increase the millage rate, and purchase new technology. Interviews with staff indicated there is not a lack of resources in the district. Interviews also revealed a number of grants have been obtained to provide funding for additional program opportunities. The superintendent shared with the External Review team that he understands that revenue is a fixed amount, something he cannot change, while cost is the variable. He shared with the team his belief that the lack of financial resources can be counteracted through human effort. During times of economic crises often witnessed by school systems across the country, leadership must employ sound fiscal practices to minimize the negative impact on classroom delivery.

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

Systems with strong improvement processes are moving beyond anxiety about the current reality and focusing on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, that is, data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, & Wohlstetter (2007) from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California indicated that data can shed light on existing areas of strength and weakness and also guide improvement strategies in a systematic and strategic manner (Dembosky et al., 2005). The study also identified six key strategies that performance-driven systems use: (1) building a foundation for data-driven decision making; (2) establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement; (3) investing in an information management system; (4) selecting the right data; (5) building school capacity for data-driven decision making; and (6) analyzing and acting on data to improve performance. Other research studies, though largely without comparison groups, suggested that data-driven decision making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Lafee, 2002; McIntire, 2002).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures. The system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine strategies to improve student performance. The institution implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained, and the institution demonstrates progress in improving student performance and institution effectiveness.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.			2.8
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •Observations •Accreditation Report 	3
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Observations •Accreditation Report •List of data sources related to district effectiveness •Interviews 	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Documentation of attendance and training related to data use•Observations•Interviews	2
5.4	The school system engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data•Observations•Evidence of student growth	3
5.5	System and school leaders monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Minutes of meetings regarding achievement of student learning goals•Accreditation Report•Observations•Interviews	3

Learning Environment

Every learner should have access to an effective learning environment in which she/he has multiple opportunities to be successful. The Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT) measures the extent to which learners are in an environment that is equitable, supportive, and well-managed. An environment where high expectations are the norm and active learning takes place. It measures whether learners' progress is monitored and feedback is provided and the extent to which technology is leveraged for learning.

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External review team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a 4 point scale with 4=very evident, 3=evident, 2=somewhat evident, and 1=not observed. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the 7 learning environments included in ELEOT.

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool

<i>Environments</i>	<i>Level</i>
A. Equitable Learning Environment	2.299999952316284
B. High Expectations Environment	2.200000047683716
C. Supportive Learning Environment	2.5999999046325684
D. Active Learning Environment	2.5999999046325684
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.299999952316284
F. Well-Managed Learning Environment	2.9000000953674316
G. Digital Learning Environment	1.5

Conclusion

Summary of the External Review

In off-site and on-site review sessions, the AdvancED External Review Team examined artifacts and evidence provided by the institution. During the on-site portion of the review, the team reviewed additional artifacts, collected and analyzed data from interviews, and conducted observations.

The ERT visited Jones County Schools on March 3-6, 2013. The team was comprised of five members: one from South Carolina, one from Arkansas, and three from Georgia. Prior to arriving at the Marriott in Macon, Georgia, on Sunday afternoon, the team discussed during a conference call the documents provided by the district on ASSIST. Team members studied the Executive Summary, the Self-Assessment, the district's website, and artifacts provided through a Dropbox. On Sunday afternoon, the team met in the hotel conference room to share initial thoughts on the indicator ratings and evidence as determined by the district.

On Monday morning, the superintendent presented an "unscripted" overview of the district, which provided much information about the history and culture of the school system. Interviews then followed of the superintendent, the certified and classified district office staff, three school board members, external stakeholders, and principals whose schools would not be officially visited on Tuesday. The team found the stakeholders to be well informed about the accreditation process. They were open about the district's strengths and challenges. After reviewing artifacts and conducting follow up interviews Monday afternoon, the team returned to the hotel to continue its dialogue and deliberations concerning standard ratings.

On Tuesday, four of the schools had formal visits while the lead evaluator visited four other schools in order to tour the facilities, observe classroom instruction, and greet teachers and students. Administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and external stakeholders were interviewed. Tuesday night, the team shared observations and information from their school visits and continued to discuss ratings, powerful practices, opportunities for improvement, and possible required actions. During interviews on Monday and Tuesday, the team observed 34 classrooms and talked with three board members, 20 administrators, 81 teachers, 24 support staff, 49 students, and 75 external stakeholders representing parents, businesses, and civic organizations.

On Wednesday morning, the team did follow-up interviews and continued to study artifacts. The review concluded with a called board meeting at 3:30 PM in the school system's board room.

Using the evidence collected, the team engaged in dialogue and deliberations concerning the degree to which the institution met the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators.

As the External Review Team reviewed artifacts, engaged in discussions with stakeholders, and observed classes, several overarching themes emerged. Based on interviews and observations, there is strong collaboration and trust among the leadership, staff, students, and community. According to the superintendent, the school system's goal is to have an environment of dignity. Heard during every

interview was the trust all stakeholders have in their superintendent and board to do what is best to guarantee the success of all students. The team found overwhelming support of the recently adopted purpose, which builds upon the original idea of success for all. Community members discussed the visibility of the purpose throughout the schools and county. Even with this support, the district staff still acknowledges the need to increase stakeholder involvement throughout the continuous improvement process, including the annual review of the purpose. During the stakeholder interviews, discussions about parental involvement revealed 80 percent of the parents work outside Jones County. While the school system would like to have more parental involvement, they are pleased with the parents' attitude of trust in the staff to take care of their children. Because over 90 percent of staff members have worked in the district more than five years, parents believe employees have a vested interest in the system and will "band together" for the welfare of all students. One mother new to the county explained that her husband drives almost an hour to work each day so that their children can attend school in Jones County.

Because of 4.1 million dollars in austerity cuts, the district has had to become resourceful in ensuring the schools have what they need. The team found a dedicated district office staff, all of whom are willing to do whatever it takes to support the schools. Their goal is make sure the weak economy does not affect academic achievement. One external stakeholder said the superintendent "could squeeze 12 cents from every dime." Leadership has used the district's limited resources wisely in its attempt to not make any decisions that may negatively impact classroom instruction.

Through the use of PD 360 as well as "redelivery" of information after workshops, teachers do have access to professional learning. However, the teachers are struggling in areas of differentiated instruction and student engagement through technology. Teachers at all schools shared the need for someone to model lessons as a means of providing a better understanding of how to differentiate instruction and use technology effectively. Administrators, teachers, and support staff all stressed their dependence on data in making decisions. The superintendent even said, "In God we trust, but everyone else must bring data," humorously stressing the district's serious dependence on data. In addition to the state's data program, the school system uses Data Director to provide them more ready access to current data. However, teachers and support staff shared with the team their desire to have even more training in retrieving and analyzing data.

Although the leadership at the school level is strong and has made effective site-based decisions, the team found there to be an inadequate systemic, systematic approach in many areas. For example, decisions about areas such as teacher mentoring, lesson plans, classroom observation forms, benchmarks, and newsletters to parents seem to be left to the schools. Quality assurance for system effectiveness requires consistency throughout a school system.

During the on-site review, members of the External Review Team evaluated the learning environment by observing classrooms and general operations of the institution. Using data from these observations, the team evaluated the quality of instruction and learning that took place classified around seven constructs or environments: equity, high expectations, support, engagement, progress monitoring and feedback, management, and use of technology.

On Tuesday of the review, the External Review team utilized the Effective Learning Environment

Observation Tool (ELEOT) to observe 34 classrooms in eight of the schools and score the seven areas of the learning environment. The team gathered evidence to determine powerful practices, opportunities, and required actions during these twenty-minute student observations. After participating in interviews at the district and school levels, studying artifacts, and analyzing student data, team members used this student-focused tool to corroborate information. Having heard during interviews about the dedication of the teachers, the team confirmed this belief during their observations. The area rated highest or most effective on the ELEOT was the "well-managed learning environment." Throughout the district, students were obviously aware of the classroom routines and behavioral expectations. There was mutual respect with teachers and peers, contributing also to the overall "supportive learning environment." Observations supported the belief that the students and staff care about one another and want success for all. The team witnessed no behavior problems at any grade level.

The district's belief in success for all students was supported as team members observed the "equitable learning environment" from school to school and from class to class. The use of inclusion for special education students was evident throughout the schools. However, the lack of a systemic understanding among teachers of what differentiated learning looks like limits the differentiated learning opportunities, an area receiving lower scores in all schools. When scoring the "high expectations environment," the team found most oral questioning to be at a recall level, requiring usually one to two words for the answer; furthermore, most questioning was directed to the entire class with a few students answering all questions, thus lowering the rating on progress monitoring. Individual names were not often called. During independent learning, the team saw several examples of teachers providing students with opportunities to revise their work. Although students were often seated at tables or in groups, the team saw limited examples of true active learning through collaboration with other students. Instead of students "actively engaged in the learning environment," most activity was either teacher-centered or independent. The team did observe examples of small group instruction and even one situation with a reading circle being led by a student. Learning stations were most common at the early elementary level.

The area receiving the lowest score based on the ELEOT was the "digital learning environment." Interview responses at the district level consistently revealed a commitment to technology. However, during school-level interviews, the team learned that bandwidth problems are causing much frustration. Students and teachers expressed frustration about insufficient bandwidth but also expressed hope that the problem will be corrected by next year. The interactive white boards were often being used as overhead projectors with little opportunity for active student engagement beyond the dragging of items from one point to another. In some classrooms, the team found no use of technology. Teachers indicated a need to see a lesson modeled in which students are actively using digital technology to communicate and work collaboratively.

The External Review for Jones County Schools was extremely well planned and coordinated. Prior to the review, the lead evaluator communicated with district leaders who truly showed an understanding of the district's strengths and challenges. All stakeholders were friendly and open with the team and readily provided information and assistance. The External Review team appreciates the district's hospitality, support, and professionalism and recommends accreditation of Jones County Schools pending the final review by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. Create a professional learning plan which specifically defines, describes, and includes modeling and monitoring of the application of various aspects of differentiated instruction (i.e. student use of technology, flexible grouping, and teacher commentary of student work) beyond PD360.

Primary Indicator(s) or Assurance(s):

3.3

During the classroom observations, interviews and review of evidence, the team found that there were mixed expectations and understanding of differentiated instruction. Usage of PD360 as a professional learning monitoring piece does not provide administrators with tangible proof of instructional strategy application. Teachers should be physically engaged in professional learning that allows for effective feedback and implementation of instructional practices that promote engaged student learning.

Addenda

Next Steps

The institution should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the Powerful Practices section to maximize their impact on the institution.
3. Develop action plans to address the Required Actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the Required Actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
5. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Required Actions. Institutions are required to respond to all Required Actions. The Required Actions should be completed before the Accreditation Progress Report is submitted. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to monitor and ensure that the system has implemented the necessary actions to complete the Required Actions. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the completion of the Required Actions and the resulting improvement.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the External Review, the Team submits the final report to AdvancED for review and for action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and upon the institution. Upon receiving its accreditation, the institution should share its achievement with internal and external communities.

About AdvancED

In 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), both founded in 1895, along with the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form AdvancED: one strong, unified organization dedicated to education quality. In 2011, the Northwest Accreditation Commission (founded 1917) joined NCA CASI and SACS CASI as part of AdvancED. AdvancED is the world's largest education community, representing 30,000 public and private schools and systems across the United States and in 75 countries worldwide and educating 16 million students. The Northwest Accreditation Commission joined the AdvancED network in 2011.

External Review

Jones County School District

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI share research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help educational institutions continuously improve.