

Report of the  
External Review  
for  
Lamar County School System

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US

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## Introduction to the External Review

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 student performance 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.

## Part I: Findings

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

### 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. Before implementation, 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, identification of Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards (if appropriate), and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team.

The AdvancED Standards and Indicators are the first of three primary areas of evaluation for AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. Using indicator-specific performance levels, the External Review Team evaluates the degree to which the institution meets each indicator on a scale of 1 to 4. The scores assigned to the indicators are averaged to arrive at a single score. This score, along with scores from evaluations of student performance and stakeholder feedback, will be used to determine the accreditation status of the institution.

Average Indicator Score for this Institution	2.63
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**Standard 1: 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.**

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 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 that are aligned with the institutions' vision and supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

Standard 1			
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.			
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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Governing body policies, procedures, and practices</li> <li>• Examples of communications to stakeholders about the district's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook)</li> <li>• Minutes from meetings related to development of the district's purpose and direction</li> <li>• Copy of strategic plan referencing the district purpose and direction and its effectiveness</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the district's purpose</li> </ul>	3.0

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"> <li>• Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the schools' purpose statements</li> <li>• Examples of school purpose statements if different from the district purpose statement</li> <li>• Examples of written stakeholder communications or marketing materials that portray the school purpose and direction</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	2.0
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"> <li>• Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders about educational programs and equitable learning experiences</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Examples of schools' continuous improvement plans</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• The district strategic plan</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Examples of schools continuous improvement plans</li> <li>• Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• The district data profile</li> <li>• The district strategic plan</li> </ul>	3.0

**Opportunities for Improvement****Indicator**

1. Develop and implement a formalized process to review, revise, and communicate the individual school purpose as aligned with the system's purpose and direction.

1.2

Minimal evidence was presented to show that individual schools were part of a formalized system driven process to address the review, revision and communication of the school's purpose for student success. The policies and procedures are not in place to clearly and concisely outline the expectations for schools. Further the review of evidence and artifacts reveal no formal mechanism is in place to ensure system personnel monitor and provide feedback on the process that is presently in place.

The system leadership has been proactive in developing a sense of purpose and direction for the school system and how this impacts student success. The individual school process must have specific guidance and policy to ensure continuity and alignment is promoted throughout the school system.

2. Establish a system-wide formal, documented Response-to-Intervention continuous improvement process.

1.4

Little evidence was presented or observed to show that a documented system wide process exists to improve student learning conditions. The External Review Team notes that LCSS should develop and implement a formal, documented Response-to-Intervention continuous improvement process that provides clear directions for the purpose of supporting and improving student learning. The Team found little congruence amongst school and district leadership of a formalized process designed to improve teacher instruction in response to student learning. Individual schools have loosely defined systems in place, however direction and alignment from leadership will provide a clearly defined method of minimizing any achievement gaps. Formative data assessment reviews to inform modification of instruction and progress monitoring will be instrumental in this process.

**Standard 2: The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.**

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 educational institution leadership research, Leithwood and 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 their 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 communities to attain continuous 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 institutional 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's experience gained through evaluation of best practices has indicated 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 2			
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.			
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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Professional development plans</li> <li>• Student handbooks</li> <li>• Staff handbooks</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• District operations manuals</li> <li>• Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions</li> <li>• School handbooks</li> </ul>	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governing authority minutes relating to training</li> <li>• Proof of legal counsel</li> <li>• Governing authority training plan</li> <li>• Assurances, certifications</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest</li> <li>• Governing code of ethics</li> </ul>	4.0
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"> <li>• Communications regarding governing authority actions</li> <li>• District strategic plan</li> <li>• Roles and responsibilities of school leadership</li> <li>• Roles and responsibilities of district leadership</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Agendas and minutes of meetings</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• Examples of decisions aligned with the district's strategic plan</li> <li>• Professional development offerings and plans</li> <li>• Examples of collaboration and shared leadership</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Examples of improvement efforts and innovations in the educational programs</li> <li>• Examples of decisions aligned with the district's purpose and direction</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Minutes from meetings with stakeholders</li> <li>• Examples of stakeholder input or feedback resulting in district action</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan</li> <li>• Communication plan</li> <li>• Involvement of stakeholders in district strategic plan</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation</li> <li>• Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice throughout the system and student success noted</li> </ul>	3.0

### **Powerful Practices**

1. The Lamar County School System Board of Education and leadership function at a high level to support the larger school community.

### **Indicator**

2.2

As evidenced through stakeholder interviews and the board meeting minutes, the governing body has implemented processes and procedures to ensure that they operate in accordance with their defined roles and responsibilities. Governing body members participate in regular, systematic professional development at the regional, state, and national level. Internal and external stakeholders affirmed that board members were accessible, transparent, and productive. A sense of trust and collaboration between the board and the system leadership was evident not only through interviews but also in the impressive record of achievement in the school system over the last several years, notably in the increase in graduation rates to nearly 80%.

The governing body supports one another and the school system in the pursuit of student success. The school system has made notable strides forward under board leadership.

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**Standard 3: The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.**

A high-quality and effective educational 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 that include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The institution'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, J., Kunter, M., Blum, W., Brunner, M., Voxx, T., Jordan, A., Klusmann, U., Krauss, S., Nuebrand, M., & Tsai, Y., 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, J., Brown, R., Choi, S., & Thomas, S., 2008). According to Marks, Louis, and Printy (2002), staff members who engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective institutions "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 that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning. The curriculum 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 3			
The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.			
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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Student work across courses or programs</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Posted learning objectives</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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"> <li>• Curriculum guides</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Common assessments</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Products – scope and sequence, curriculum maps</li> </ul>	2.0
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"> <li>• Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool</li> <li>• Student work demonstrating the application of knowledge</li> <li>• Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the approved or prescribed instructional strategies and programs</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary projects</li> </ul>	2.0
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"> <li>• Curriculum maps</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Documentation of collection of lesson plans, grade books, or other data record systems</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Professional development offerings and plans tied to the prescribed education program, instructional strategies, developmentally appropriate practices, and student success</li> </ul>	2.0

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"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees</li> <li>• Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings</li> <li>• Professional development funding to promote professional learning communities</li> <li>• Examples of cross curricular or program projects, interdisciplinary instruction, and classroom action research projects</li> </ul>	2.0
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student learning</li> </ul>	2.0
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"> <li>• Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to district and school beliefs and values about teaching and learning</li> <li>• Records of meetings and informal feedback sessions</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff</li> </ul>	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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"> <li>• Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Calendar outlining when and how families are provided information on child's progress</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• Curriculum and activities of structures for adults advocating on behalf of students</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• List of students matched to adults who advocate on their behalf</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Master schedule with time for formalized structure</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Sample report cards for each program or grade level and for all courses and programs</li> <li>• Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting</li> </ul>	2.0

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"> <li>• District quality control procedures showing implementation plan for professional development for district and school staff</li> <li>• District professional development plan involving the district and all schools</li> <li>• Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• Schedules, lesson plans, or example student learning plans showing the implementation of learning support services</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning</li> <li>• Data used to identify unique learning needs of students</li> </ul>	3.0

**Powerful Practices****Indicator**

1. The school system affords families numerous and varied opportunities for understanding their children's educational achievements, needs, and growth.

3.8

Evidence from school and classroom visits, presentations from the system leadership, and interviews provided clear evidence that Lamar County School System has developed structures and systems to communicate with families. Teachers, staff, and school leadership use school Kiosks, school websites, school messaging system, District Open House, Summer Newspaper insert, Dr. Truby's Monday Morning Memo (MMM), Channel 10 morning announcements, PK-5's Tuesday folders and Lamar County Middle School's "specified standardized colored" flyer. A District-wide Parental Involvement Policy has been developed jointly with, and agreed upon with, parents of children participating in Title I, Part A programs, as evidenced by District Team Planning Sessions and Action Team for Partnership Meetings. Teachers and parents indicated through interviews that data are widely available and communicated through various delivery models

Continuous improvement is based on a thorough understanding of the current reality of student achievement. Availability and communication of these data and analysis of their implications to families provide a foundation for planning student and school success. Current profiles of student achievement contribute to clearly defined goals for student success.

**Opportunities for Improvement****Indicator**

1. Investigate a system of grading and reporting that encompasses curriculum goals through standards across grade levels and courses.

3.10

Interviews, presentations, and classroom observations provided evidence that standards-based education is being implemented in Lamar County School System. The district has recently developed curriculum maps and scope-and-sequence documents that cover grades K-12. However, minimal evidence was presented to show a consistent system of grading and reporting that communicates students' achievement and progress through standards across grade levels and courses. Discussions across grade levels and grade spans about the evaluation of student work anchored in the system's curriculum frameworks provide rich opportunities for collaborative professional culture.

As the system is moving toward standards-based teaching and learning, grading and reporting structures must be aligned to the delivered instructional practice and learning model.

**Standard 4: The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.**

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, D., Rudo, Z., Schneider, C., & Smith-Hansen, L., 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 the 30,000 institutions in the AdvancED network that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, meets special needs, and complies with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staff members 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 members to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard 4			
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.			
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"> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• District quality assurance procedures for monitoring qualified staff across all schools</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Assessments of staffing needs</li> <li>• Documentation of highly qualified staff</li> <li>• Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for the district and schools</li> <li>• Locally developed documents.</li> </ul>	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Examples of school schedules</li> <li>• District quality assurance procedures showing district oversight of schools pertaining to school resources</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Examples of school calendars</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Alignment of school budgets with school purpose and direction</li> <li>• Alignment of district budget with district purpose and direction</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities and learning environments</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements</li> <li>• Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments</li> <li>• Example maintenance schedules for schools</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• District strategic plan showing the areas of budget, facilities, quality control, and other strategic systems</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul>	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Evaluation procedures and results of education resources</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• District education delivery model intended for school implementation including media and information resources to support the education program</li> <li>• Data on media and information resources available to students and staff</li> <li>• Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information</li> </ul>	3.0

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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"> <li>• Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model</li> <li>• Policies relative to technology use at the district-level and school-level</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level</li> <li>• District quality control procedures that monitor the effectiveness of technology services at the district-level and school-level</li> <li>• Assessments to inform development of district and school technology plans</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness</li> <li>• Examples of school-level technology plans and budgets to improve technology services and infrastructure to students and staff</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul>	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Schedule of family services, e.g., parent classes, survival skills</li> <li>• Rubrics on developmentally appropriate benchmarks; e.g. early childhood education</li> <li>• Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education</li> <li>• List of support services available to students</li> </ul>	3.0
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"> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Budget for counseling, assessment, referral, educational and career planning</li> <li>• Description of IEP process</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Description of referral process</li> </ul>	3.0

**Powerful Practices****Indicator**

1. Lamar County School System has renovated and expanded its facilities to improve services to students, families, and the community as a whole and to set the stage for achieving its vision.

4.3

Interviews with central office staff, board members, and community stakeholders provided evidence of strong leadership from the superintendent and the board of education to marshal community support for building renovations. In the last few years, the system has built state-of-the-art facilities for athletics, the performing arts, and career/technical education. Creative, forward-looking designs have both expanded facilities with wise stewardship of limited resources. System leadership communicated to local stakeholders the need for these renovations, and won fiscal support through the passage of two Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax levies. Community members noted the visionary but systematic leadership behind these changes. Plans are in place to secure funds to increase student access to technology.

As a result of these efforts, the school system has invigorated its role as a community center and has furthered its goal of providing world class education for its students.

2. Lamar County School System has been aggressive in procuring grants, innovative programs, and community support to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of its students.

4.7

Lamar County School System has serves a community whose median income is 20% below the state median; 70% of the students served qualify for free and reduced price meals. While academic preparation is certainly the primary focus for the system, the culture of the system demonstrates commitment to ensuring that the physical, social, and emotional needs of students are met as well. The system has been awarded a three-year Elementary and High School Counselor grant for \$1,000,000 to improve outreach to students with various needs. An ambitious 21st Century grant of over \$2,000,000 is providing after-school services to students of all ages, and is projected to do so until 2017. Plans are in place to institute a school-based health clinic. In addition, personnel throughout the system provided evidence of numerous types of partnerships with the community to find innovative ways to support families in need. The school system has staff in place to ensure close communication with students and families and to identify and meet their needs.

Academic success for students is predicated upon meeting their physical, social, and emotional needs.

**Standard 5: 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.**

Systems with strong improvement processes move beyond anxiety about the current reality and focus on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, i.e., data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, and 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, J., Pane, J., Barney, H., & Christina, R., 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 institutional 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).

Through ongoing evaluation of educational institutions, AdvancED has found 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 5			
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.			
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"> <li>• Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local or school assessments on student learning and school performance</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free</li> </ul>	2.0

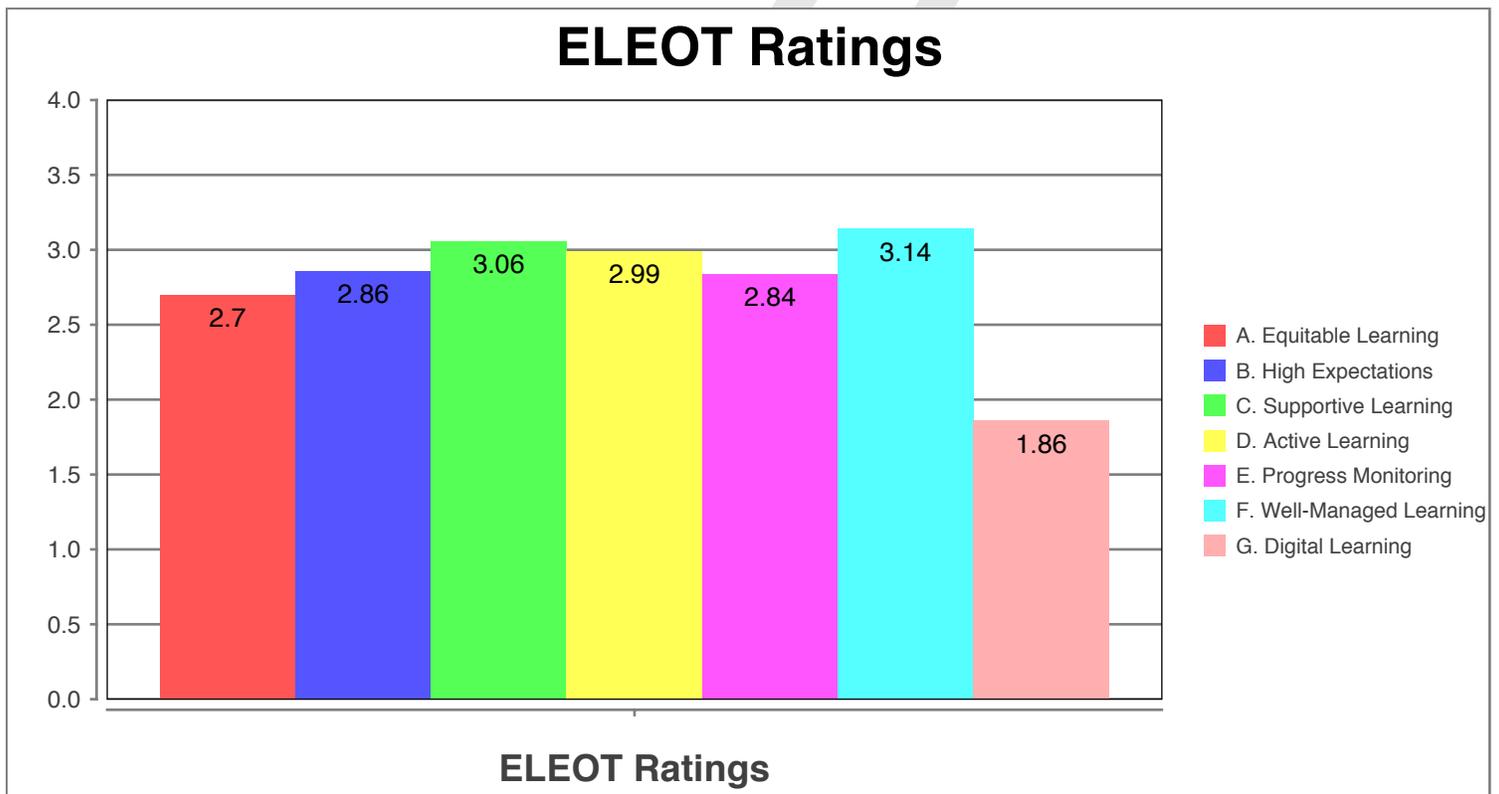
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning</li> </ul>	2.0
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	2.0
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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data</li> <li>• Examples of use of results to evaluate continuous improvement action plans</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Evidence of student growth</li> <li>• Evidence of student success at the next level</li> </ul>	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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"> <li>• Minutes of meetings regarding achievement of student learning goals</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Communication plan regarding student learning, systems that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders</li> <li>• Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Examples of district marketing tools and websites that cite student achievement results or that make promises regarding student achievement</li> <li>• Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0

## 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 four-point scale. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the seven learning environments included in ELEOT.



## Student Performance

Student Performance on assessments is the second of three primary areas of evaluation for AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. Institutions are asked to collect and analyze student performance data, then submit the data and the analyses to the External Review Team for review. The External Review Team evaluates the quality of the assessments used by the institution, the degree to which the institution properly administered the assessments, analyzed and acted on the results, and the overall performance of students using a set of rubrics. Results of that evaluation are reported below.

Student Performance Evaluation	
Evaluative Criteria	Performance Level
Assessment Quality	2.0
Test Administration	3.0
Quality of Learning	3.0
Equity of Learning	2.0

## Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholder Feedback is the third of three primary areas of evaluation in AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. The AdvancED surveys are directly correlated to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators; they provide not only direct information about stakeholder satisfaction but also become a source of data for triangulation by the External Review Team as it evaluates indicators.

Institutions are asked to collect and analyze stakeholder feedback data, then submit the data and the analyses to the External Review Team for review. The External Review Team evaluates the quality of the administration of the surveys by institution and the degree to which the institution analyzed and acted on the results. Results of that evaluation are reported below.

Stakeholder Feedback Evaluation	
Evaluative Criteria	Performance Level
Questionnaire Administration	4.0
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	3.0

## Individual Institution Results

AdvancED requires internal and external stakeholders from each individual institution within the system to evaluate their institution on the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools, student performance, and stakeholder feedback. The following table provides the results of those self-analyses. Higher scores indicate higher perceived performance on each of the measures. The range of possible scores for each of the institutions within the system are 1 (low performing) to 4 (high performing).

Institution	Indicator Averages	Questionnaire Administration	Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	Assessment Quality	Test Administration	Quality of Learning	Equity of Learning
Lamar County Comprehensive High School	2.67	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.0
Lamar County Elementary School	3.18	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
Lamar County Middle School	2.73	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
Lamar County Primary School	2.91	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	2.0

## Part II: 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.***

On November 10-13, 2013, an AdvancED team consisting of five members from Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina conducted an external review in Lamar County School System, Barnesville, Georgia. This was the second time the school system has undergone the systems accreditation process. Team members found the district very well-prepared for the review. All accreditation reports were completed and made available to the team well in advance of the review. Internal and external stakeholders were familiar with the accreditation protocols and were able to provide important perspectives in interviews. The system staff had gathered numerous artifacts to support self-assessment ratings, all of which were available electronically and were indexed meticulously by standard and indicator. The external review team gained stakeholder perspectives through formal interviews and/or informal conversations with all five school board members, 21 central office and school administrators, seventeen parents and community partners, 44 teachers and support staff, and 55 students. Team members conducted classroom observations in 38 classrooms in all four schools in the system.

The consensus of the external review team was that the school system was very open and transparent both in conducting the internal self-assessment and in sharing information during the external review. The system is characterized by an atmosphere of trust among all stakeholders, a necessary precondition for ongoing continuous improvement.

***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.***

The external review team largely substantiated the ratings in the school system self-assessment. On no indicator was there a variance of more than one point. As the Index of Educational Quality shows, Lamar County School System received the highest ratings in the standards relating to Leadership and Governance. Internal and external stakeholders spoke with approval and appreciation for the dynamic yet sensitive leadership of the superintendent and the board, and the excellent relationships among all leaders. The board clearly understood its roles in the system and had worked to cultivate trust among all stakeholders. The superintendent in his seven years in the system has been pro-active in helping the school system move forward in renovating and expanding facilities, as well as in addressing numerous fiscal challenges resulting from losses of state funding through searching out grants, maintaining (and using as needed) the system's fund balance, and keeping a clear eye on present and future funding needs and resources. Unlike many school systems in Georgia, Lamar County has only recently resorted to furloughs to help address budgetary problems. As a result, the external review team ratings in the area of Resources were high.

The Teaching and Learning Impact ratings were somewhat lower than the other two. The system has put in place an excellent foundation for improvements in this area in its investment in personnel, programs, and resources. However, these investments have not come to full fruition as yet. The system has invested in the employment of

Learning Support Specialists at each school at least sporadically to build professional learning communities, but the work is as yet inconsistent, with a need for some basic protocols and greater formalization of work. The external review team noted the need for greater clarity on expectations for how all personnel access, analyze, and respond to data to inform instruction. In addition, formal routines for improving vertical and horizontal articulation was cited as a need both in the system self-assessment and in the external review. Finally, the external review team sees a need for fleshing out the system's purpose statements which cite "world class education" as a mission. Discussions and decisions among internal and external stakeholders about what world class education looks like in Lamar County can help drive reforms in the classroom.

***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.***

The external review team conducted 38 learning environment observations in all four schools. Six out of the seven identified learning environments was rated close to or above Evident. The lowest rated area -- the Digital Learning Environment -- was rated close to Somewhat Evident. While instructional technology was present and available in all schools, the system can focus more on ensuring that students are using technology to use information for learning, solve problems, and work collaboratively.

The highest rated areas was in the Well-Managed Learning Environment. Teachers were skillful in ensuring a positive classroom climate, with behavioral issues addressed expeditiously and effectively. The very highest indicator rating was "speaks and interacts respectfully with teacher(s) and peers," with "knows classroom routines, behavioral expectations and consequences" a close second. One might surmise that the system's development of its Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support program at all school has seeing results. The lowest rated area in this environment was "collaborates with others during student-centered activities," suggesting that teachers should take more risks in setting up collaborative/cooperative activities for students since the essentials of classroom management are in place.

The second-highest environment rating was in Supportive Learning Environment. Within that environment, the highest indicator rating came under "Is provided support and assistance to understand content and accomplish tasks." Interestingly, the lowest rated area was "Is provided additional/alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge for her/his needs." These results suggest that teachers are responsive to student needs but are stopping short of providing true differentiation, a finding consistent with the relatively low rating on the indicator "Has differentiated learning opportunities and activities that meet her/his needs" under Equitable Learning Environment.

The external review of Lamar County School System was very successful, not least because of the evidence that the system sees accreditation as an ongoing process, not an event. At the very beginning of the review, the superintendent shared detailed information about the system's response to the 2008 review team's feedback. As a result, the 2013 team was able to check to see how its feedback to the system is a logical outgrowth of that of the earlier team.

There are many tasks involved in a successful review. The team wishes to thank Dr. Norma Greenwood, Associate

Superintendent, for her meticulous work in organizing all the work of the review. The team appreciates Dr. William Truby, Superintendent, for all the time he devoted to the team, even chauffeuring team members for two days and answering many questions in the course of our rides.

In the past, accreditation reviews resulted in an accreditation recommendation on status. Labels such as advised, warned, probation, or all clear were used to describe the status of a school relative to the criteria. Beginning with school year, 2013-14, AdvancED is introducing a new framework to describe the result of an accreditation review. Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduces an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ). The IEQ is comprised of three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) use of resources to support and optimize learning. Therefore, your institution will no longer receive an accreditation status. Instead, your institution will be accredited with an IEQ score. In the case where an institution is failing to meet established criteria, the accreditation will be under review thereby requiring frequent monitoring.

The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and Indicators; the Analysis of Student Performance; and the Engagement and Involvement of Stakeholders. Within each domain institutions will be able to connect to the individual performance levels that are applied in support of the AdvancED Standards and evaluative criteria. Within the performance levels are detailed descriptors that can be a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Required Action as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected Indicator.

The IEQ provides a new framework that recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement. Your institution's IEQ is the starting point for continuous improvement. Your actions for improvement that have a positive impact will be reflected in your IEQ score.

IEQ Institutional Score: 266

Teaching and Learning Impact: 233  
(Standards 3 and 5; Student Performance Criteria)

Leadership Capacity: 308  
(Standards 1 and 2; Stakeholder Engagement Criteria)

Resource Utilization: 288  
(Standard 4)

The External Review team recommends that Lamar County School System be accredited by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission for a five-year term of accreditation.

## Required Action

1. Develop common conceptions of what it means to experience "world class learning" and provide "world class education" in order to promote achievement of the system vision.

Related Indicator or Assurance: 1.3

### Description:

At this point, the system has articulated a very ambitious vision for what it provides for its students. Various stakeholders communicated their buy-in to the district's vision statement. External review team members is concerned that the term "world class" is used as a synonym for high quality. Truly fleshing out what world class learning through ongoing research and discussion among internal and external stakeholders will help transform learning experiences for all students. One instructional leader explained in an interview that the system needs to educate parents, the community, students, and staff members about what it will take to achieve success in the 21st century in an era when students will be competing for jobs not only with people from Georgia but with people from around the world. This individual noted the need to shift the paradigm of learning to ensure that teachers are facilitators of learning rather than deliverers: "Students need to be the talkers and creators in the classroom."

Development of a stronger conception of what world class education entails can guide progress in the area of instructional technology, an area about which many stakeholders expressed concern. The school system has invested in technology infrastructure in recent years so that all campuses have wireless access and instructional technology is available in classrooms. The elementary school has embarked on a "bring your own device" initiative to increase student access to digital tools. The external review team did not find a fully-articulated vision for the use of instructional technology that will drive purchases and priorities -- including professional learning -- that will capitalize on the potential for digital tools to transform student learning.

The implications for building consensus around what a world class school system looks like has tremendous potential for driving decision-making in curriculum and instruction, student access to and use of digital tools, community relations, and helping the community attract business.

2. Establish ongoing processes to ensure horizontal and vertical alignment of curriculum.

Related Indicator or Assurance: 3.2

### Description:

Priorities for instructional practices that have the greatest impact on student learning in identified areas of need must be established by the school system. Subsequently, these prioritized practices must be established, communicated, embraced, and supported by the system. Vertical and Horizontal planning among teachers from different grade levels must exist to develop a continuum of knowledge and skills that build from one grade

level to the next. Team communication leads to a greater understanding of what is taught each year and the progression of the content. This practice helps teachers employ appropriate strategies, plan introduction of concepts, and provide appropriate learning experiences. As a result, student success and achievement is enhanced. Horizontal Team Planning consists of teachers who teach the same grade/content and meet regularly with the purpose of improving student learning outcomes. The teachers work together to plan learning experiences for their whole class as well as individual students who have specific needs.

3. Develop and implement a clearly defined, systemic framework for collecting, analyzing, and reporting comprehensive data for use by instructional staff.

Related Indicator or Assurance: 5.2

Description:

In its self-assessment, the system identified a need for "analyzing data that determines verifiable improvement in student learning including readiness for and success at the next level." The external review team noted the system's purposeful development of an infrastructure for efficient and effective use of ongoing assessment data, but convincing evidence that schools are collecting, analyzing, and reporting data using a common frame of reference was lacking. Data analysis structures are not coordinated or consistent throughout the school district. The External Review team observed various modes of data analysis implementation throughout the district including the utilization of learning support specialists as leaders and teachers of data analysis methods.

A systemic framework for data analysis that aligns academic performance horizontally and vertically should be established by the school system. Subsequently, this framework must be formally developed, clearly communicated, executed, and supported by the system. This framework should clarify expectations for all schools with regard to data analysis, including what is to be consistent at all schools and where schools have autonomy and choice. While the academic calendar does not permit the entire staff to pursue professional learning at the same time, this framework must be addressed through both the district and school improvement plans and the leadership to ensure all staff receive the appropriate training and implement the framework to promote academic achievement for all students in grades P-16.

## **Part III: Addenda**

### ***The External Review Team***

**Lead Evaluator:**

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**Associate Lead Evaluator:**

Dr. Sean Deas

**Team Members:**

Mr. Joseph Lanham

Ms. Sharquinta Tuggle

Mr. Charles L McWhite

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## **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 addressing 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 appropriate state, national, and/or international levels 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 that confers accreditation 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, and 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 (NWAC) that was founded in 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.

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

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