



External Review

Clayton County School System

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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.

Part I: 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 | <p>The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •Governing body policies, procedures, and practices •District purpose statements - past and present •Survey results •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 •Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the district's purpose | 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 •Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the schools' purpose statements •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"> •Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders about educational programs and equitable learning experiences •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 •Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs •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 •Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs •Observations •Agenda, minutes from continuous improvement planning meetings •Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders •The district data profile •The district strategic plan | 3 |

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The school system has set specific times for its annual review of the Mission and Vision and uses community forums to glean stakeholder input in the revision process.
The district annually reviews and revises, if needed, the purpose and direction statements for the system. This process begins immediately after each school year ends. The final statements are submitted for adoption in September. Reviewing the purpose and direction for the system is imperative to ensure that all stakeholders have input and understand the major foci of the school system.

1.1

Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Seek, explore, and implement additional strategies to increase rigor and improve pedagogy.

1.3

The Rigor Meter and Depth of Knowledge levels are displayed throughout the district; however, the data does not support an increase in rigorous instruction. It is necessary to improve rigor by addressing higher order thinking skills and the process used to structure instructional programs.

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. | | 2.33 | |
| 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 •Student handbooks •Accreditation Report •Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions •School handbooks •School Board Policies | 2 |

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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 •Proof of legal counsel •Governing authority training plan •Accreditation Report •Interviews •Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest •School Board's Self Assessment Board Policies Organizational Chart | 2 |
| 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"> •District strategic plan •Examples of school improvement plans •Roles and responsibilities of school leadership •Roles and responsibilities of district leadership •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Survey results regarding functions of the governing authority and operations of the district •Stakeholder input and feedback •Agendas and minutes of meetings •Organizational Chart | 2 |
| 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"> •Professional development offerings and plans •Examples of collaboration and shared leadership •Interviews •Observations •Accreditation Report | 3 |

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| 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">•Accreditation Report•Interviews•Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys•Survey responses•Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan•Involvement of stakeholders in district strategic plan | 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•Accreditation Report•Job specific criteria•Observations•Schedule for Superintendent's Evaluation | 3 |

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. | 2.83 |

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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"> •Learning expectations for different courses and programs •Interviews •Course, program, or school schedules •Student work across courses or programs •Course or program descriptions •Survey results •Lesson plans •Observations •Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices •Posted learning objectives •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 •Accreditation Report •Common assessments •Surveys results •Observations •Interviews •Program descriptions •Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices •Products – scope and sequence, curriculum maps •Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum •Data Rooms Data Notebooks Virtual Data Rooms | 3 |

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| Indicator | | Source of Evidence | Performance Level |
|-----------|---|--|-------------------|
| 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 professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation•Authentic assessments•Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource•Findings from supervisor formal and informal observations•Student work demonstrating the application of knowledge•Surveys results•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the approved or prescribed instructional strategies and programs•Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Observations | 3 |
| 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•Accreditation Report•Supervision and evaluation procedures•Documentation of collection of lesson plans, grade books, or other data record systems•Surveys results•Administrative classroom observation protocols and logs•Interviews•Observations•Professional development offerings and plans tied to the prescribed education program, instructional strategies, developmentally appropriate practices, and student success•e-Walk Data | 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">•Observations•Common language, protocols and reporting tools•Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees•Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings•Survey results•Professional development funding to promote professional learning communities•Interviews•Accreditation Report | 3 |
| 3.6 | Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Observations•Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance•Survey results•Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction•Interviews•Accreditation Report | 3 |
| 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">•Accreditation Report•Survey results•Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to district and school beliefs and values about teaching and learning•Records of meetings and informal feedback sessions•Observations•Interviews•Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff | 3 |

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| 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">•Performance-based report cards•Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance•Observations•Survey results•Volunteer program with variety of options for participation•List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days•Accreditation Report•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•Samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student learning•e-Walk Data Parent Resource Rooms Information addressing various languages | 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•Accreditation Report•Survey results•Interviews•Observations•Teachers As Advisors Training Agenda | 2 |

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| Indicator | | Source of Evidence | Performance Level |
|-----------|---|---|-------------------|
| 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 •Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices •Survey results •Sample communications to stakeholders about grading and reporting •Observations •Accreditation Report •District quality control procedures including the monitoring of grading practices across all schools •Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting | 2 |
| 3.11 | All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evaluation tools for professional learning •Survey results •District quality control procedures showing implementation plan for professional development for district and school staff •District professional development plan involving the district and all schools •Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs •Crosswalk between professional learning and district purpose and direction •Accreditation Report •Observations •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"> •Schedules, lesson plans, or example student learning plans showing the implementation of learning support services •Survey results •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Data used to identify unique learning needs of students | 3 |

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

- | | |
|--|------------|
| <p>1. Ensure that challenging and equitable opportunities are consistently present in all classes and all courses so that rigor is apparent throughout the district.</p> <p>Through classroom observations, interviews, and reviews of lesson plans, the need for high expectation learning experiences in each course or class throughout the system is indicated. Implementation of this opportunity will ensure consistency in instructional rigor throughout the district. This consistency will prepare students for success at the next level.</p> | <p>3.1</p> |
| <p>2. Apply the Clayton County Schools Core Belief Statements as the primary guiding force for all instructional decisions and actions.</p> <p>Through interviews, observations, and reviews of instructional strategies, the ERT noted a need for consistency and clarity in planning and using instructional strategies that align to the system's stated values and beliefs. Implementation of this opportunity will ensure student collaboration, self reflection, and development of critical thinking skills.</p> | <p>3.3</p> |
| <p>3. Expand the Advisor/Advisee Program across the district to include mentors for every student.</p> <p>The evidence revealed a significant effort to implement mentoring programs at various schools. Many of them involved mentors external to the school system. A key feature of indicator 3.9 is the use of school staff members as advocates for students.</p> | <p>3.9</p> |

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 •District budgets or financial plans for the last three years •Observations •District quality assurance procedures for monitoring qualified staff across all schools •School budgets or financial plans for last three years •Interviews •Assessments of staffing needs •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 |

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| 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"> •Observations •Examples of school schedules •District quality assurance procedures showing district oversight of schools pertaining to school resources •Accreditation Report •Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources •Examples of school calendars •Interviews •Alignment of school budgets with school purpose and direction •Alignment of district budget with district purpose and direction | 3 |
| 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"> •Interviews •Observations •Accreditation Report •Example systems for school maintenance requests •Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements | 3 |
| 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 •Observations | 3 |
| 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 •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Data on media and information resources available to students and staff •Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information | 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•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•Examples of school-level technology plans and budgets to improve technology services and infrastructure to students and staff•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•Student assessment system for identifying student needs•Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support•Accreditation Report•Schedule of family services, e.g., parent classes, survival skills•Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education•List of support services available to students | 3 |

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| Indicator | | Source of Evidence | Performance Level |
|-----------|--|--|-------------------|
| 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">•List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning•Accreditation Report•Budget for counseling, assessment, referral, educational and career planning•Observations•Interviews•Description of referral process | 3 |

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The system provides support structures to meet the social and emotional needs of the student population.

4.7

The support structures can be found in partnerships between and/or among community agencies, homes, and schools, and are demonstrated through parent liaisons, parent resource rooms, and parent education activities. These structures all serve to educate parents, support academic achievement, and better meet the social and emotional needs of students.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Develop a written document of clear expectations for maintaining clean and healthy environments for all students and staff.

4.3

Clayton County Public Schools provides facilities that are conducive to the learning environment; however, a plan to maintain cleanliness is not applied consistently across the system. Clean schools communicate care and high expectations, facilitate learning, and is a source of school pride.

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 (Dembo 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. | 2.6 |

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| 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">•Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols•Interviews•Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local or school assessments on student learning and school performance•Observations•Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness•Accreditation Report•Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free | 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">•Accreditation Report•Written protocols and procedures for data collection and analysis•Examples of changes to the district strategic plan based on data results•Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning•Interviews | 2 |
| 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•Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data•Interviews | 2 |

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| Indicator | | Source of Evidence | Performance Level |
|-----------|---|--|-------------------|
| 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 •Policies and procedures specific to data use and training •Accreditation Report •Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning •Examples of use of results to evaluate continuous improvement action plans •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"> •Accreditation Report •Communication plan regarding student learning, systems that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders •Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals •Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups •Interviews | 3 |

Powerful Practices**Indicator**

1. Notable efforts are in place to build capacity for assessment development and ensure that all assessments are reliable and bias free.

5.1

The system has invested in the expertise of a trained professional to ensure the psychometric quality of all assessments. It also has developed the Clayton County Public Schools - District Assessment Plan that includes a theory of action for assessment, an outline of beliefs regarding assessment, and a description of the Clayton County Public Schools' balanced assessment system. Compliance with federal and state accountability measures is outlined. Assessments that are reliable, bias-free, and aligned to instructional standards allow educators to evaluate the appropriateness of curriculum and the effectiveness of instruction. They also provide opportunities to monitor student achievement and growth. A professional development plan for teachers and leaders ensures common expectations regarding quality assessments throughout the district.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Design and implement a professional development plan to build capacity in all staff to use data for continuous quality improvement.

5.3

Although the opportunities outlined in the system's Professional Learning Catalog attend to data collection methods, training for all employees on the essential skills of using data to inform improvement in practices is noticeably lacking. As a part of formal continuous quality improvement, practices can become best practices when a regular, structured analysis of data is included. Lack of attention to this essential component of continuous quality improvement weakens improvement outcomes and compromises system transparency.

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.

ELEOT

| <i>Environments</i> | <i>Level</i> |
|---|---------------------|
| A. Equitable Learning Environment | 2.44 |
| B. High Expectations Environment | 2.46 |
| C. Supportive Learning Environment | 2.69 |
| D. Active Learning Environment | 2.57 |
| E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment | 2.31 |
| F. Well-Managed Learning Environment | 2.77 |
| G. Digital Learning Environment | 1.62 |

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.

The on-site review spanned four days beginning Sunday, April 14, 2013, and extending through Wednesday, April 17, 2013. The actual review began well before the on-site visit with the 12-person External Review Team (ERT) reviewing and studying the Executive Summary, Self-Assessment, the Strategic Plan, and other documents available for review on the system's website. The school system was well-prepared for the external review. Throughout the visit the Clayton County Public School System responded to all of the team's queries and requests; and based on the team's review and triangulation of data, the system demonstrated an honest and accurate appraisal of itself and the way it shared information with the team.

The External Review Team observed and listened to presentations from the interim-superintendent and staff where they described the state of the system and how they approached and completed the self-assessment process. The interim-superintendent profiled the school system by presenting its Vision and Mission and highlighting the Strategic Plan and the system's Core Beliefs.

The Strategic Goals of the district as presented were:

- To increase achievement for all students as evidenced by state, national, and international assessment results
- To create an environment that promotes active engagement, accountability and collaboration of all stakeholders to maximize student achievement
- To provide and maintain a safe, orderly, and secure learning environment
- To effectively communicate the system's vision and purpose and allow stakeholder involvement in an effort to build understanding and support
- To provide high quality support services delivered on time and within budget to promote student academic success in the Clayton County Public Schools
- To recruit and retain highly qualified and effective staff.

Longitudinal assessments results on the state's Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), End-of-Course Tests and Advanced Placement tests were presented. The results were mixed; however, the interim superintendent indicated that:

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- Student performance in most areas has shown slight increases.
- Science and social studies have shown significant improvement.
- More students are scoring at the Exceed level [on CRCT] especially in reading.
- Students with disabilities are continuing to show growth.
- Challenges exist in mathematics, closing achievement gaps, and raising achievement/performance to 90 or above in all CRCT and EOCT tested areas.

The External Review Team visited 12 schools to examine the interface between the central office and schools with particular emphasis on communication, central office support for professional development, the use of data for decision-making, equity in the allocation of resources, parental engagement, and continuous improvement planning. Among the schools visited were:

- Church Street Elementary School
- Eddie White K-8 Academy
- Forest Park High School
- Hawthorne Elementary School
- Kemp Primary School
- Lovejoy High School
- M. D. Roberts Middle School
- McGarrah Elementary School
- Morrow High School
- Morrow Middle School
- Mt. Zion High School
- Riverdale High School

The External Review Team interviewed 172 administrators, 288 teachers, 36 support staff members, 168 parents/business partners, 209 students, and eight board members to gain additional insight and perceptions of stakeholders regarding the school system's adherence to AdvancED standards and the effectiveness of the system in meeting its Mission, Vision, and continuous improvement goals.

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 ERT reviewed artifacts and engaged in discussions/interviews with stakeholders, several overarching themes emerged.

Among the overarching themes were:

- Dynamic school leadership and educator commitment to ongoing excellence enhance the implementation of the Clayton County Public Schools Strategic Improvement Plan.

- The system utilizes a clearly defined process of continuous improvement driven by quality assurance measures to refine its purpose and direction.
- System-wide informal and formal collaborative opportunities are used to forge partnerships and focus resources on improving student achievement.
- Job-embedded professional learning, inclusive of all employees in the Clayton County School System, illustrates a commitment to continuous growth, improved productivity, and quality assurance.
- Commitment to the system's three instructional priorities (literacy across the curriculum, critical thinking, and integrated technology) is evidenced by the clear alignment of resources, instructional practices, and professional learning to guide instruction.
- The Clayton County School System values stakeholders and makes a concerted effort to seek their input and engagement.
- There is a need to address the issue of public perception regarding the Clayton County School System.
- There is a need to evaluate and improve the efficacy of instruction.

A review of artifacts, observations, and discussions with stakeholders revealed that setting specific times at the end of the school year to annually review the mission and vision statements via the use of community forums was worthy of recognition. This practice ensures that parents, business partners, and other interested community members have an opportunity to verbally express their ideas, suggestions, and support for the direction of the school system in ways other than through responding to surveys. The forums allow stakeholders to "get up close and personal" to collaboratively discuss and share ideas.

The system should continue to seek ways to increase rigor and improve pedagogy. This will also be an opportunity to further demonstrate the system's compliance with the intent of Indicator 1.3, which challenges the system to support rigorous and equitable educational programs, and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and the development of life skills.

The system might wish to approach increasing rigor in instruction by formally examining the pedagogy of the system, minimizing and/or discontinuing those practices that do not lend themselves to rigorous instruction, and focusing professional learning on best practices that will hone teachers' skill sets around increasing rigor in instruction.

School Board governance has made significant progress in working together as a policy making body. While this is laudable, there is still a need for the board to demonstrate a commitment to work among themselves and with the superintendent as a team; and act impartially for the good of the entire school system as stated in board policy. In doing so the board will further demonstrate that it operates responsibly and functions effectively at all times.

The system has a well-crafted Academic Achievement Plan that has the potential to catapult the system to its next level of achievement. Implementing it with fidelity will ensure that the Clayton County Schools' Core Beliefs undergird all instructional decisions and actions.

In demonstrating a commitment to the principle tenets of Indicator 4.7, of particular and important note are the valiant efforts of Clayton County Public Schools and the Clayton County Juvenile Justice System (CCJJS) to collaboratively create and implement the Clayton County System of Care. The grant-funded program is headed by the Chief Judge of CCJJS and is strategically staffed with an administrator and a team of social service professionals who meet on a frequent basis to look at early warning signals among students and assess the needs of those who are at risk of court referral and recommend a plan of action to address the students' disruptive and criminal behaviors. The program links the child and family to services in the community that are not available to the school system. The Chief Judge proudly and enthusiastically supports the program and reports that the number of students referred to the courts for school offenses has been reduced by 83% and there have been a reduction in the possession of serious weapons on campuses by 73% since the program's inception. An unanticipated result of the program is that the school system observed an increase in graduation rates by 24% at the end of the 2010 school year, which surpassed the statewide average and part of which can be directly attributed to the success of the program. This nationally recognized program is a prime example of the commitment the school system has to collaborate with those stakeholders external to the system to bring to bear resources and support services to meet the social and emotional needs of its students and their families.

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.

All of the constructs within the overall learning environment were rated from a low of 2.44 to a high of 2.77 with the exception of the use of technology (digital learning) where the rating was 1.62. The team noted, in general, that students were not, in a consistent manner, effectively using the technology to promote higher order thinking or greater use among students for independent creative inquiry. Many of the classroom environments, especially at the secondary level, were of the lecture or drill and practice style, which do not lend them to active student engagement in a manner consistent with differentiated instruction.

The External Review Team extends its appreciation for the excellent hospitality, support, and professionalism displayed by all of the stakeholders of Clayton County Public Schools. The team respects and acknowledges efforts the system has expended to this point to improve the quality of its educational programs and promote academic excellence. While the system acknowledges that there is much more to be done, the team offers its congratulations for the progress made thus far toward achieving district accreditation as a quality school system.

The External Review Team recommends ACCREDITATION of the Clayton County Public School System

for a five year term with the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. The Board will demonstrate a commitment to work among themselves and with the superintendent as a team and will act impartially for the good of the entire school system as stated in the Board Policy, BBBA, last revised September 10, 2012.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 2.2

Evidence from interviews indicates improved Board relations; however, continuing to focus on relationships and teamwork is crucial to becoming a cohesive Board where decision-making is based on what is best for the entire school system.

2. Create an organizational framework within the system to address public relations and communication with internal and external stakeholders.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 2.5

Discussions with administrators and a review of artifacts revealed the absence of an official public relations program and communication plan for the system. The Clayton County School System has received wide-spread negative publicity due to unfortunate events in the past. It has transcended those situations and set a course of action where it can become a world class school system. Some stakeholders are less informed of the strides the system has taken and the plans that are in place to become such a system. Implementing this recommendation will provide a laser-like focus on communication and public relations that clearly establishes communication goals, strategies, and protocols whereby all stakeholders, the larger metropolitan area, state, and nation can be fully and routinely informed of "the great things that are happening" in the Clayton County School System. In addition, the system will benefit from greater stakeholder engagement in the pursuit of its vision and mission and ultimately allow for a broader emphasis on the efficacy of instructional programs.

3. Develop a systematic approach to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs and practices including those that utilize digital technology, to determine their efficacy in fostering student achievement.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 5.2

A review of artifacts and interviews with system personnel revealed a fragmented approach to determining efficiency and effectiveness of many of its instructional programs, practices, and digital technology. Even though these programs and practices are generally research-based, there was little to no evidence of system-wide formal evaluation to determine whether they are implemented with fidelity and are optimally fostering student achievement. Implementing this required action will provide data to guide decision-making in determining the efficacy of instructional programs, practices, and digital technology and the impact they have on maximizing student achievement.

Part III: 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.

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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.