

Report of the External Review Team for Laurens County School System

467 Firetower Rd
Dublin
GA 31021-2682
US

**Mr. Rob Johnson
Superintendent**

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Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Results 10

 Teaching and Learning Impact 10

 Standard 3 - Teaching and Assessing for Learning 11

 Standard 5 - Using Results for Continuous Improvement 12

 Student Performance Diagnostic 12

 Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™) 14

 eleot™ Data Summary 18

 Findings 21

Leadership Capacity 25

 Standard 1 - Purpose and Direction 26

 Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership 26

 Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic 27

 Findings 27

Resource Utilization 30

 Standard 4 - Resources and Support Systems 30

 Findings 31

Conclusion 34

 Accreditation Recommendation 37

Addenda 38

 Individual Institution Results (Self-reported) 38

 Team Roster 39

 Next Steps 41

 About AdvancED 42

 References 43

Introduction

The External Review is an integral component of AdvancED Performance Accreditation and provides the institution with a comprehensive evaluation guided by the results of diagnostic instruments, in-depth review of data and documentation, and the professional judgment of a team of qualified and highly trained evaluators. A series of diagnostic instruments examines the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the capacity of leadership to effect continuous improvement, and the degree to which the institution optimizes its use of available resources to facilitate and support student success. The results of this evaluation are represented in the Index of Education Quality (IEQ™) and through critical observations, namely, Powerful Practices, Opportunities for Improvement, and Improvement Priorities.

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 specific to their institution type, demonstrate acceptable levels of student performance and the continuous improvement of student performance, and provide evidence of stakeholder engagement and satisfaction. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the conditions, processes, and practices within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness.

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 Standards were developed by a committee comprised of talented 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 define institutional quality and guide continuous improvement. Prior to implementation, an internationally recognized panel of experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research reviewed the standards and provided feedback, guidance and endorsement.

The AdvancED External Review Team uses AdvancED Standards, associated indicators and criteria related to student performance and stakeholder engagement to guide its evaluation. The Team examines adherence to standards as well as how the institution functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics expected of an accredited institution. The Standards, indicators and related criteria are evaluated using indicator-specific performance levels. The Team rates each indicator and criterion on a scale of 1 to 4. The final scores assigned to the indicators and criteria represent the average of the External Review Team members' individual ratings.

The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation. It energizes and equips the institution's leadership and stakeholders 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 the in-depth examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with all stakeholder groups, and extensive observations of learning, instruction, and operations.

Use of Diagnostic Tools

A key to examining the institution is the design and use of diagnostic tools that reveal the effectiveness with which an institution creates conditions and implements processes and practices that impact student performance and success. In preparation for the External Review the institution conducted a Self Assessment that applied the standards and criteria for accreditation. The institution provided evidence to support its conclusions vis a vis organizational effectiveness in ensuring acceptable and improving levels of student performance.

- an indicator-based tool that connects the specific elements of the criteria to evidence gathered by the team;
- a student performance analytic that examines the quality of assessment instruments used by the institution, the integrity of the administration of the assessment to students, the quality of the learning results including the impact of instruction on student learning at all levels of performance, and the equity of learning that examines the results of student learning across all demographics;
- a stakeholder engagement instrument that examines the fidelity of administration and results of perception surveys seeking the perspective of students, parents, and teachers;
- a state-of-the-art, learner-centric observation instrument, the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™) that quantifies students' engagement, attitudes and dispositions organized in 7 environments: Equitable Learning, High Expectations, Supportive Learning, Active Learning, Progress Monitoring and Feedback, Well-Managed Learning, and Digital Learning. All evaluators must be trained, reach acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability, and certified to use this research-based and validated instrument.

The External Review Team's findings and critical observations are shared in this report through the IEQ™ results as well as through the identification of Powerful Practices, Opportunities for Improvement, and Improvement Priorities.

Index of Education Quality

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 AdvancED Standards and other evaluative criteria. Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, AdvancED introduced a new framework to describe the results of an accreditation review. Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduced an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ™). The IEQ™ comprises three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the capacity of leadership to guide the institution toward the achievement of its

vision and strategic priorities; 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 and demonstrated improvement.

The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and associated indicators, the analysis of student performance, and the engagement and feedback of stakeholders. Within each domain institutions can 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 serve as a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report and building on their Powerful Practices, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Opportunity for Improvement and Improvement Priority as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected indicator(s).

The IEQ™ provides a new framework that recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement. An institution's IEQ™ is the starting point for continuous improvement. Subsequent actions for improvement and evidence that these have had a positive impact will raise the institution's IEQ™ score.

Benchmark Data

Throughout this report, AdvancED provides benchmark data for each indicator and for each component of the evaluative criteria. These benchmark data represent the overall averages across the entire AdvancED Network for your institution type. Thus, the AdvancED Network average provides an extraordinary opportunity for institutions to understand their context on a global scale rather than simply compared to a state, region, or country.

It is important to understand that the AdvancED Network averages are provided primarily to serve as a tool for continuous improvement and not as a measure of quality in and of itself. Benchmark data, when wisely employed, have a unique capacity to help institutions identify and leverage their strengths and areas of improvement to significantly impact student learning.

Powerful Practices

A key to continuous improvement is the institution's ability to learn from and build upon its most effective and impactful practices. Such practices serve as critical leverage points necessary to guide, support and ensure continuous improvement. A hallmark of the accreditation process is its commitment to identifying with evidence, the conditions, processes and practices that are having the most significant impact on student performance and institutional effectiveness. Throughout this report, the External Review Team has captured and defined Powerful Practices. These noteworthy practices are essential to the institution's effort to continue its journey of improvement.

Opportunities for Improvement

Every institution can and must improve no matter what levels of performance it has achieved in its past. During the process of the review, the External Review Team identified areas of improvement where the institution is meeting the expectations for accreditation but in the professional judgment of the Team these are Opportunities for Improvement that should be considered by the institution. Using the criteria described in the corresponding rubric(s) to the Opportunity for Improvement, the institution can identify what elements of practice must be addressed to guide the improvement.

Improvement Priorities

The expectations for accreditation are clearly defined in a series of the rubric-based AdvancED Standards, indicators and evaluative criteria focused on the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the capacity of the institution to be guided by effective leadership, and the allocation and use of resources to support student learning. As such, the External Review Team reviewed, analyzed and deliberated over significant bodies of evidence provided by the institution and gathered by the Team during the process. In the professional judgment of the Team as well as the results of the diagnostic process, the Team defined, with rationale, Improvement Priorities. The priorities must be addressed in a timely manner by the institution to retain and improve their accreditation performance as represented by the IEQ™. Improvement Priorities serve as the basis for the follow-up and monitoring process that will begin upon conclusion of the External Review. The institution must complete and submit an Accreditation Progress Report within two years of the External Review. The report must include actions taken by the institution to address the Improvement Priorities along with the corresponding evidence and results. The IEQ™ will be recalculated by AdvancED upon review of the evidence and results associated with the Improvement Priorities.

The Review

The Laurens County School System External Review Team convened for the first time face to face at a delightful Bed and Breakfast (B&B), these accommodations provided by the system in Dublin, Georgia on Monday, February 16 at 4:00 pm. The visit had been moved to a Monday through Thursday schedule due to the Presidents' Day holiday. Previous to this meeting the Team had met and planned for the review via conference call and online work session. The Team reviewed plans and the External Review schedule to inform and update the Team members on the AdvancED External Review process and the expectations for the system and for the Team throughout the review.

The system conducted a comprehensive self-study that resulted in an informative System Accreditation Report. Indicator ratings were very honest. School Accreditation Reports, improvement plans and performance data had been supplied to the Review Team and placed in the Team Workspace utilized by the Team for the sharing of information and documents. Additional evidence and artifacts were supplied over the weekend preceding the External Review. The Team found themselves agreeing with many ratings by the end of the visit, an indication of an effective internal review.

Accreditation Reports for the system and schools, trend data as well as well-constructed system and school

websites were provided in advance. The evidentiary process was challenged by connectivity issues at the central office. The Team worked very hard to obtain and understand the evidence in such a manner as to complement the hard work of system personnel. However, the Team could not help but note the parallel between this situation and frustrations voiced by system personnel with "getting things done" through system personnel at various levels. This evidence supports the need described later in the report for systemic refinement and focus of processes to support student performance.

The first work session was followed by a dinner with personnel from across the system highlighted by impressive performances by music students from the various schools. Afterwards the superintendent made an informative presentation concerning system operations, performance statistics and other evidence. The Team returned to the B & B and continued the work session discussing the Accreditation Report and other available evidence and documentation supplied by the system.

On Monday the Team convened at the system central office for the superintendent's interview, standards presentations, interviews with central office personnel, principals and system stakeholders. The Team interviewed the superintendent, four school board members, nine system administrators and forty-nine parents and community leaders. Late in the afternoon the Team returned to the B & B and began the second work session with a discussion and comparing of data on what they had experienced. The Team broke briefly for dinner and returned to the work session until late in the evening to make plans for the school visits and various interviews that would take place the next day.

On Tuesday Team members were driven by system personnel to the schools on the morning schedule. After lunch Team members were taken to another set of schools for a total of eight schools visited during the External Review: four elementary, two middle and two high schools. Fifty-seven eleot™ observations and eighteen informal walkthrough observations were conducted. Eighty-nine teachers, twenty-nine students and five support staff were interviewed. The observations and interviews on Tuesday greatly broadened the understanding of the system, how the system provides the education processes for students, their successes and their challenges.

At the end of the school and the eleot™ observations, the Team returned to the B & B to enter eleot™ data and deliberate on findings. After the IEQ and overall eleot™ scores were generated, the Team set about the work of developing the Actions, the guiding statements to be left for the system.

On Wednesday morning the Team returned to the Central Office for final deliberations, finalizing the findings and constructing the Exit Report to be given to system personnel in the afternoon. The Exit Report was delivered to the school board in special called session and various stakeholders from the system and community. The Team held a final debrief and dismissed to return home.

The Laurens County External Review Team thanks the leadership of the system for guiding a very successful External Review. The Team extends thanks for making them very comfortable and welcomed while in Dublin and the schools across the system. To facilitate the successful External Review, the system had engaged in an effective Internal Review and produced evidences and artifacts to support what was reported in the

Accreditation Report. Finally, the Team congratulates the system for their achievement of recommended accreditation and commends them for embarking on this journey of continuous improvement.

Stakeholders were interviewed by members of the External Review Team to gain their perspectives on topics relevant to the institution's effectiveness and student performance. The feedback gained through the stakeholder interviews was considered with other evidences and data to support the findings of the External Review. The following chart depicts the numbers of persons interviewed representative of various stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Interviewed	Number
Superintendents	1
Board Members	4
Administrators	9
Instructional Staff	89
Support Staff	5
Students	29
Parents/Community/Business Leaders	49
Total	186

Results

Teaching and Learning Impact

The impact of teaching and learning on student achievement is the primary expectation of every institution. The relationship between teacher and learner must be productive and effective for student success. The impact of teaching and learning includes an analysis of student performance results, instructional quality, learner and family engagement, support services for student learning, curriculum quality and efficacy, and college and career readiness data. These are all key indicators of an institution's impact on teaching and learning.

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 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.

Institutions 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 3 - Teaching and Assessing for Learning

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
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.	2.40	2.69
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.	2.40	2.55
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	2.40	2.54
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	2.80	2.70
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	2.80	2.57
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	2.40	2.48
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	2.20	2.67

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
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.	3.00	2.97
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.	2.80	2.46
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.	2.80	2.57
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	2.80	2.60
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	2.20	2.63

Standard 5 - Using Results for Continuous Improvement

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	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	2.80	2.67
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.	2.20	2.48
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	2.00	2.14
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.	2.60	2.45
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.	2.80	2.85

Student Performance Diagnostic

The quality of assessments used to measure student learning, assurance that assessments are administered with procedural fidelity and appropriate accommodations, assessment results that reflect the quality of

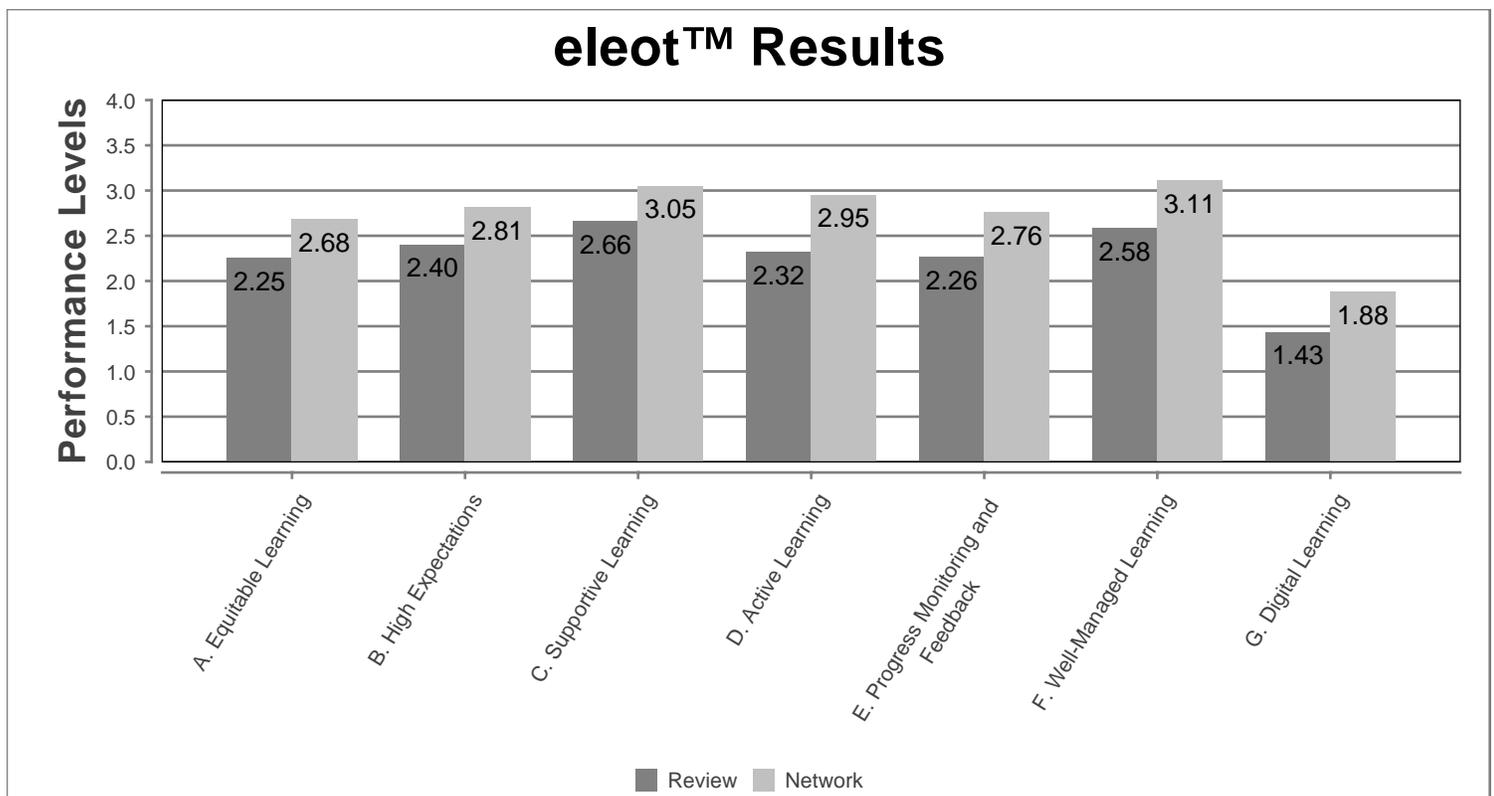
learning, and closing gaps in achievement among subpopulations of students are all important indicators for evaluating overall student performance.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Assessment Quality	4.00	3.32
Test Administration	3.80	3.62
Equity of Learning	2.20	2.52
Quality of Learning	3.00	3.06

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™)

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. Every member of the External Review Team is required to be trained and pass a certification exam that establishes inter-rater reliability. Team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a four-point scale (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 seven learning environments included in eleot™ as well as benchmark results across the AdvancED Network.



Fifty-seven eleot™ observations and eighteen informal walkthrough observations were conducted. Team members interviewed eighty-nine teachers, twenty-nine students and five support staff. The observations and interviews on Tuesday greatly broadened the understanding of the system, how the system provides the education processes for students, their successes and their challenges.

The eleot™ observations resulted in a system picture of thoughtful deliberate instruction delivered to students for acquisition of knowledge and skills. Students were often involved in teacher-led class discussions. Students strived to meet the expectations of the teachers and responded to the teachers and their peers in a positive, respectful manner. Student engagement involved individual written or oral responses to questions that were presented to them. Several instances of hands-on learning and higher-order thinking activities, and small-group work were noted but were not pervasive among the classes observed. The integration of technology that was actually utilized by the students was noted in the observations. Classroom management was not an issue in any of the classes since teachers were generally proactive and utilized their relationships with the students to help circumvent potentially disruptive situations.

These classroom visits were conducted across the system in core classrooms as well as elective courses per the AdvancED observation protocol. The seven learning environments were observed and results tallied to produce a snapshot of the school's learning environment. The eleot™ averages for each of the seven domains were close to the AdvancED Network (AEN) scores and are described below. The AEN score provides a basis for comparison between the school's scores and those of similar institutions accredited by AdvancED.

The Equitable Learning Environment scored 2.45 compared to the AEN score of 2.68.

This score confirms that students have equal access to classroom instruction and activities and know that behavioral expectations are fair and consistently applied. The score supports the commendable behavior, on-task behaviors and engagement levels the Team observed in many classrooms. A low indicator for this environment concerns differentiated learning opportunities and activities which also confirms what team members observed.

The High Expectations Environment scored 2.40 in comparison to the AEN score of 2.81

The Team observed that students know and strive to meet the high expectations established by the teacher and are tasked with activities and learning that are attainable. Many engaging discussions were witnessed that challenged student knowledge and thinking, but this score could have been higher had teachers consistently provided examples of the work they expect and moved away from teacher-centered learning activities to increase the rigor and higher order thinking. Being asked and responding to questioning that requires higher order thinking (e.g., applying, evaluating, synthesizing) is a definite area for improvement.

The Supportive Learning Environment score of 2.66 is below the AEN of 3.05.

Students are generally positive about the learning experiences in their classrooms. Classrooms exhibited high rates of on-task behaviors and engagement even in those where instruction was very traditional. Team observers found that additional or alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge to meet learning needs scored lowest in this environment, again aligning with the Team observation that most learning is teacher-centered, large-group and with few examples of differentiation. While students are attentive and generally rise to the expectations of the teachers, monitoring of individual progress and providing individual assistance are not common practices.

The Active Learning Environment score of 2.32 is below the AEN of 2.95.

While the stronger indicators on active engagement in discussions and activities were evident in this environment, teachers providing opportunities to make connections between learning and students' lives was observed in only a very few instances thus indicating an area for improvement in instructional strategies.

Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment scored 2.26 in comparison to the AEN of 2.76.

Students demonstrate their understanding of the content being presented through completion of the work expected and through participation in classroom activities. Few indications that students understand how their work is assessed were noted. This finding relates to the teacher-centered model of instruction, the provision of examples of the product expected from students, and teachers individualizing instruction and checking for understanding of that instruction.

The Well-Managed Learning Environment scored 2.58 compared to 3.11 on the AEN.

Speaking and interacting respectfully with teachers and peers scored high along with following classroom rules and working well with others. These were expected by the Team to be high because of the high expectations and culture that are consistently maintained throughout the schools of the system. Within this domain are also indicators on classroom transitions that are smoothly and efficiently executed, and collaboration with other students during student-centered activities, both of which scored low. Simply stated, the Team observed few classroom transitions because learning activities tend to be large group and teacher-centered. Student collaboration is largely limited to large group discussion which affords minimal opportunity for quality collaboration.

The Digital Learning Environment score of 1.43 is below the AEN of 1.88.

This AEN score across accredited institutions is low because educators everywhere are struggling to learn what their students can do instinctively- utilize digital tools/technology in learning processes. The Team found instances in which technology was being used, mainly in large group, display fashion, to communicate and work collaboratively for learning. This indicates the willingness of many teachers to integrate technology into their teaching and learning practices. However, much room for growth is apparent using digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, create original works for learning and to use these tools to facilitate collaboration and communication to provide highly productive learning situations.

In a middle grades classroom, the students were thoroughly engaged. The class was divided into several groups of four to five students. Questions to groups related to different topics around the central theme that was being covered. The questions were graduated- they ranged from simple identification questions to more difficult questions that required students to apply knowledge and do some analysis. While in groups students were respectful to each other, maintained academic focused conversations and were allowed kinesthetic

movement by switching groups. After several rotations, the teacher moved swiftly from small group to whole group. He started by building momentum and asking simple identification questions in a very quick manner. Next, the entire class was chorally responding to definitions after he stated the words. Following the exceptional choral response session, he began to state questions that required reasoning and explanations. The pace was fast and maintained 100% student engagement and bell to bell instruction that was engaging and fun. When students were answering questions, the teacher often went to the standard displayed and pointed to language that he expected the students to use in their response increasing their vocabulary utilization. The teacher and class demonstrated well developed relationships evidenced by the reciprocal conversations, risk-taking by the students, and the students striving to meet his high expectations.

In another classroom students read a piece of literature and the assignment was to create a product that related to the text. The teacher had given the students multiple ways to express their thinking using differentiation of product by creating a brochure, comic strip, etc. The students were using laptops to create this product, the teacher floating throughout the classroom monitoring progress. Annotated exemplars of actual student work were hung on the board for students to use. Toward the end of the period, the teacher used a compare/contrast graphic organizer and had students write in their journals listing traits of each character. After a few minutes, the teacher began calling students to the board to have them write their ideas. This was done in a fast-paced manner and allowed the entire class to write information and share ideas. Bell to bell instruction was used and a collaborative atmosphere between the students and the teacher was evident. Engagement was very high as the teacher changed activities frequently and used technology to keep them engaged as well as using differentiation of the product to give them choice in the assignment.

In a third classroom students were in small groups given an assignment. The questions were recall or basic comprehension questions that students could derive from the textbook. The other sheet was a coloring activity. The students were to color according to the picture in the textbook and label the parts. Each worksheet was completed prior to the end of class leaving many students unengaged for some time. The students were not discussing any elements of the assignment though they were sitting in small groups.

The following eleot™ data summary provides a breakdown of average scores in each of the seven learning environments as well as for each Indicator. The Team discussed how effectively the strong scores in each environment identified strong classroom practices that have kept student and system performance within acceptable ranges. These practices should be clearly defined, strengthened, and used as models for improvement. At the same time, the lower Indicator scores clearly identify areas for improvement that, when addressed through systemic alignment and improvement processes, will provide improvement across the spectrum of Indicators.

eleot™ Data Summary

A. Equitable Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	1.62	Has differentiated learning opportunities and activities that meet her/his needs	5.36%	14.29%	17.86%	62.50%
2.	2.93	Has equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	7.14%	80.36%	10.71%	1.79%
3.	2.91	Knows that rules and consequences are fair, clear, and consistently applied	3.57%	83.93%	12.50%	0.00%
4.	1.55	Has ongoing opportunities to learn about their own and other's backgrounds/cultures/differences	8.93%	10.71%	7.14%	73.21%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.25						

B. High Expectations			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.82	Knows and strives to meet the high expectations established by the teacher	8.93%	66.07%	23.21%	1.79%
2.	2.70	Is tasked with activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	7.14%	55.36%	37.50%	0.00%
3.	1.91	Is provided exemplars of high quality work	10.71%	17.86%	23.21%	48.21%
4.	2.48	Is engaged in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks	5.36%	42.86%	46.43%	5.36%
5.	2.09	Is asked and responds to questions that require higher order thinking (e.g., applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	5.36%	25.00%	42.86%	26.79%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.40						

C. Supportive Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.80	Demonstrates or expresses that learning experiences are positive	7.14%	69.64%	19.64%	3.57%
2.	2.88	Demonstrates positive attitude about the classroom and learning	7.14%	73.21%	19.64%	0.00%
3.	2.59	Takes risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	5.36%	55.36%	32.14%	7.14%
4.	2.82	Is provided support and assistance to understand content and accomplish tasks	10.71%	66.07%	17.86%	5.36%
5.	2.20	Is provided additional/alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge for her/his needs	3.57%	39.29%	30.36%	26.79%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.66						

D. Active Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.43	Has several opportunities to engage in discussions with teacher and other students	5.36%	46.43%	33.93%	14.29%
2.	1.79	Makes connections from content to real-life experiences	8.93%	16.07%	19.64%	55.36%
3.	2.73	Is actively engaged in the learning activities	8.93%	57.14%	32.14%	1.79%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.32						

E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.21	Is asked and/or quizzed about individual progress/learning	3.57%	39.29%	32.14%	25.00%
2.	2.52	Responds to teacher feedback to improve understanding	0.00%	60.71%	30.36%	8.93%
3.	2.57	Demonstrates or verbalizes understanding of the lesson/content	3.57%	55.36%	35.71%	5.36%
4.	1.91	Understands how her/his work is assessed	3.57%	23.21%	33.93%	39.29%
5.	2.11	Has opportunities to revise/improve work based on feedback	0.00%	41.07%	28.57%	30.36%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.26						

F. Well-Managed Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.98	Speaks and interacts respectfully with teacher(s) and peers	10.71%	78.57%	8.93%	1.79%
2.	2.89	Follows classroom rules and works well with others	7.14%	75.00%	17.86%	0.00%
3.	2.18	Transitions smoothly and efficiently to activities	5.36%	41.07%	19.64%	33.93%
4.	1.88	Collaborates with other students during student-centered activities	7.14%	23.21%	19.64%	50.00%
5.	2.96	Knows classroom routines, behavioral expectations and consequences	3.57%	89.29%	7.14%	0.00%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.58						

G. Digital Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	1.48	Uses digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	7.14%	10.71%	5.36%	76.79%
2.	1.34	Uses digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	5.36%	5.36%	7.14%	82.14%
3.	1.48	Uses digital tools/technology to communicate and work collaboratively for learning	5.36%	10.71%	10.71%	73.21%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 1.43						

Findings

Improvement Priority

Adopt systematic processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning from all data sources so that all professional and support staff can evaluate improvement efforts and the effectiveness of programs that affect student learning.

(Indicators 5.2)

Evidence and Rationale

Artifacts and interviews across the system revealed various levels of autonomy among the schools and in how they disaggregate, analyze, and determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies and goals. The wide variety in demographics across the schools was cited as the reason for the lack of shared decision-making about data and methods and strategies for reaching goals. The Accreditation Report stated: “. . . although teacher and administrators have received professional learning and support in the interpretation and use of data, that is still considered an area of need by many. . . “

A consistent systemic procedure for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning from all data sources would create a strong cohort among the schools for sharing of strategies, learning experiences, and ideas that would more effectively support the system’s vision and mission. This will also create a more effective vehicle for transfer of student performance data between the schools. The adoption of policies and procedures that are uniform across the district will result in a common language for the discussion of data, student progress, and achievement goals. It will also serve to unify the district and create a greater opportunity for focus on common goals.

Improvement Priority

Develop and implement a comprehensive communication plan to control the message of the system and sharpen the focus on the mission, "Rigor, relevance, and relationships... Every teacher, every student, every day" focused in the minds of stakeholders.

(Indicators 1.1, 1.2, 5.5)

Evidence and Rationale

Interviews with stakeholders at all levels revealed a wide range of opinions, perceptions and incorrect information about the system, schools, policies, performance, allocation of resources and initiatives. These perceptions were sometimes in direct conflict with what External Review Team members found to be true. The Team listened intently to understand the bases of these perceptions and finally concluded that many of these strongly held perceptions are rooted in the history of the system. Regardless of fact or cause, the Team is acutely aware of how these perceptions blur the focus on mission, dilute the attention of leadership on learning tasks and keep stakeholders distracted from their stated purpose to "challenge students to become independent critical thinkers, problem solvers, and contributing citizens," not to mention undermining student confidence in their schools and system. Interviews with students provided evidence that students are not particularly confident in the ability of their schools and system to provide the highest quality education for them. They are aware of the variety of perceptions though they do not understand them.

By being out in front of public perceptions and having specific plans to "get the message" to stakeholders, the system can present a positive, unified and correct image of quality education that is centered on student achievement and preparing students to face the world that awaits them.

Opportunity for Improvement

Create and utilize a comprehensive curriculum plan that defines system goals and specific strategies that insure a collective definition of academic rigor in classrooms system-wide.

(Indicators 3.2)

Evidence and Rationale

The External Review Team discovered that each school in the system seems to have their own picture of what good teaching and learning looks like. School and system personnel alike indicated that systemic guidance could improve that would increase alignment of processes across the system.

While the system provision for the autonomy of each school to meet the unique learning needs of each school population is effective in a great many instances, system personnel told the Team that the lack of systemic alignment and guidance hinders the efficiency of the supply and support of resources that the system can provide for the schools. The Team noted how collaborative efforts with such support entities as the Georgia Department of Education, the Regional Education Service Agency and the Southern Regional Education Board can support professional development and could assist in the achievement of system-wide standards for instructional delivery.

ASPIRE (Align, Survey, Plan, Implement, Review and Evaluate) Teams at the various schools, which work similarly to leadership teams, could function more efficiently with a consistent format and central focus

implemented from the system level. Central Office personnel and principals could be provided stronger guidance to monitor, provide oversight and coach teachers to improve the instructional direction and strategies.

Common curricular practices and goals across the system promote the efficiency and equity of support of system resources, and will improve continuity and growth in processes supporting student performance and growth.

Opportunity for Improvement

Develop policies and procedures for analyzing data that will identify improvement in student learning and readiness for success at the next level.

(Indicators 5.4)

Evidence and Rationale

Current sources of state-provided data are apparently useful at certain times of the year. However, according to teachers, these sources have not been proven to be appropriate for regular use when there is a need to determine instructional strategies that will address immediate needs of the students. Teachers must spend a substantial amount of time disaggregating and interpreting data to plan rigorous instruction. Standardized policies and procedures for analyzing data will help educators be more prepared and able to adjust instruction for students on an individual basis. Educators will also be more able to effectively predict the likelihood of student success at the next level

This Opportunity for Improvement could be combined with the Improvement Priority for Indicator 5.2 on the processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning. It is placed here to draw specific attention to how the system can support teachers in the use of data for instruction.

The systematic and deliberate visitation of performance results on a regular basis equips system and school personnel with information which can be used to monitor the system's progress toward the achievement of performance goals.

Powerful Practice

The system and its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of learning progress.

(Indicators 3.8)

Evidence and Rationale

Laurens County maintains a steady flow of information to parents concerning student progress in school. Interviews with various stakeholders highlighted the frequency of communication with parents pertaining specifically to their children's progress towards meeting established learning goals. In most schools, families receive updates at least weekly and sometimes daily when needed. Parents across the system indicated that this practice is pervasive and strongly supports their ability to keep track of progress and assist their children and their teachers in learning processes. In addition, parent nights, content-area and/or grade-level nights, newsletters, webpage announcements, phone messaging, Parent-Teacher Organization meetings, Open

Houses at schools, informational meetings, public forums, and newspaper communications are systematically utilized to keep families informed and engaged.

The meaningful engagement of families in the education of their children strengthens classroom practices and extends student learning into other areas of their lives.

Powerful Practice

The system works to ensure that staff participates in professional learning communities through ASPIRE (Align, Survey, Plan, Implement, Review, and Evaluate) teams at the school and system level. (Indicators 3.5)

Evidence and Rationale

The review of student performance data indicates that the system's students meet or exceed standards on most state-mandated summative assessments. It should be noted that most of the measures reported have minimum competency requirements. ASPIRE teams are similar in function to leadership teams. Action plans are developed every 45 days at each school and disseminated to colleagues through the work of the ASPIRE teams. This professional collaboration is clearly linked to improvement results in instructional practice, system effectiveness, and student performance.

The ASPIRE teams could be extremely powerful in moving student performance to the next levels when their practices are tightly aligned with the system purpose and direction statements. The systematic expectation for the utilization of standards-based practices in classroom instruction, with a focus on higher order thinking skills, high levels of student engagement and active engagement in learning activities strengthen performance and better prepare students for college and career readiness.

Leadership Capacity

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress towards its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its institutional purpose and direction, the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives, the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways, and the capacity to enact strategies to improve results of student 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 more than 32,000 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.

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 1 - Purpose and Direction

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	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	2.40	2.67
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.	2.20	2.69
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.	3.00	2.87
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.	2.80	2.64

Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership

The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	2.60	2.96
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	2.40	2.99
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.	2.60	3.20
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	2.80	3.00
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	2.60	2.69

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	2.60	2.78

Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic

Stakeholder Feedback is the third of three primary areas of evaluation in AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. The AdvancED surveys (student, parent, and teacher) are directly correlated to the AdvancED 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, survey results, and the degree to which the institution analyzed and acted on the results.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Questionnaire Administration	4.00	3.43
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	3.00	3.12

Findings

Improvement Priority

Adopt systematic processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning from all data sources so that all professional and support staff can evaluate improvement efforts and the effectiveness of programs that affect student learning.

(Indicators 5.2)

Evidence and Rationale

Artifacts and interviews across the system revealed various levels of autonomy among the schools and in how they disaggregate, analyze, and determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies and goals. The wide variety in demographics across the schools was cited as the reason for the lack of shared decision-making about data and methods and strategies for reaching goals. The Accreditation Report stated: “. . . although teacher and administrators have received professional learning and support in the interpretation and use of data, that is still considered an area of need by many. . . “

A consistent systemic procedure for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning from all data sources would create a strong cohort among the schools for sharing of strategies, learning experiences, and ideas that would

more effectively support the system's vision and mission. This will also create a more effective vehicle for transfer of student performance data between the schools. The adoption of policies and procedures that are uniform across the district will result in a common language for the discussion of data, student progress, and achievement goals. It will also serve to unify the district and create a greater opportunity for focus on common goals.

Improvement Priority

Develop a long-term strategic plan, focused on the system mission, purpose and belief statements that will guide all aspects of system planning and operation.

(Indicators 1.1, 4.4)

Evidence and Rationale

Laurens County School District has developed powerful mission, purpose and belief statements. Unifying goals and statements are evident throughout the system in various formats. Incorporation and further development of these into a comprehensive, well-structured guiding document will promote transparency and succinct accountability for common goals at all levels of the system.

System personnel indicated in the Accreditation Report their awareness that programs, initiatives and guidance for the system lack focus and alignment. "We are all over the place," stated one central office leader. School level leadership indicated their frustration with directives and requirements that pull their attention and energies in seemingly opposite directions, distracting them from instructional priorities.

The system should maintain the momentum and intensify systemic focus on improving instruction and increasing student performance by adding measurable goals and action steps to provide specific guidance to the district and schools. Accompanying this plan could be a simple monitoring tool to quickly but systematically evaluate each measure for effectiveness in improving instruction with the intent to drive Laurens County a position of leadership among systems in the state in student and system performance.

A plan that unites and aligns all elements of system operations to meet the carefully defined expectations will bring about clarity, focus and efficiency in system operations resulting in improvement in system and student performance.

Improvement Priority

Develop and implement a comprehensive communication plan to control the message of the system and sharpen the focus on the mission, "Rigor, relevance, and relationships... Every teacher, every student, every day" focused in the minds of stakeholders.

(Indicators 1.1, 1.2, 5.5)

Evidence and Rationale

Interviews with stakeholders at all levels revealed a wide range of opinions, perceptions and incorrect information about the system, schools, policies, performance, allocation of resources and initiatives. These perceptions were sometimes in direct conflict with what External Review Team members found to be true. The

Team listened intently to understand the bases of these perceptions and finally concluded that many of these strongly held perceptions are rooted in the history of the system. Regardless of fact or cause, the Team is acutely aware of how these perceptions blur the focus on mission, dilute the attention of leadership on learning tasks and keep stakeholders distracted from their stated purpose to "challenge students to become independent critical thinkers, problem solvers, and contributing citizens," not to mention undermining student confidence in their schools and system. Interviews with students provided evidence that students are not particularly confident in the ability of their schools and system to provide the highest quality education for them. They are aware of the variety of perceptions though they do not understand them.

By being out in front of public perceptions and having specific plans to "get the message" to stakeholders, the system can present a positive, unified and correct image of quality education that is centered on student achievement and preparing students to face the world that awaits them.

Resource Utilization

The use and distribution of resources must be aligned and supportive of the needs of an institution and the students served. Institutions must ensure that resources are aligned with the stated mission and are distributed equitably so that the needs of students are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes an examination of the allocation and use of resources, the equity of resource distribution to need, the ability of the institution to ensure appropriate levels of funding and sustainability of resources, as well as evidence of long-range capital and resource planning effectiveness.

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 more than 32,000 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 and ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard 4 - Resources and Support Systems

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
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.	2.80	2.98
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.	2.60	2.98
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	3.00	3.05
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	2.00	2.67

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	2.80	2.82
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	2.40	2.64
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.	3.00	2.65
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.	2.80	2.64

Findings

Improvement Priority

Develop a long-term strategic plan, focused on the system mission, purpose and belief statements that will guide all aspects of system planning and operation.

(Indicators 1.1, 4.4)

Evidence and Rationale

Laurens County School District has developed powerful mission, purpose and belief statements. Unifying goals and statements are evident throughout the system in various formats. Incorporation and further development of these into a comprehensive, well-structured guiding document will promote transparency and succinct accountability for common goals at all levels of the system.

System personnel indicated in the Accreditation Report their awareness that programs, initiatives and guidance for the system lack focus and alignment. “We are all over the place,” stated one central office leader. School level leadership indicated their frustration with directives and requirements that pull their attention and energies in seemingly opposite directions, distracting them from instructional priorities.

The system should maintain the momentum and intensify systemic focus on improving instruction and increasing student performance by adding measurable goals and action steps to provide specific guidance to the district and schools. Accompanying this plan could be a simple monitoring tool to quickly but systematically evaluate each measure for effectiveness in improving instruction with the intent to drive Laurens County a position of leadership among systems in the state in student and system performance.

A plan that unites and aligns all elements of system operations to meet the carefully defined expectations will bring about clarity, focus and efficiency in system operations resulting in improvement in system and student performance.

Improvement Priority

Revisit the current technology plan to ensure that the plan is focused on students with intent to increase differentiated instruction, collaboration between students and increased, challenging technology-enhanced activities that support learning.

(Indicators 4.6)

Evidence and Rationale

Classroom observations at all instructional levels revealed the need for opportunities for students to engage in meaningful activities using technology. These opportunities are particularly needed to increase differentiated instructional strategies, depth of knowledge, higher order thinking skills through the use of accessible technologies for students. Professional learning to accompany these new initiatives will be helpful to move the technology from a teacher-led practice to meaningful activities completed by the student. Long term technology plans should consider fiscal responsibilities for each school to sustain increased levels of engagement through the use of chosen devices to maintain student access. By focusing on the importance of technology to support learning, the environment will lend itself to increasing the rigor and relevance for all students.

The current technology plan provides primarily for administrator and teacher use and is not keenly focused on the needs of students. The External Review Team witnessed limited use of technology by students in learning activities though a substantial investment in Smartboards, PCs, document cameras and projectors that has been made. This investment could be very effective if incorporated into an overall structure for enhancing student engagement and achievement.

The Team also noted that a fiscal plan to sustain practices and support instructional needs of students and teachers should be folded into the current 3-year technology plan. Monitoring for this practice and technical assistance as well as professional development for teachers must be written in the plan to support and maintain this vision for moving into the 21st century.

By focusing on the importance of technology to support learning, the learning environment will lend itself to increasing the rigor and relevance for all students.

Powerful Practice

In grades K-5, the system maintains a very effective Response to Intervention (RtI) process as a means to promote equitable opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels.

(Indicators 4.7)

Evidence and Rationale

Interviews with staff and other stakeholders underscored the system's commitment to the early identification of skills gaps and learning needs, the selection of research-based interventions, and frequent progress monitoring to ensure that interventions are successful. The program is a model that could be extended to all grade levels to support high achievement by students.

A systematic intervention process helps to sustain academic growth and ultimately improves the graduation rate as well as college and career readiness.

Conclusion

The following are themes and trends identified and considered by the External Review Team during the review and led to the Actions provided by the Team for recognition of improvement and to guide continued growth.

Examples of high quality classroom instruction exist across the system that can serve as models for improvement.

The need exists to increase instruction system-wide that is rigorous, relevant and highly engaging.

Curricular and instructional continuity across the system could be strengthened through systemic guidance, oversight and direction.

The district has developed and maintains a very effective Response to Intervention (RtI) process as a means to promote equitable opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels.

Policies and procedures for the analysis of data are needed that will determine mastery while defining student needs and planning for improvement in student learning

The system will benefit from a long term strategic plan, informed by the mission, purpose and direction that will guide all aspects of system planning and operation. This plan should also guide the alignment of system resources and staff development with standards, curriculum, teaching and assessment.

The system and its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of learning progress

The system works to ensure that staff participates in professional learning communities through ASPIRE (Align, Survey, Plan, Implement, Review, and Evaluate) teams at the school and system level.

A comprehensive communication plan will guide consistent proactive efforts to communicate a positive message to unify the system and improve community perceptions.

Resource structure, allocation, and utilization must be driven by the Purpose, Direction and Mission with a focus on supporting and improving student learning- the Strategic Plan.

Technology integration should be driven by differentiated instruction, application of knowledge, higher-order thinking skills and increased student engagement in learning processes.

Reduced state and federal funds resulted in the elimination of positions, reducing the number of employees by attrition, and reducing salaries by 2% during 2010 and 2011. The system also had ten work reduction days. The system met these challenges by raising the local mileage rate and was able to return the last two reduction days to the staff restoring the school calendar to the full 180 days for students and 190 days for

teachers indicating the strong commitment of the system to learning.

The system performance scores exceed or tie the state performance averages in all subject areas of the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests except 8th grade math. On the Career and College Readiness Performance Index Report, the system is above the state average for elementary schools and only slightly below for middle and high schools.

Northwest Laurens Elementary, was awarded the Title I Reward School status. East Laurens Elementary, was identified in FY 13 as a Focus School because of the achievement gap between students with disabilities and regular education peers but the school was awarded an additional Title I-A School Improvement Grant in addition to the 5% set-aside of the system's Title I dollars because the school turned scores around significantly.

East Laurens High School was provided a School Improvement Grant because of poor achievement scores. The three year grant period was beneficial for the school in that the low socioeconomic school was able to add much-needed technology to all classrooms which opened the door for many avenues for improvement. The school improved test scores and student achievement dramatically.

The mission of the Laurens County School System, "Rigor, relevance, and relationships... Every teacher, every student, every day. . ." was developed in 2013 so that it would align with the vision and clearly focuses on the academics, life and relationships that the community considers important. The vision, "Laurens County Schools are student-centered communities of learners that challenge students to become independent critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and contributing citizens. . ." coupled with the mission and belief statements provide comprehensive information about what stakeholders expect of the system.

The system has recently generated powerful guiding statements and beliefs about learning but has not yet clearly defined the expectations for system performance and student learning. As a result, programs, resources and practices, especially classroom practices, have not yet been aligned with these expectations, described by the system employee: "We are all over the place."

The "achievement gap" is described in the Accreditation Report and was visible to the Team in the classrooms across the system. Closing the achievement gap can only be achieved by: a. careful and thorough description of the contributing factors; b. very carefully constructed, deliberate programs, practices and resources that address those factors, and c. efficient and effective monitoring and adjustment models to be sure all factors are being appropriately assessed, addressed and supported. The Team agreed on the need for clear direction and clarity that are addressed in the Actions left for the system by the Team.

This report provides "Improvement Priorities" which the External Review Team determined to be next steps in improvement of school and student performance. Additionally, "Powerful Practices" and "Opportunities for Improvement" provide additional support and guidance toward meeting the Powerful Practices. These "Actions" do not stand alone, but are inter-related to the Opportunities and build on the Powerful Practices in the sense that strengths and improvement in one area support growth in the others, thus empowering the

systemic operations supporting continual improvement in student performance.

Improvement Priorities

The institution should use the findings from this review to guide the continuous improvement process. The institution must address the Improvement Priorities listed below:

- Adopt systematic processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning from all data sources so that all professional and support staff can evaluate improvement efforts and the effectiveness of programs that affect student learning.
- Develop a long-term strategic plan, focused on the system mission, purpose and belief statements that will guide all aspects of system planning and operation.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive communication plan to control the message of the system and sharpen the focus on the mission, "Rigor, relevance, and relationships... Every teacher, every student, every day" focused in the minds of stakeholders.
- Revisit the current technology plan to ensure that the plan is focused on students with intent to increase differentiated instruction, collaboration between students and increased, challenging technology-enhanced activities that support learning.

Accreditation Recommendation

Index of Education Quality

The Index of Education Quality (IEQ™) provides a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of indicators and evaluative criteria. A formative tool for improvement, it identifies areas of success as well as areas in need of focus.

The IEQ™ comprises three domains: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) the use of resources and data to support and optimize learning.

The overall and domain scores can range from 100-400. The domain scores are derived from: the AdvancED Standards and indicators ratings; results of the Analysis of Student Performance; and data from Stakeholder Feedback Surveys (students, parents, and staff).

	External Review IEQ Score	AdvancED Network Average
Overall Score	270.24	282.79
Teaching and Learning Impact	268.57	274.14
Leadership Capacity	275.00	296.08
Resource Utilization	267.50	286.32

The IEQ™ results include information about how the institution is performing compared to expected criteria as well as to other institutions in the AdvancED Network. The institution should use the information in this report, including the corresponding performance rubrics, to identify specific areas of improvement.

Consequently, the External Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission that the institution earn the distinction of accreditation for a five-year term. AdvancED will review the results of the External Review to make a final determination including the appropriate next steps for the institution in response to these findings.

Addenda

Individual Institution Results (Self-reported)

Institution Name	Teaching and Learning Impact	Leadership Capacity	Resource Utilization	Overall IEQ Score
East Laurens Elementary	328.57	281.82	300.00	310.26
East Laurens High School	290.48	263.64	328.57	289.74
East Laurens Middle School	280.95	245.45	328.57	279.49
East Laurens Primary	328.57	290.91	285.71	310.26
Northwest Laurens Elementary	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00
Southwest Laurens Elementary School	261.90	245.45	257.14	256.41
West Laurens High School	271.43	272.73	328.57	282.05
West Laurens Middle School	238.10	236.36	271.43	243.59

Team Roster

Member	Brief Biography
Dr. Drew Moore	<p>Drew Moore began his teaching career as an elementary music teacher in Shreveport, Louisiana. In 1978 he moved to the middle laboratory school at Northwestern State University adding multiple subjects to his teaching repertoire and began working in accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) which accredited his school. Professional experiences include media director at a residential high school for the gifted in math, science, and performing arts; teaching adjunct for the local university and university laboratory school administrator. Retired after thirty-three years in public and higher education, he now chairs and serves as team member on external review teams at the school, district, distance learning, and corporate level. Drew also serves on the Louisiana State AdvancED/SACS committee and the AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Degrees include: Bachelor of Music Education, Master's in Music, Specialist Degree in Public School Administration and Doctorate in Education Technologies from Northwestern State University in Louisiana and additional graduate work at Memphis State University in Tennessee and Louisiana State University- Shreveport.</p>
Jenny Rooks	<p>Jenny Rooks started her career in Maine teaching ELA to high school at-risk students after graduating with a degree from the University of Maine System. She traveled to Colorado and worked in a self-contained middle school class with ELL students for two years. An offer to start a program with students with Autism and severe needs came available and Jenny accepted. After arriving in Georgia she became a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and changes positions to Intervention Specialist from teacher and began developing a PBIS program. After adding on a leadership degree, she became Director of Instructional Student Supports for Monroe County Schools.</p>
Mr. Garry Rickard	<p>Garry's educational career spans 37 years in the same school district- Mountain Brook City Schools, Alabama. During that time Rickard served as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, vocational director, and 33 years as a school principal/administrator. Educational efforts now focus on serving as an AdvancED Lead Evaluator at the state, district, Department of Defense Schools, and international schools. Other AdvancED work included serving two terms on the AdvancED Alabama Council and currently serves as the Associate Director-AdvancED Alabama. Past interests include regularly substitute teaching in the public schools and supervising student teachers. Educational degrees include a BS (history), M.Ed, AA, Ed.S (School Administration and Leadership). Rickard is the recipient of the Alabama AdvancED Excellence in Education Award for 2013-14.</p>

Member	Brief Biography
<p>Ms. Davian LaJoyce Ellison</p>	<p>A graduate of Scotland High School and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davian LaJoyce Ellison has various work experiences including marketing, economic and community development, and education. She is also no stranger to political involvement, as she served on the Laurinburg City Council and as a party chairperson and a National Party Congressional District Delegate. The unique combination of these experiences enables her to have a keen understanding of policy, stakeholder engagement and organizational structure.</p> <p>As an educator, Ellison has a diverse teaching record. She is dual licensed in Special Education and Regular Education, holding certifications in Middle Grades Language Arts (6-9), Special Education General Curriculum, EC Language Arts (K-6), EC Math (K-6), EC Science (K-6), and EC Social Studies. During her 8 years as an Educator, she has been a Sixth grade Inclusion Teacher, a Seventh and Eighth grade Learning Disabled English and Math teacher as well as an Eighth grade Regular English Language Arts teacher. Ellison has served in various leadership roles inside of the school building including: Grade Level Chairperson, Principal's Advisory Team Member and School Improvement Team Member. Last year, she was selected to participate in her district's Aspiring Administrator's Program and is looking forward to a year-long extensive Administrative Internship to complete the Masters of School Administration Program and Principal's Certification through Fayetteville State University, a constituent university of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.</p>
<p>Dr. Ella Green</p>	<p>Dr. Ella Green has 25 years experience in the education field. She is a 2013 graduate of Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. She holds an Early Elementary Certification, a Master's Degree in Middle Grades Education, and a Doctorate Degree in Educational Administration. She has held the positions of teacher at the middle school level, instructional coach at middle and elementary levels, elementary assistant principal, and interim curriculum coordinator for grades K-8. She currently works at the elementary level as an instructional coach and has begun to work in partnership with the local college on instructional initiatives designed to enhance students' field experiences at her school. Dr. Green has also served previously as an AdvancEd Team Member.</p>
<p>Dr. Lisa Hinely</p>	<p>Dr. Lisa Hinely is currently the Superintendent of Schools in Oglethorpe County, GA. She has 28 years of experience as an educator. Previously, she has served as a classroom teacher, instructional supervisor, assistant principal, principal, central office director, and assistant superintendent. The Oglethorpe County School System is preparing for its five year district re-accreditation visit this spring.</p>

Next Steps

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with 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. Consider the Opportunities for Improvement identified throughout the report that are provided by the team in the spirit of continuous improvement and the institution's commitment to improving its capacity to improve student learning.
4. Develop action plans to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward addressing the Improvement Priorities.
5. Use the report to guide and strengthen the institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
6. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Improvement Priorities. Institutions are required to respond to all Improvement Priorities. 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 address the Improvement Priorities. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the responses to the Improvement Priorities and the resulting improvement.
7. Continue to meet the AdvancED Standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

About AdvancED

AdvancED is the world leader in providing improvement and accreditation services to education providers of all types in their pursuit of excellence in serving students. AdvancED serves as a trusted partner to more than 32,000 public and private schools and school systems – enrolling more than 20 million students - across the United States and 70 countries.

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 became part of AdvancED.

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. The Accreditation Divisions of AdvancED share research-based quality standards that cross school system, state, regional, national, and international boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified and consistent process designed to engage educational institutions in continuous improvement.

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