

Report of the  
External Review  
for  
Calhoun County Board of Education

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## Introduction to the External Review

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

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

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

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

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

## Part I: Findings

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

### Accreditation Standards and Indicators

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

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, identification of Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards (if appropriate), and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team.

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

Average Indicator Score for this Institution	3.26
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**Standard 1: The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.**

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

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

Standard 1			
The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Documentation or description of the process for creating the district's purpose including the role of stakeholders</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the district's purpose</li> </ul>	3.0
1.2	The system ensures that each school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of school purpose statements if different from the district purpose statement</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs</li> </ul>	3.0

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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Examples of schools continuous improvement plans</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs</li> </ul>	3.0

### ***Opportunities for Improvement***

### ***Indicator***

1. Develop and implement a formal process to review and revise the system's purpose and direction.

1.1

System artifacts and stakeholder interviews provided evidence related to purpose and direction. Evidence from system stakeholders focused on the review process for revising and, where appropriate, updating the system's statement of purpose to more appropriately reflect changing demographics, philosophies, expectations, and contemporary thought. Artifact review focused on the current statement of purpose, written descriptions of past reviews, and the extent to which the statement of purpose is utilized to focus decisions and determine system effectiveness. The evidence showed that it did appear that the Calhoun County School System (CCSS) had conducted past reviews of its purpose and direction and intent was expressed of system plans to conduct a biannual review. However, even with written evidence and the intent to conduct a biannual review, the team could not determine that a formal process and a review plan were sufficiently in place to ensure that this core organizational need will be routinely addressed and updates made as needed.

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

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

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

Standard 2			
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Professional development plans</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions</li> </ul>	4.0



Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governing authority training plan</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest</li> <li>• Governing code of ethics</li> </ul>	3.0
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles and responsibilities of school leadership</li> <li>• Roles and responsibilities of district leadership</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Survey results regarding functions of the governing authority and operations of the district</li> <li>• Stakeholder input and feedback</li> </ul>	4.0
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development offerings and plans</li> <li>• Examples of collaboration and shared leadership</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Examples of decisions aligned with the district's purpose and direction</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	4.0
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys</li> <li>• Survey responses</li> </ul>	3.0
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	3.0

**Powerful Practices****Indicator**

1. The system's transitioning of policy from prohibiting student possession of electronic devices to encouraging their individual use in the classroom gives faculty the freedom to maximize the student's learning experience and positively affect academic achievement. 2.1

Recently the Calhoun County Board of Education approved a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy permitting student use of personal electronic devices such as laptops, tablets, and iphones as learning tools. This change represents a major shift from previous policy and has resulted in expanded hardware and software resource availability for students, relieved some of the technology acquisition demands for CCSS, and allowed CCSS to expand its bandwidth to accommodate current needs and provide for future growth. Many students commented in interviews on the positive impact of the policy change and how it has allowed them the flexibility to communicate and to conduct assignment-related research because of immediate technology access.
2. The Calhoun County School System Board of Education and administration have established uniform policies and procedures that adequately support each school while maintaining the autonomy of school leadership teams to make decisions determined to be best for their individual schools. 2.3

Interviews with board members, the superintendent, and principals provided consistent feedback to the external review team regarding the extent to which the superintendent and principals are empowered to operate the system and its schools. Board members, some new, indicated that they were keenly aware of the need to provide administrators with the autonomy needed for operational decision-making while remaining focused on those duties and responsibilities related to governance. Evidence to support this feedback included the flexibility provided to each school leadership team and its faculty to develop and implement a purpose for its learning community, create and administer a budget consistent with guidelines of board policy and law, make curriculum refinements when appropriate, and generally engage in the overall operation of the school without interference.
3. The Calhoun County School System's administrative team fosters a servant leadership quality, keeping the needs of the students, parents and faculty in the forefront of policy and practice decisions. 2.4

On repeated occasions throughout the review, team members heard references to decisions and actions being made in the best interest of the students enrolled in the Calhoun County School System. Members of the board of education addressed this core value as essential to decisions made by the board. The superintendent identified this as key to decisions made by himself and those of the principals within Calhoun County. Parents and other community-based stakeholders provided support for this conclusion by indicating their approval of system decisions related to the maintenance of safe, secure, and clean schools, development of a strong curriculum, employment of well-qualified faculty, staff and administrators, and, promotion of a strong co-curricular program throughout the system. Performance results from state and system testing programs indicate the students in Calhoun County are responding by scoring at or above state norms in many areas.

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

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

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

Standard 3			
The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The system's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Course, program, or school schedules</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Graduate follow-up surveys</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of the systematic review process for curriculum, instruction, and assessment</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Common assessments</li> <li>• Surveys results</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource</li> <li>• Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool</li> <li>• Surveys results</li> <li>• Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the approved or prescribed instructional strategies and programs</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul>	3.0
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Supervision and evaluation procedures</li> <li>• Peer or mentoring opportunities and interactions</li> <li>• Surveys results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul>	3.0
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	3.0
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff</li> <li>• Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices</li> </ul>	3.0
3.8	The system and all of its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of their children's learning progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Volunteer program with variety of options for participation</li> <li>• List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0
3.9	The system designs and evaluates structures in all schools whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports that student's educational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum and activities of structures for adults advocating on behalf of students</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Description of formalized structures for adults to advocate on behalf of students</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting</li> </ul>	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• District quality control procedures showing implementation plan for professional development for district and school staff</li> <li>• Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning</li> <li>• Data used to identify unique learning needs of students</li> </ul>	3.0

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

1. Clarify the purpose of professional learning communities within the Calhoun County School System and monitor for consistency the implementation in all schools within the system.

3.5

Evidence of the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) was provided in the system's self-assessment as well as other documents. External Review Team members also inquired about the implementation and use of professional learning communities during interviews with internal stakeholders. Results of the review of evidence and stakeholder interviews revealed fairly common use of PLCs across the system but no common definition and standards of use within each of the system's schools. It appeared to members of the team that identification and use of the PLC structure was left to the administration and faculty of each school. The result was inconsistency of understanding and use. For purposes of ensuring effective outcomes from the use of professional learning communities, developing a system-level definition and monitoring for consistency could prove valuable for maximizing the effective use of time and other resources.

2. Create, implement and periodically evaluate a communication plan to promote meaningful engagement of families in their children's education and to provide avenues which keep families informed of their children's learning progress.

3.8

While both documents and stakeholder interviews support efforts made by the Calhoun County School System to communicate with families about the learning progress of their children and to engage families in meaningful ways in support of their children's education, many stakeholders, especially parents, indicated that more could be done in a concerted way to communicate and engage families. For example, despite the efforts of the system to communicate through multiple means including email, computer-based parent portal access to student grades, and, among others, a phone alert system that communicates with families when students are absent or receive low grades, some parents indicated that they do not always feel they are in the communications loop. Stakeholders also indicated that some families may not receive system communications either due to the absence of technology in the home or, if available, non use for purposes of tracking student progress. Based on this evidence, the team concluded that at least some of the problem may result from the absence of a coordinated plan that aligns and coordinates all of the communications options available to ensure, to the extent possible, that all families who desire to receive system communications related to student progress and engagement opportunities will have that opportunity.

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

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

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

Standard 4			
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.1	The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ, and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, and educational programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• School budgets or financial plans for last three years</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Assessments of staffing needs</li> <li>• Documentation of highly qualified staff</li> <li>• Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for the district and schools</li> </ul>	4.0



Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs, and system operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District quality assurance procedures showing district oversight of schools pertaining to school resources</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Alignment of district budget with district purpose and direction</li> </ul>	4.0
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• School safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes</li> </ul>	4.0
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities, learning environments</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	3.0
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Data on media and information resources available to students and staff</li> </ul>	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model</li> <li>• Policies relative to technology use at the district-level and school-level</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness</li> </ul>	3.0
4.7	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Student assessment system for identifying student needs</li> <li>• Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Schedule of family services, e.g., parent classes, survival skills</li> <li>• Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education</li> <li>• List of support services available to students</li> </ul>	3.0
4.8	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Description of IEP process</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0

**Powerful Practices****Indicator**

1. CCSS utilizes effective and efficient fiscal management practices that have resulted in funding sufficient to meet annual operating needs, a three month contingency necessary for exigency conditions, and no capital debt.

4.2

Evidence of prudent fiscal management revealed that the Calhoun County School System has done a most effective job managing its resources. At a budget point of approximately \$100,000,000, CCSS appears to provide resources adequate for serving the needs of approximately 9,000 students while maintaining a fund reserve equal to three months of operating capital. In addition, the system currently holds no capital debt and has accumulated sufficient resources to pay for several capital projects currently underway. Written evidence, including a recent independent audit, supports the system's compliance with state and federal laws governing the use of public funds.

***Standard 5: The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.***

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

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

Standard 5
The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model</li> <li>• Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local or school assessments on student learning and school performance</li> <li>• Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> </ul>	4.0
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of data used to measure the effectiveness of the district systems that support schools and learning</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• District quality control procedures that monitor schools in effectively using data to improve instruction and student learning</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning</li> </ul>	4.0
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	4.0

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"> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning</li> <li>• Evidence of student readiness for the next level</li> <li>• Evidence of student growth</li> </ul>	3.0
5.5	System and school leaders monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District quality control procedures for monitoring district effectiveness</li> <li>• Accreditation Report</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>	3.0

### **Powerful Practices**

### **Indicator**

1. CCSS has developed and utilizes a student assessment protocol supported by an information management system that provides relevant, up-to-date information necessary for curriculum decision making about individual students, group, and system teaching and learning needs.

5.1

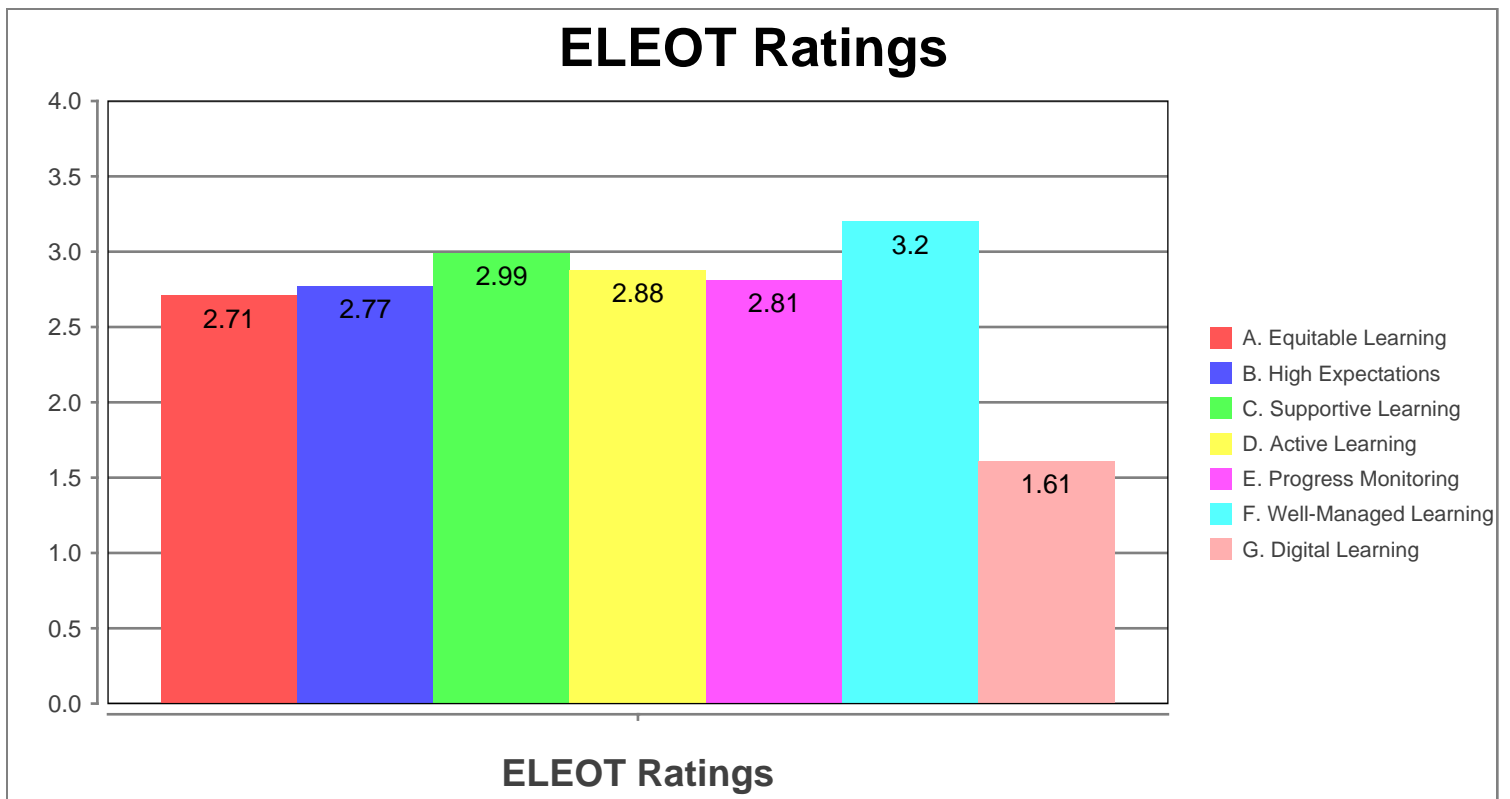
CCSS utilizes a technology-based information management system that stores and provides on demand student performance data from formative and summative assessments in a variety of formats. According to system personnel, student benchmark data are used as a beginning point for measuring student performance, formative data are used for purposes of tracking student academic progress, and summative measures including those mandated by the Alabama Department of Education (e. g., Alabama High School Graduation Examination, Explore, Plan, Quality Core End of Course Tests, ACCESS for English Language Learners, Alabama Alternate Assessment, ACT Plus Writing, ACT Aspire, and Alabama Science Assessment) are used effectively to measure outcomes. In addition, every school has access to other formative and summative assessments and computer-based interventions including Waterford Early Learning intervention and assessment (P-2, SPED), STAR/AR Reading and Math, Success Maker/Success Maker Enterprise intervention and assessment (K-12, special education), ThinkCentral (K-8), EssayScorer (high schools, middle schools), and, among others, Perfection Learning (high schools, middle schools). In various configurations, results of these multiple assessments are used frequently and effectively to inform individual student learning needs, whole-class instruction, and system-level curriculum decision making.

NOTE: This evidence indicator correlates with evidence indicators 5.2 and 5.3.

## Learning Environment

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

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External Review Team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a four-point scale. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the seven learning environments included in ELEOT.



## Student Performance

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

Student Performance Evaluation	
Evaluative Criteria	Performance Level
Assessment Quality	3.0
Test Administration	4.0
Quality of Learning	3.0
Equity of Learning	3.0



## Stakeholder Feedback

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

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

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

## Individual Institution Results

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

Institution	Indicator Averages	Questionnaire Administration	Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	Assessment Quality	Test Administration	Quality of Learning	Equity of Learning
Alexandria Elementary School	3.69	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0
Alexandria High School	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	2.0
Ohatchee Elementary School	3.71	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0
Ohatchee High School	2.61	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0
Pleasant Valley Elementary School	3.61	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Pleasant Valley High School	3.0	4.0	2.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
Saks Elementary School	3.24	3.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	2.0
Saks High School	2.94	1.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Saks Middle School	3.61	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
Walter Wellborn Elementary School	3.67	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Walter Wellborn High School	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
Weaver Elementary School	3.6	4.0	2.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
Weaver High School	3.61	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
White Plains Elementary School	3.33	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
White Plains High School	3.18	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0
White Plains Middle School	3.15	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.0

## Part II: Conclusion

### *Summary of the External Review*

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

The External Review for the Calhoun County School System began on Sunday, April 13, 2014, and concluded on Wednesday, April 17, 2014. Based on frequent contacts with CCSS personnel prior to and throughout the review, extensive written evidence provided by CCSS, stakeholder interviews, and school visits and classroom observations conducted as a part of AdvancED protocol, the External Review Team found that the system was well-prepared to host an external review. Throughout the process, system personnel appeared to be open and honest in their responses and, where requested, forthcoming with additional supporting evidence. The system's self-appraisal was found to be realistic, supported by interview and survey results, and, for the most part, consistent with the appraisal of the External Review Team. During the review, the team interviewed 4 board members, 58 administrators, 26 teachers, 82 students, and 5 parents for a total of 175 stakeholders.

***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.***

Evidence showed the strong emphasis placed on "Success for All" by the Calhoun County Board of Education, its administration, faculty, and staff. This core value and the resulting expectations permeate all aspects of the system. Board members attend to the responsibilities that are designated in Alabama law leaving administrative matters to the superintendent, system-level administrators, school-based administrators, and faculty and staff. The emphasis on student success is further evident through effective management of system fiscal, material, and human resources. As indicated elsewhere in this report, the system maintains a budget that is adequate to address the needs of approximately 9,000 students, retains a contingency equivalent to three months of operating capital, and currently has no long-term capital debt. Student performance continues to increase as evidenced by increases in test results from state and national normed measures of academic progress and the graduation rate has shown steady growth since 2010 increasing from 58% to 86% for the graduating classes of 2013.

While stakeholders identified and could document many successes, the External Review Team noted several areas that presented opportunities for continuous improvement including the development and implementation of a process to regularly review the system's purpose and direction, clarification of the purpose and use of professional learning communities throughout the system, development of a cohesive communication plan focused on meaningful engagement of families in their children's education, assurance that all instructional personnel are trained in the analysis, interpretation, and use of data to inform instruction, and refinement of the CCSS Professional Development Plan to ensure that system-wide needs necessary for addressing the system's purpose and direction have been identified and included as a part of the plan. With respect to review of the system's purpose and direction, the Team did identify some evidence supporting past reviews and assurance was provided of an intent to conduct a review on a biannual basis. However, no evidence related to a formal process for conducting such a review was identified by the Team. Formalizing such a process and including representatives from both internal and external stakeholder groups would be highly beneficial for ensuring continued relevance of

this bedrock principle determined to be an essential guide for meeting stakeholder needs. The use of professional learning communities, similar to many professional development activities, was described by stakeholders at both the system level and the school level as being primary responsibilities of each school. As a result, the Team concluded that system-wide inconsistencies existed about the definition and use of professional learning communities that, if clarified, could result in more effective use of time and resources dedicated to this activity. Similarly, opportunities could be identified as a part of this process that will ensure consistent professional development for all instructional personnel in those areas determined to be central to emerging or ongoing needs of the Calhoun County School System. Training in the analysis, interpretation, and use of data to inform instruction was identified as being one of those areas.

It was clear to members of the External Review Team that the CCSS focus on "Success for All" and continued improvement are genuine. This was evident in documented progress in test results and increased graduation rates, emphasis on readiness for success at the next level, stakeholder feedback, and prudent resource utilization. It was also clear to members of the team that the CCSS is poised for success through its continued emphasis on improvement.

***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.***

Thirty-two observations of randomly-selected classrooms were conducted in 6 of 19 schools within the Calhoun County School System using the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT). In general, team members observed learning environments that were supportive, well managed, and active. The supportive learning environment was scored at 2.99, indicating that students demonstrated positive attitudes about the classroom and their learning experiences. Students were also observed to receive support and, where appropriate, additional instructional assistance to better understand subject content. Team members observed classrooms that were well managed; this environment received a score of 3.20. Students appeared to be respectful of teachers and classmates, demonstrated appropriate behavior, and typically conducted themselves in a manner that reflected high teacher expectations for compliance with general rules of conduct. The active learning environment earned a score of 2.88. Some variety in instruction and student engagement was noted and varied from lecture-based instruction to individual and small-group work focused on research and problem solving. In these instructional settings, student activity levels ranged from more reserved learning engagement to high and more active. However, it was apparent to team members that in most all cases, the focus was on student engagement in learning. Based on the consistency of scores noted in the supportive, well managed, and active learning environments, the team concluded that students understood the importance of learning in settings where the classroom instructional leaders appeared willing to provide assistance and support to facilitate learning, encouraged learning through differentiation, and held high expectations for respectful student interactions with teachers and peers.

In the environments focused on equitable learning, high expectations, and progress monitoring, consistency was observed among these areas. The equitable learning environment received a score of 2.71 reflecting some consistency in observations of differentiated learning opportunities, but more consistency in equal student access to classroom resources and support and fair treatment in the application of class rules. However, learning activities focused on opportunities to learn about student cultures and backgrounds were less frequently observed as

indicated by a score of 1.78. High expectations for students, an environment that received a score of 2.77, were apparent in several observable forms including oral and written communications, in-class activities, and student assignments. Efforts by students to meet the expectations of their teachers and engage in learning activities that were challenging were observed. However, instruction that focused on student use of higher order thinking skills and exemplars of high quality work were not routinely observed. The progress monitoring and feedback environment received a score of 2.81 and was observed, where appropriate, during some of the classroom observations. Therefore, based on observations related to these environments, the team concluded that equity was evident within learning environments in CCSS schools, that, in general, teachers do hold high learning expectations for students, and student progress is monitored to ensure effective student learning outcomes.

The use of digital technology in the learning environment received a score of 1.61 indicating that team members did not observe with any frequency student use of technology to gather, evaluate and use information for learning, conduct research, or communicate and work collaboratively for learning. To some degree, this outcome may have resulted from the timing of the observations (beginning, middle, ending of the lesson). In some cases it was obvious to the observer that use of technology by students was not appropriate for the subject or lesson being presented and finally, the designated day for school site visits was changed from Tuesday, April 15 to Monday, April 14 due to tornado activities in the greater Calhoun area. This may have contributed to changes in classroom routines throughout the System due to these potentially threatening weather conditions. However, team members did observe that adequate technology for both student and teacher use was available and that teachers frequently used technology during instruction. However, students were not observed to use technology with any degree of consistency for purposes of learning.

In the past, accreditation reviews resulted in an accreditation recommendation on status. Labels such as advised, warned, probation, or all clear were used to describe the status of a school relative to the criteria. Beginning with school year, 2013 - 2014, AdvancED is introducing a new framework to describe the result of an accreditation review. Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduces an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ). The IEQ is comprised of three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) use of resources to support and optimize learning. Therefore, your institution will no longer receive an accreditation status. Instead, your institution will be accredited with an IEQ score. In the case where an institution is failing to meet established criteria, the accreditation will be under review thereby requiring frequent monitoring. The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and Indicators; the Analysis of Student Performance; and the Engagement and Involvement of Stakeholders. Within each domain institutions will be able to connect to the individual performance levels that are applied in support of the AdvancED Standards and evaluative criteria. Within the performance levels are detailed descriptors that can be a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Required Action as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected Indicator.

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

IEQ Institutional Score: 324

Teaching and Learning Impact: 319  
(Standards 3 and 5; Student Performance Criteria)

Leadership Capacity: 325  
(Standards 1 and 2; Stakeholder Engagement Criteria)

Resource Utilization: 338  
(Standard 4)

Subsequent to calculating the Index of Educational Quality, the Team again spent time reviewing and discussing evidence that resulted in strong scores in each of the three performance domains comprising the IEQ. In addition to evidence supporting ratings for each of the standard indicators, the Team considered CCSS student performance outcomes on state and national measures of academic progress placing them at or above testing norms for nearly all groups, an impressive increase in the graduation rate from 58% to 86% in a three-year period (2010-2013), strong fiscal health of the system that has been described elsewhere in this report, a highly qualified faculty, facilities that are in excellent condition, a governing board that appears to know its role and responsibilities and leaves the administration of the system to those it employees, an administration that accepts the responsibility for effectively administering the affairs of the Calhoun County School System, and strong support from community stakeholders. Based on this evidence, the team concluded that the ratings were well supported and are an accurate indication of the system's level of performance.

Preparation for an external review was facilitated through excellent planning, preparation, and leadership by the Calhoun County School System Executive Director and Primary Accreditation Contact. Members of the External Review Team wish to express appreciation for his efforts and to all system personnel who were involved in preparing for system-wide accreditation. On Wednesday, April 17, the External Review Team presented its exit report to the Calhoun County Board of Education, the superintendent, and to system administrators, principals, and others.

The External Review Team recommends that the Calhoun County School System be accredited by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission for a 5-year term of accreditation.

## Required Action

1. Develop, implement, and evaluate a rolling system strategic plan that identifies system long-and short-term goals and objectives, individuals responsible for oversight, funds needed for implementation and evaluation, assessment tools, and measureable outcomes.

Related Indicator or Assurance: 4.4

### Description:

The External Review Team reviewed several system plans, including a technology plan, stakeholder involvement plan, a capital plan, and a document containing some system goals. However, no single document identified as a strategic plan or continuous improvement plan was produced or reviewed that appeared to contain comprehensive and well-connected goals and objectives and specificity related to funding needs, designated personnel responsible for progress monitoring, and measureable outcomes that focused the system's journey into the near-term future. However, the development, implementation and evaluation of such a plan could result in more effective and efficient use of system resources, alignment of other system plans with this master plan, increased stakeholder involvement, and utilization as an effective public relations tool. It would also appear that developing such a plan on a rolling basis where one year is completed and evaluated and another year is added would be highly effective for maintaining system focus and align with a process of continuous improvement.

## **Part III: Addenda**

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

**Lead Evaluator:**

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**Associate Lead Evaluator:**

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**Reviewer:**

Dr. Michael E Lodico

**Team Member:**

Ms. Jaspconia Florence-Moore

Dr. Tim Guinn

Ms. Donna J Wear



## **Next Steps**

The institution should:

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

## ***Celebrating Accreditation***

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

## ***About AdvancED***

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

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

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