

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Hall County School System**

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United States

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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), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI 3

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review 4

Summary of Findings 5

 Commendations 6

 Recommendations 7

 Next Steps 8

Standards for Accreditation 9

 Standard 1. Vision & Purpose 9

 Standard 2. Governance & Leadership 10

 Standard 3. Teaching & Learning 11

 Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results 13

 Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems 14

 Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships 15

 Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement 16

Quality Assurance Findings 18

Conclusion 19

Appendix 20

 Quality Assurance Review Team Members 20

 AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems 20

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

Background. Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) accredit public and private schools and districts in 30 states, the Navajo Nation, Latin America, and the Department of Defense Schools worldwide.

In April 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), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form one strong unified organization dedicated to education quality. That unified organization, known as AdvancED, creates the world's largest education community, representing 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 65 countries worldwide and educating 15 million students.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help schools continuously improve.

The Accreditation Process. To earn and maintain accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, school districts and their schools must:

- 1) Meet the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools.** School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement.** School districts and their schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose that the school district is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school and district effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results).
- 3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.** School districts and schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, school districts host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and recommendations to help the school district improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school district and a written report detailing the team's recommendations. The school district acts on the team's recommendations and submits a progress report following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school district community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help school districts and their schools maximize student success and improve organizational effectiveness.

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

Purpose. The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

1. Evaluate the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and recommendations to improve the district and its schools.
4. Make an accreditation recommendation for review by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

A key aim of the Quality Assurance Review is to verify that the school district is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

School District Preparation. To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school district and the community complete the AdvancED Standards Assessment Report. The report engages the district in an in-depth self assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school district identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that it is meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school district examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school district effectiveness.

Summary of Team Activities. The Quality Assurance Review Team is led by an AdvancED certified team chair and comprised of professionals from outside the school district. The team reviews the findings of the school district's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school district, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school district's adherence to the standards for accreditation. The team provides an oral exit report and prepares a written Quality Assurance Review Team Report designed to help the school district and its schools improve.

The Quality Assurance Review Team Report. Following the visit, the review team completes the Quality Assurance Review report. After review by a nationally-trained reader, the report is submitted to the district. The report contains commendations and recommendations for improvement.

Using the Report - Acting on the Recommendations. The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the recommendations. Following the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, the school district must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress it has made on the team's recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district is addressing the recommendations.

Accreditation Recommendation. The Quality Assurance Review team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed at the state level and by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school district following action from the commission.

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited Hall County School System on 10/18/2009 - 10/21/2009.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 129 administrators, 207 teachers, 40 support staff, 127 parents and business partners, 123 students, and 5 Board of Education members for a total of 631 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 10 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

- Vision and Purpose
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Documenting and Using Results
- Resource and Support Systems
- Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems with a school district and systematic methods of attaining high student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of the standards lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards. The Quality Assurance Review Team used the AdvancED standards to guide its review of the school district, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school district and its schools function as a whole and embody the practices and characteristics of a quality school district.

Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

The Quality Assurance Review Team also examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team's findings in this area can be found following the standard reports.

The team used the standard reports and quality assurance findings to identify common themes, significant accomplishments, and pressing needs facing the district. These became the basis for the overall commendations and recommendations that are provided below. The commendations and recommendations should serve as the focus for the district as it acts on the team's findings. They represent the areas that the team believes will have the greatest impact in helping the district further its improvement efforts. The standard reports and quality assurance findings can be used to help reinforce and enrich the district's understanding of the commendations and recommendations.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Hall County School System for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted. The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Hall County School System for:

- **The superintendent and his staff provide visionary leadership that inspires and guides the schools and community in their continuous focus on student achievement and other school sponsored activities.**

Interviews with site-based administrators, teachers, students, support staff, parents, and community leaders confirm the stakeholder support for the vision and the direction the system is pursuing. The leadership guidance in the development of the vision statement, “Character, Competency, Rigor...For All,” reflects the enthusiasm for the work of the system. The interviews revealed that stakeholders give credit to the superintendent for uniting the community and his staff in initiating creative programs. All schools achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time in the history of the school district.

Good leadership promotes success throughout a school system.

- **The district leadership cultivates a warm, inviting culture that encourages risk-taking to meet the needs of the stakeholders.**

The open door policy of the superintendent, his communication to stakeholders as well as staff members, and sincere and contagious enthusiasm about education supports the culture. Interviews with teachers, school administrators, parents, and community leaders confirm the feeling of community within the schools. The care and support of the principals is a major contributor to the culture which permeates throughout the system. Innovative programs in math, science, languages, and intervention for students who need help have resulted from this atmosphere.

There is a commitment of the system/school leadership to promote and maintain a positive culture.

- **Board of Education (BOE) members understand their roles and responsibilities and are knowledgeable about the operations of the system.**

Interviews with all five (5) board members revealed a genuine concern for the students within the system and an understanding of the challenges of the changing demographics of Hall County School District (HCSD). Interviews with board members confirm that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities and value their relationship with the superintendent. The trust and respect for each other and the superintendent is much greater than normally observed in other districts.

To have a successful school system communication and mutual respect between the school board and superintendent is vital.

- **The district provides a wide variety of instructional program options to meet the needs of its diverse student population.**

Among the programs available to their students are: Lanier Career Academy, World Language Academy, da Vinci Academy, Singapore Math, and three International Baccalaureate programs. The balanced literacy framework guides instruction at the elementary level. The superintendent and BOE encourage schools to

“think out of the box” to envision how they can best meet the needs of the students they serve.

Every community has the need for education programs that best prepare their children to live and work in the 21st century. The change of demographics requires visionary leadership and a willingness to recognize the unique needs of the population the system serves.

- **HCSD has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in all of its schools as well as system-wide.**

For the first time in history all schools in the district have achieved AYP. The stakeholders embraced a laser focus on student achievement. The comprehensive review of data enabled the schools to successfully address areas of deficiency. Contributing to this success was the shared data through the Infinite Campus and other intervention initiatives.

It takes an entire school system working as a team to achieve at the highest level.

Recommendations

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following recommendations for improvement. The team focused its recommendations on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall effectiveness of the school district. The Hall County School System will be held accountable for making progress on each of the recommendations noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these recommendations. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the recommendations.

- **Develop a long range plan to bridge the curricula between elementary, middle, and high schools.**

Scaffolding efforts among elementary, middle and high schools should include specific long range plans for how to provide continuity in and among a variety of school experiences and other more traditional settings present within the district. Interviews with parents and teachers indicated concern about the transition among schools and programs.

Students and parents need to plan for the transition from one program/school to another within the district.

- **Align the AdvancED standards with system and school improvement plans and develop explicit quality assurance procedures to ensure that district AdvancED standards are being met.**

Through interviews with the school staff it was revealed that school improvement plans may have been developed in isolation of the AdvancED standards. Alignment of the standards as the plans are developed would enhance the school improvement initiatives and ensure that standards are addressed.

Alignment of AdvancED standards and school improvement initiatives will provide better continuous improvement plans and quality assurance.

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools: The team reviewed the district's adherence to each of the AdvancED standards. The findings from this review are provided in the next section of this report.

Next Steps

The school district 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 commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.
3. Develop action plans to address the recommendations made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the recommendations.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.
5. Following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the team's recommendations. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the recommendations. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork, provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help school districts and their schools with continuous improvement.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for review and action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school district. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school district should celebrate its achievement with the community. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and other related items can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school district, its schools, and community in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the commendations and address the recommendations noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school district to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

The Quality Assurance Review Team divided into standard teams to review each standard and prepare a standards report summarizing the team's findings. These standard reports, along with the quality assurance findings that follow these reports, provided the basis for the team's identification of over-arching commendations and recommendations presented earlier in this report. The reports submitted by each team are provided on the following pages for the district's review and use. Each report reflects its respective team's unique voice, perspective, and deliberations. The reports can be used to help enrich and deepen the district's understanding of the overall commendations and recommendations.

Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

Standard: The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

Description:

The vision statement was initially developed during the 2005-2006 school year shortly after the arrival of the new superintendent. Over the course of the year and through various meetings with a variety of stakeholders two themes: Rigor and Competency emerged. Additional conversations revealed that the need to include character within the district's vision arose and subsequently the final product: "Character, Competency, and Rigor...for All" was adopted by the entire school district. This new vision for Hall County Schools not only met the district's philosophical beliefs about their hopes for their children but additionally was one that could be easily articulated, translated to specific roles within the system, and understood by all stakeholders.

Following the development of the vision statement, a deliberate effort was undertaken to cultivate a sense of urgency among all stakeholders that subsequently enabled a sense of commitment and a desire to see change among those invested in the process. In order to clearly identify potential areas for growth the Balanced Scorecard was developed to not only assess student achievement but all other components of the system as well. This effort to provide for a transparent review of all elements of the system "flattened the bureaucracy" which had the causal effect of increasing buy-in by all stakeholders. Based upon the data revealed within the Balanced Scorecard simple goals were established for all elementary, middle, and high school students in such a way that they too, as with the vision statement, could be easily remembered and embraced by all stakeholders. More thought should be given to the problem of students transitioning from one program or school level to another. It should be noted that the Balanced Scorecard is a fluid document that is updated and reviewed continuously and provides the relevant data necessary to make adjustments and revisions to both the system and school improvement plans.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- There is belief by stakeholders that both competency and rigor are not mutually exclusive.
- Stakeholders understand that the expectation for students is the same for ALL employees of the

HCSO as well.

- The “think outside the box” attitude present at all levels allows for both competency and rigor to be obtained through a variety of both traditional and innovative ways.
- There are short term action plans that routinely call upon school communities to re-visit goals that are directly tied to the data within the Balanced Scorecard.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Find additional ways to reveal the data as presented within the Balanced Scorecard, as it relates to individual schools and to the system in a variety of formats, so all stakeholders can make informed decisions about how to contribute to the success of the system.
- Provide a plan for transitioning students from one program and school level to another. A good time to do this would be during the next review of the mission and goals.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Hall County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

Standard: The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

Description:

The superintendent motivates and encourages staff to identify directions that serve the unique population of individual schools. The BOE and superintendent exhibit a shared vision for the district that promotes high expectations for students and staff. The role of the BOE is clearly understood by all board members. The superintendent and the leadership staff assumes responsibility for the day-to-day operations. All district policies have been updated and are available on the system website for review by all stakeholders. New policies or revision of existing policies are developed by the BOE with input from stakeholders. The policy manual is available on eBOARDSolutions.com.

The district’s governance demonstrates a culture of communication, collaboration, and a united focus on student achievement. Interviews with the district and school personnel reflect a belief that individual voices are heard and valued by the internal and external stakeholders. Legal council is utilized to support the district in making decisions concerning legal requirements. Board meetings include reports on student performance and district and school effectiveness as well as results of the evaluation systems. Resources and the budget are aligned to support the district’s strategic plan.

The BOE is committed to providing equity as stated in their mission statement: "Character, Competence, Rigor...for All." Interviews with teachers, administrators, and the BOE confirmed a complete commitment to the entire mission statement.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The superintendent and BOE have a mutual trust and an understanding of their roles.
- Members of the BOE work as a team whose sole interest is the welfare of the students.

- The district's policy manual is updated annually and posted online with the Georgia School Boards Association as a part of eBOARD Solutions.
- The superintendent offers visionary leadership characterized as creative and enthusiastic.
- All stakeholders interviewed including students, teachers, staff members, parents, community members, and business partners clearly communicated support for the district's governance and leadership team.
- The district's leadership provides for systematic analysis and review of student performance and school and system effectiveness through the use of the district's Balanced Scorecard.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Provide internal and external stakeholders multiple opportunities to be included in decision making processes to promote a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership. The use of surveys and feedback forms with all stakeholder groups add to what is already being done.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Hall County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

Standard: The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Description:

The district speaks with one voice in their mission to provide Character, Competency, and Rigor for All through the teaching and learning that takes place in every classroom, with every student, every single day. To support this teaching and learning, the district has provided a research-based curriculum and instructional methods that provide both the requisite knowledge and skills that students need to demonstrate competency on the Georgia Performance Standards, as well as the opportunity to think critically and conceptually, engage in scientific inquiry and problem solving, and design and create products which reflect the rigor of authentic, intellectual work.

The district has created a sense of urgency in supporting students as they face the demands of competing in a global society. The administration and staff have determined that for all students to reach required competencies, schools must focus on a collaborative effort to "pull up" the struggling learners rather than to "push up" from the bottom. This focus on competency has resulted in the achievement of 100 percent of the schools meeting AYP standards in 2009. At the elementary level, achievement gains in reading and math on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) have also been noted. Elementary curriculum initiatives such as the Balanced Literacy Framework and the newly implemented Singapore Math have been identified as the vehicle for achieving these gains.

The use of the charter school model reflects an appreciation for the diversity of student learners and encourages stakeholders to be risk takers as they envision schools to meet the needs of learners in an ever changing world. The World Language Academy currently provides dual language immersion in English and Spanish to students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The da Vinci Academy provides thematic

interdisciplinary instruction that integrates the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences to selected middle school students. The Lanier Career Academy provides offerings in culinary arts, hospitality, marketing, digital media, and health science. Rigor is also evident in the use of the Renzulli Learning System, a program that links student learning with educational resources, increasing numbers of Advanced Placement (AP) courses, Carnegie unit classes offered to seventh and eighth grade students, and International Baccalaureate Diploma Programs at three high schools. Through interviews, it was noted that all system stakeholders see these accomplishments as a source of pride. However, some parents and teachers express concern about the continuity of these programs. The concern was mostly about providing a smooth transition from elementary school to middle school and middle to high school

The district also provides extensive infrastructure for developing, maintaining, and improving instructional technology and media services. Some classrooms have Promethean Boards and/or LCD projectors to enhance the delivery of instruction. Web-based programming such as the Lexia Learning System, a reading and language acquisition program, is available system-wide to provide instructional support and data for literacy teachers. Additionally, the district has committed to providing laptops for all teachers within a three-year time frame, and teachers have expressed enthusiasm and appreciation for the system's commitment to making instructional technology a priority.

Finally, the districts Teaching and Learning Balanced Scorecard provides the criteria against which these lofty goals of competency and rigor for all students are measured. The district has chosen to focus on excellence rather than adequacy and by doing so, supports a standards-based curriculum that challenges and meets the needs of each student.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district has implemented an innovative curriculum that supports the needs of a diverse learning population.
- The district recognizes that all students are deserving of a rigorous curriculum that will prepare them for future schooling or work in the 21st century.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Find additional ways to provide support to teachers and parents in the implementation of Singapore Math.
- Develop a long range plan to help student transition from one level or program to the next.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Hall County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

Standard: The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

Description:

The district has implemented a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures at the elementary level. Elementary administrators, teachers, and parents are data rich. Formative assessments such as the Online Assessment System (OAS), Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) enable administrators and teachers to assess literacy progress and address strengths and weaknesses in a timely fashion. Instructional literacy coaches work with teachers to examine data and make appropriate instructional adjustments to address identified needs.

While the elementary schools have multiple formative assessments to measure progress and diagnose specific weaknesses, interviews with secondary teachers indicate a need for better formative assessment measures to diagnose student weaknesses in content reading and math, as well as the need for a more fully developed Pyramid of Interventions to address identified needs.

Summative assessment data are being utilized to assess student performance and analyze instructional effectiveness. The state Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) are given in grades one through eight, and the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT) and End of Course Tests (EOCT) are given in grades nine through twelve. The system utilizes CRCT growth data provided by Pioneer RESA to evaluate teacher effectiveness in increasing student achievement. Finally, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is given in grades two through eight to provide comparison data to show how Hall County students are performing nationally in reading and math.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Assessment data are utilized to analyze student performance and to drive instructional decision making.
- A system is in place to share meaningful assessment data with all stakeholders.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a more comprehensive assessment plan at the secondary level to include formative assessment measures to identify specific student weaknesses in core subject areas.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Hall County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

Standard: The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Description:

Human Resources

The district uses a well designed process to recruit, employ, mentor, and retain qualified professional and support staff. A staffing plan determines the number of personnel required to fulfill district responsibilities and assignments. Procedures for advertising, screening, and placement are directed by the Human Resources staff. The district uses an on-line tool to manage applications. Allocations for staffing at the school level are based on an allocation formula reflecting school needs and follows recruitment, screening, and hiring procedures developed and administered by Human Resources. Screening and recruitment practices are focused on identifying applicants who are certified for the position and are highly qualified. Continued efforts should be made to employ more staff that represents the student population. The district is serious about ensuring that the induction of new staff members does not end with the recruiting process. New teacher orientation utilizes the assistance of instructional coaches and professional learning opportunities that are developed for their needs.

Professional learning is supportive of the district goals and school improvement plans. Professional learning is extensive, including school and district workshops for all administrators and support staff. Professional learning is furthered through instructional coaches at the elementary and middle school level who share their expertise. School improvement plans and short-term action plans are directly tied to appropriate professional learning activities and support content, instructional strategies, technology integration, assessment, data analysis, and classroom management.

Alliances with local colleges and universities ensure quality experiences for prospective teachers and those who are already employed. Professional learning activities are research based and are predicated on best practices.

Financial Resources

A basic allocation formula is developed by the superintendent's staff and presented to the BOE. This formula assures that the necessary positions needed to accomplish and support the mission and vision are allocated in a fair and equitable manner. District and school improvement plans are tied to the district's vision, mission, and Balanced Scorecard and are referred to when determining staffing and human resources needs at the school level. The district assures fiscal accountability by utilizing a performance based budget that supports their vision and mission. All federal and state requirements are followed. It was noted during the interviews and examination of artifacts that HCSD received outstanding audits for the past four years for excellence in fiscal management and accounting procedures.

Physical Resources

The district employs a Director of Student Services who is charged with coordinating efforts to provide a safe environment. A Crisis Management Plan has been developed in line with federal and state requirements. Evidence from schools indicates that the management plan is operational and well communicated to stakeholders. Parents, students, and teachers indicated that they "feel safe" in their schools. Through interviews it was noted that school staff is concerned not only about student safety but also the well-being of students by providing a school nurse in every elementary and middle school, as well

as two cluster nurses assigned to two high schools that make regularly scheduled visits to the other high schools. The district feels that safety and security is important for achieving academic success. It was noted in the Standards Assessment Report, and confirmed by observation, that all schools are equipped with automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) and trained staff in CPR.

Support Systems

The district employs 21 full-time elementary counselors, 12 middle grade counselors, and 13 full-time and two half-time high school counselors. There are six full-time and three part-time social workers. In addition, the district employs eight full-time and one part-time school psychologists. Each high school employs a graduation coach. Exceptional Student Education Services provide specialized programs and teachers. This program is well respected by stakeholders and many compliments as to the effectiveness and leadership at the district level were expressed during the interview process. All federal and state requirements pertaining to screening, placement, and monitoring of Exceptional Student Services are met.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Safety and security for all stakeholders is a high priority for the system.
- There is evidence of the district's commitment to recruit and retain highly qualified staff members.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Explore the possibility of placing surveillance cameras in all schools.
- Establish equitable technology access (software and hardware) and clearly communicate a plan to all stakeholders.
- Increase efforts to employ administrators, teachers, and other staff that are representative of the student population.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Hall County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

Standard: The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Description:

The QAR team met with members from the following stakeholder groups: central office staff, support staff, principals, board members, parents, business, and community members. Information about school board meeting agendas, meeting times and minutes are posted on the district website. This information is also available in local newspapers and district newsletters. Email is used extensively to communicate internally and externally.

Regularly scheduled meetings are held by district administrators with building level administrators for the purpose of sharing information and gathering input as it pertains to student achievement. Principals routinely meet with their teachers and staff to facilitate the prioritization of strategies pertaining to student achievement within their buildings. School improvement teams hold monthly meetings. Stakeholders are given the opportunity to participate to some extent in the school and district decision making processes

that affect student achievement.

It was noted during interviews that the district has the understanding, commitment, and support of parents and community leaders. Extensive participation by steering committees was demonstrated in the adoption of new programs. There was little evidence that a comprehensive, clear, and concise district wide communication plan is in place. The QAR team noted that such a plan designed and implemented with the involvement of all stakeholders would be a positive move. To provide direction for a comprehensive district wide communication plan, there is a need for someone to have the responsibility for directing this vital area. As part of this communication plan, it is necessary that the district and school websites be effectively revised with current, meaningful, and accessible information that is updated regularly.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- There is strong evidence that supports a unique level of public trust in the district leadership. School improvement planning is recognized by the success of the district in making AYP. Effective leaders promote the development of a district-wide strategic plan (Balanced Scorecard) that reflects student learning as the major priority of the district.
- There is strong evidence of community and parent support. Research indicates that parent and community involvement increases student performance.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a district communication plan using, among other things, updated websites at the district and school levels.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Hall County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Standard: The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

Description:

The district is committed to continuous improvement that is focused on student achievement. A strategic plan has been developed that includes the mission, vision, and goals. The Balanced Scorecard serves as the accountability tool to determine progress toward achieving aligned district and individual school improvement plans.

The district strategic plan is developed from the GAPSS reviews, demographic information, student achievement data, and perception data. The district data are utilized by school leadership teams in developing the individual school improvement plans. The five-year system plan and the aligned five-year school plans reflect short term action plans (STAPs) to enable schools to focus on specific need areas unique to their schools. The STAPs are designed as improvement action plans to be completed over a 45-day period.

The district's strategic plan is formally reviewed, monitored, and updated during the summer administrative retreat. Evidence is collected to support the improvement successes. The template is then forwarded to the schools so they can add their school improvement plans. Stakeholders are afforded opportunities to impact the plans through school council meetings, district and school advisory meetings, and leadership meetings.

The district strategic plan and aligned school improvement plans guide the budget and the professional learning plans. Quality professional development is provided by district/school leaders, instructional coaches, Georgia Department of Education staff, and consultants to support the various system improvement initiatives such as integration of technology to enhance instruction, differentiated instruction, standard based instruction and assessment, utilization of data, and classroom resources. Support staff provide professional learning unique to their departments. Data reviewed and used to monitor progress includes: Balanced Scorecard of Teaching and Learning, standard-based classroom walk throughs, measureable student achievement data, growth by AYP subgroups, federal and state benchmarks, stakeholder surveys, staff evaluations using the Balanced Scorecard, and GAPSS observations and interviews. The staff utilizes various strategies for communicating the components of the strategic plan including system/school websites, eBOARD, school council meetings, advisory groups, emails, parent and community meetings, and the Infinite Campus site.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The literacy, technology, math, graduation, and ESOL coaches provide immediate and continued support for student achievement for all students and the closing of gaps among subgroups.
- The district and school's improvement efforts have led all schools to the achievement of AYP.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Provide comprehensive opportunities for stakeholder input in the development and updates of the strategic plan.
- Provide monitoring, assessing, and updating of the strategic plan and the progress reflected in the Balance Scorecard at pivotal points during the year to assure that the system is achieving intended outcomes.
- Develop a process to ensure that AdvancED standards are periodically reviewed and progress toward meeting them is evaluated. This process should include aligning the AdvancED standards with the district goals and improvement plans.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Hall County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

Quality Assurance Findings

The Quality Assurance Review Team examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team provides the following findings in this area.

Description

The district has developed a strategic plan that guides the work toward achieving its mission, Character, Competency, and Rigor for All. A structured school improvement process has been designed and is followed throughout the district. The school improvement plans are aligned with the district strategic plan. The Balanced Scorecard serves as the monitoring tool to determine district/school effectiveness in achieving goals. Representatives from all departments serve on the district cabinet and participate in the monthly and bimonthly leadership meetings where the school improvement initiative updates are given. The school short term action plan is examined every 45 days and revised as needed to support the district/school achievement goals. The school improvement process is evaluated using GAPSS reviews, demographic information, student achievement data, and perception data.

The annual summer retreat offers the opportunity to score progress toward achieving the district/school goals. The participants review all data available and re-focus improvement plans for the following year. Evaluations of all leadership include progress toward meeting the district/school goals.

Results as reflected in the Balanced Scorecard are shared with all stakeholders utilizing the websites, public media resources, parent meetings, Infinite Campus site, and civic organizations. The results are used to re-focus improvement initiatives through updating the district strategic plan and school improvement plans.

Strengths

- The development of a process for evaluating achievement of the goals using a Balanced Scorecard and staff evaluations support continuous improvement.
- The alignment of the district strategic plan with school improvement plans helps to ensure focused student achievement.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

- Align AdvancEd standards with the system/school improvement process and initiatives.

Conclusion

The commendations and recommendations in this report are designed to focus the school district on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and system effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and recommendations only have meaning when acted upon by the school district and its schools. The strength of this report lies in the school district's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school district is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified several recommendations for improvement that the school district will need to address. Following this review, the school district will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's recommendations.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to William Schofield and Eloise Barron, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS CASI accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Andrew Weaver, Chair
- Faye Montgomery, Vice Chair (Warren County School System)
- Dr. Carol Brown, Team Member (Twiggs County School System)
- Mr. Charles Hayes, Team Member (Anderson Dst. 3)
- Debbie Downer, Team Member (Rome City School System)
- Ms. Denise Doyle, Team Member (Palm Beach County School District)
- Mrs. Lori Squires, Team Member (Wesley Lakes Elementary School)
- Mrs. Monika Wiley, Team Member (Jonesboro High School)
- Mr. Scott Gaines, Team Member (Maury County Schools)
- Ms. Tessie Grayson, Team Member (Tallassee Elementary School)
- Travis Collins, Team Member (Meadowbrook Elementary School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

The AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As school districts reach higher levels of implementation of the standards, they will have a greater capacity to support ever-increasing student performance and organizational effectiveness. Each of the seven standards listed below has corresponding indicators and impact statements which can be accessed at www.advanc-ed.org.

Vision and Purpose

The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

Governance and Leadership

The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

Teaching and Learning

The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Documenting and Using Results

The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

Resource and Support Systems

The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.