AdvancED

External Review

Mountain Brook City Board of Education

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Introduction to the External Review Process

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

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

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

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

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

Part I: Findings

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

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

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

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, conclusions concerning Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards, and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team. Indicators are evaluated and rated individually by the External Review Team using a four-level performance rubric. The Standard Performance Level is the average of indicator scores for the standard.

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction
Purpose and direction are critical to successful institutions. A study conducted in 2010 by the London-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that "in addition to improving performance, the research indicates that having a sense of shared purpose also improves employee engagement" and that "...lack of understanding around purpose can lead to demotivation and emotional detachment, which in turn lead to a disengaged and dissatisfied workforce."

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

Standard	Standard Performance Level

The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.		3.25
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.	•Interviews •Governing body policies, procedures, and practices •District purpose statements - past and present •Survey results •Documentation or description of the process for creating the district's purpose including the role of stakeholders •Examples of communications to stakeholders about the district's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook) •Observations •Minutes from meetings related to development of the district's purpose and direction •Copy of strategic plan referencing the district purpose and direction and its effectiveness •Accreditation Report •Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the district's purpose	3
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.	•Survey results •Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the schools' purpose statements •Examples of school purpose statements if different from the district purpose statement •Examples of written stakeholder communications or marketing materials that portray the school purpose and direction •Accreditation Report •Observations •Interviews	3

1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	•Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders about educational programs and equitable learning experiences •Observations •Interviews •Examples of schools' continuous improvement plans •Survey results •Accreditation Report •Statements or documents about ethical and professional practices •Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs •Statements of shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning •The district strategic plan	4
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.	•Interviews •Accreditation Report •Examples of schools continuous improvement plans •Survey results •Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs •Observations •Agenda, minutes from continuous improvement planning meetings •Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders •The district data profile •The district strategic plan	3

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. System leadership and staff across all levels and divisions of the system have committed to a team culture that is based on a common sense of purpose, focused on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning, and supports the academic success and growth of all students.

   1.3

   The visiting team identified, through interviews with stakeholders and artifacts reviewed, a system-wide culture and climate that focuses on the success and intellectual growth of every student at high scholastic levels. A clear and unifying sense of purpose and shared-beliefs provide the foundation and direction for all operational aspects of the system. The Superintendent and leaders in all divisions and levels of the system work collaboratively to communicate the system's purpose to all stakeholders and support each other's professional growth and commitment to high levels of academic success for all students. Survey results and interviews with stakeholders reported appropriately high learning expectations, the presence of an academically challenging curriculum, and classroom instruction that promotes and provides support for student learning at all levels. A system that establishes a common culture and unified sense of purpose, and which promotes and supports a systemic culture of high expectations for students and staff, will be supportive of efforts to continuously improve and realize academic growth for all students.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

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

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has leaders who are advocates for the institution's vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders. The institution's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.		3.33
Indicator	Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1 The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	•Interviews •Observations •Professional development plans •Student handbooks •Staff handbooks •Accreditation Report •District operations manuals •Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions •School handbooks	3
2.2 The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	•Governing authority minutes relating to training •Communication plan to inform all staff on code of ethics, responsibilities, conflict of interest •List of assigned staff for compliance •Proof of legal counsel •Assurances, certifications •Accreditation Report •Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies •Observations •Historical compliance data •Interviews •Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest •Governing code of ethics	3

| 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. | •Communications regarding governing authority actions

•District strategic plan

•Examples of school improvement plans

•Roles and responsibilities of school leadership

•Roles and responsibilities of district leadership

•Observations

•Interviews

•Social media

•Accreditation Report

•Survey results regarding functions of the governing authority and operations of the district

•Stakeholder input and feedback

•Maintenance of consistent academic oversight, planning, and resource allocation

•Agendas and minutes of meetings | 4 |
| 2.4 | Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction. | •Examples of decisions aligned with the district's strategic plan

•Professional development offerings and plans

•Examples of collaboration and shared leadership

•Examples of decisions aligned with the school's purpose statement

•Interviews

•Survey results

•Observations

•Examples of decisions in support of the schools' continuous improvement plans

•Examples of improvement efforts and innovations in the educational programs

•Examples of decisions aligned with the district's purpose and direction

•Accreditation Report | 4 |

2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	•Accreditation Report •Minutes from meetings with stakeholders •Examples of stakeholder input or feedback resulting in district action •Interviews •Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys •Survey responses •Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan •Communication plan •Involvement of stakeholders in district strategic plan •Observations	3
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	•Interviews •Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation •Accreditation Report •Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation •Job specific criteria •Observations •Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice throughout the system and student success noted •Representative supervision and evaluation reports	3

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. The governing board ensures that system and school leadership has autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.

   2.3

   As evidenced through stakeholder interviews and perceptual survey data, the governing body actively supports and respects system and school leadership's responsibility to accomplish the goals for improvement in student learning and instruction, as well as manage day-to-day operations. Given that board members are appointed by the city council, and not elected by popular vote, board members have a non-traditional relationship with system constituents. Board members interviewed expressed that concentrated efforts are focused on maintaining a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of the board and those of the system leadership, while still being responsive to stakeholder concerns. The governing body consistently refers parents and community members through the proper channels to address operational issues and concerns outside the board's policy defined roles and responsibilities. Continuous system improvement is facilitated by a governing board that functions cohesively and ensures the autonomy of system leaders to perform in the areas of student achievement and to effectively manage the operation of the system and its schools.

2. System and building level leadership promote and foster a collaborative culture of continuous improvement and student growth that is guided by and aligned to the system's purpose and beliefs.

   2.4

   System and building leadership actively promotes and fosters support for the system's purpose and identified beliefs. Efforts were reported by stakeholders to be result-oriented and focused on providing students high quality educational services. Collaboration was identified as a foundation of system decision-making and expressed by all stakeholders to define how the community supports their schools to be successful. The Superintendent is perceived by stakeholders to lead by example and model collaborative decision-making as the leader of the system. To foster and promote a culture of continuous school improvement system leaders need to actively model and align their decisions to the system's purpose and engage all stakeholders from a collaborative, team-based approach to decision-making.

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

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

provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations. Teachers give students feedback to improve their performance.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.		2.83

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.	•Learning expectations for different courses and programs •Interviews •Course, program, or school schedules •Student work across courses or programs •Course or program descriptions •Survey results •Lesson plans •Observations •Survey responses from program leaders receiving students from previous programs, schools, or grade-levels •Graduate follow-up surveys •Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices •Posted learning objectives •Accreditation Report •Descriptions of instructional techniques	3

| 3.2 | Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice. | •A description of the systematic review process for curriculum, instruction, and assessment

•Standards-based report cards

•Observations

•Interviews

•Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices

•Curriculum writing process

•Products – scope and sequence, curriculum maps

•Profile of educational model or delivery system

•Curriculum guides

•Common assessments

•Accreditation Report

•Surveys results

•Program descriptions

•Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum | 3 |

| 3.3 | Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations. | •Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation

•Authentic assessments

•Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource

•Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool

•Student work demonstrating the application of knowledge

•Surveys results

•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the approved or prescribed instructional strategies and programs

•Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices

•Interviews

•Accreditation Report

•Observations

•Interdisciplinary projects | 3 |
| 3.4 | System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success. | •Accreditation Report

•Supervision and evaluation procedures

•Documentation of collection of lesson plans, grade books, or other data record systems

•Peer or mentoring opportunities and interactions

•Recognition of teachers with regard to these practices

•Surveys results

•Interviews

•Observations

•Professional development offerings and plans tied to the prescribed education program, instructional strategies, developmentally appropriate practices, and student success | 3 |

3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	•Observations •Common language, protocols and reporting tools •Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees •Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings •Survey results •Professional development funding to promote professional learning communities •Interviews •Peer coaching guidelines and procedures •Evidence of informal conversations that reflect collaboration about student learning •Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration •Examples of cross curricular or program projects, interdisciplinary instruction, and classroom action research projects •Accreditation Report	3
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	•Observations •Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance •Survey results •Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction •Interviews •Accreditation Report	3

| 3.7 | Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning. | •Accreditation Report

•Survey results

•Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to district and school beliefs and values about teaching and learning

•Records of meetings and informal feedback sessions

•Observations

•Interviews

•Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff

•Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices | 3 |
| 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. | •Performance-based report cards

•Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance

•Observations

•Survey results

•Volunteer program with variety of options for participation

•List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days

•Accreditation Report

•Calendar outlining when and how families are provided information on child's progress

•Interviews | 3 |

3.9	The system designs and evaluates structures in all schools whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports that student's educational experience.	•Curriculum and activities of structures for adults advocating on behalf of students •Accreditation Report •Description of formalized structures for adults to advocate on behalf of students •Survey results •Interviews •Observations •Master schedule with time for formalized structure	2
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.	•Interviews •Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices •Survey results •Observations •Accreditation Report •Sample report cards for each program or grade level and for all courses and programs •Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting	2
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	•Evaluation tools for professional learning •Survey results •District professional development plan involving the district and all schools •Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs •Crosswalk between professional learning and district purpose and direction •Accreditation Report •Observations •Interviews	3

| 3.12 | The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students. | •Schedules, lesson plans, or example student learning plans showing the implementation of learning support services

•Survey results

•List of learning support services and student population served by such services

•Interviews

•Accreditation Report

•Observations

•Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning

•Data used to identify unique learning needs of students | 3 |

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Construct and implement a system-wide approach that will provide a structured, formal connection between each student and at least one adult on campus who can advocate for the social and emotional needs and academic success of all students.   3.9

   The team found through presentations and interviews with stakeholders an absence of a formal and systematic approach to develop strong relationships between individual students and adult advocates who have a depth of knowledge regarding each student's educational experience. The system has created extra-curricular programs with high levels of student participation that effectively provides strong connections between adults and students, but the program is not formally structured to ensure every student is included or evaluated for its impact on student success. A comprehensive and structured approach to systematically address the physical, social, and emotional needs of all students will provide increased opportunities for all learners to grow personally and academically.

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

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

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, to meet special needs, and to comply with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staffs who are well qualified for their assignments. The institution provides a safe learning environment for students and staff. The institution

provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.		3.25
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.	•Accreditation Report •Survey results •District budgets or financial plans for the last three years •Observations •School budgets or financial plans for last three years •Interviews •Assessments of staffing needs •Documentation of highly qualified staff •Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for the district and schools	3

| 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. | •Observations

•Examples of school schedules

•District quality assurance procedures showing district oversight of schools pertaining to school resources

•Accreditation Report

•Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources

•Survey results

•Examples of school calendars

•Interviews

•Alignment of school budgets with school purpose and direction

•Alignment of district budget with district purpose and direction

•District strategic plan showing resources support for district | 4 |
| 4.3 | The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff. | •District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities and learning environments

•Interviews

•Observations

•Accreditation Report

•Example systems for school maintenance requests

•Survey results

•Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements

•Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments

•Example maintenance schedules for schools

•School safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes

•Example school records of depreciation of equipment | 3 |

4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	•District strategic plan showing the areas of budget, facilities, quality control, and other strategic systems •District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities, learning environments •Evaluation results of the effectiveness of the district strategic plan or indicators of changes resulting in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategic plan •Survey results •Interviews •Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments •Accreditation Report •Observations	3
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	•Observations •Survey results •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Data on media and information resources available to students and staff •Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information	3

| 4.6 | The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs. | •Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model

•Policies relative to technology use at the district-level and school-level

•Survey results

•District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level

•District quality control procedures that monitor the effectiveness of technology services at the district-level and school-level

•Assessments to inform development of district and school technology plans

•Accreditation Report

•Interviews

•Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness

•Examples of school-level technology plans and budgets to improve technology services and infrastructure to students and staff

•Observations | 4 |
| 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. | •Observations

•Interviews

•Student assessment system for identifying student needs

•Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support

•Survey results

•Accreditation Report

•Examples of improvements made to education program and delivery models based on results of program effectiveness evaluations

•Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education

•List of support services available to students | 3 |

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.	•List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning •Survey results •Accreditation Report •Description of IEP process •Observations •Interviews •Description of referral process	3

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are effectively utilized to support the purpose and direction of the system.   4.2

    As evidenced through observations and stakeholder interviews, the system and school leaders exhaust every option to secure material and fiscal resources to meet the needs of all students and improve the effectiveness of the system. City leaders refer to the school system as "the crown jewel of the city" and provide meaningful support to the system. The Mountain Brook City Schools Foundation provides extensive financial resources that supplement a major portion of the professional development and technology budgets of the system. Additionally, residents in the Mountain Brook community have voted themselves to be the highest tax school system in the state. Parents and community stakeholders stated that their self-imposed tax burden is something that they willingly do to provide the necessary financial support to the system. Attention to protecting instructional time was visible in all schools and also protected by system administrative policies and practices. The acquisition and effective use of resources contributes significantly to the quality of system performance in all aspects of the development of high quality educational programs and services for students.

2. The technology infrastructure, equipment, and staff support are sufficient to support the system's strategic plans and student growth at a high level.   4.6

    The purpose of technology in the system is to increase student engagement, according to stakeholder interviews. The system has implemented a "bring your own device" policy that is reported to have a high level of satisfaction level by staff, students, and parents. The technology department has constructed and maintains an infrastructure throughout the system that can accommodate multiple devices from all students and provide appropriate levels of connectivity. Stakeholders report high quality technical support services to meet the teaching, learning, and operational needs of all stakeholders in the system. Monthly technology professional development is embedded at each school to support ongoing technology integration and a best practices approach to digital learning strategies. Finally, the system has appropriate policies and procedures in place in this area, and a highly developed technology plan, including long-range planning for technology services, equipment, and infrastructure development. In preparing students for individual success it is imperative that the system's technology infrastructure and equipment are adequate for students to attain the skills necessary to shape their future and contribute to successful learning.

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

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

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures. The system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine strategies to improve student performance. The institution implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained, and the institution demonstrates progress in improving student performance and institution effectiveness.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.			3.2
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level

5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	•Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model •Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols •Survey results •Interviews •Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local or school assessments on student learning and school performance •Observations •Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness •Accreditation Report •Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free	3
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	•Examples of data used to measure the effectiveness of the district systems that support schools and learning •Observations •Accreditation Report •List of data sources related to district effectiveness •Examples of changes to the district strategic plan based on data results •Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning •Interviews •List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning	3

5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	•Accreditation Report •Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data •Documentation of attendance and training related to data use •Survey results •Observations •Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data •Interviews	3
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.	•Interviews •Accreditation Report •Student surveys •Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data •Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning •Examples of use of results to evaluate continuous improvement action plans •Observations •Evidence of student readiness for the next level •Evidence of student growth •Evidence of student success at the next level	3

| 5.5 | System and school leaders monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders. | •District quality control procedures for monitoring district effectiveness

•Minutes of meetings regarding achievement of student learning goals

•Accreditation Report

•Survey results

•Communication plan regarding student learning, systems that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders

•Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals

•District quality control procedures for monitoring information about student learning, systems that support learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals

•Observations

•Examples of district marketing tools and websites that cite student achievement results or that make promises regarding student achievement

•Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups

•Interviews | 4 |

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The system monitors the comprehensive information about student learning, system and school effectiveness, and the achievement of system strategic goals throughout the year and actively communicates this progress information to all stakeholders.

    System stakeholders and community leaders expressed to the team that parents and community members have excellent access to the system's performance data, including both formative and summative data. The team also found evidence in system documents, including district websites, school websites, local publications, and brochures promoting the school system, that the system communicates information regarding system goals and academic performance effectively. Strong stakeholder support for the system's educational program is enhanced by the effective and timely communication of student performance results.

5.5

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Implement and align a formalized comprehensive assessment system to inform   5.1
    and design appropriate interventions for individual students and provide reliable
    information regarding program effectiveness across all grade levels and subject
    areas.

    The system has collected student achievement data from multiple assessment
    measures. The team found evidence through interviews with administration and
    teachers that most data is shared with stakeholders and analyzed through
    professional learning community (PLC) teams. Elementary teachers use Dynamic
    Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) to benchmark all students and
    progress monitor the performance of at-risk students.   In addition, the system
    uses AIMS Web and Global Scholar as diagnostic assessments. The elementary
    schools also use program specific assessments and locally developed common
    assessments to measure student achievement. However, the team did not find a
    systematic process in place across all schools in the system. Additionally, the
    district has collected summative assessment data, including End of Course Tests,
    American College Testing (ACT), Explore (ACT), and PLAN. Artifacts and
    interviews revealed that summative data is used to measure student achievement
    progress and program effectiveness as a system. Effective and sustainable
    student academic growth requires the development of a comprehensive
    assessment system that is aligned K-12 to inform and design appropriate
    interventions for individual students, provide reliable information regarding
    program effectiveness, and inform student readiness at the next level.

Learning Environment

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

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External review team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a 4 point scale with 4=very evident, 3=evident, 2=somewhat evident, and 1=not observed. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the 7 learning environments included in ELEOT.

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT)

Environments	*Level*
A. Equitable Learning Environment:	2.68
B. High Expectations Environment:	2.91
C. Supportive Learning Environment:	3.06
D. Active Learning Environment:	3.23
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment:	2.89
F. Well-Managed Learning Environment:	3.23
G. Digital Learning Environment	2.18

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 system was visited by an AdvancED External Review (ER) team from April 28th-May 1st, 2013. The team was comprised of five members, with three of the members being from school systems in Alabama, and two members coming from out-of-state. The team worked intensively over the review period to gather evidence, review artifacts, and interview representatives of all stakeholder groups to effectively assess the system's capacity and progress toward meeting the five standards identified in the AdvancED Standards for Systems Accreditation. Included in the review process was a systematic observation of the learning environments in a representative sample of the system's classrooms.

The system was exceptionally well prepared for the visit and provided substantial and appropriate artifacts and evidence for the team to review. This would also include access to an array of internal and external stakeholders that were interviewed by the team. A total of 197 stakeholders, representing all stakeholder groups, were interviewed and engaged by the team.

The visiting team was provided access to digitally prepared data files that included documentation identifying appropriate profile information, system and school strategic plans and goals, measures of system and school performance, and other artifacts that supported a thorough insight into the operation and function of the system and its schools. Additionally, the system provided comprehensive self-assessments of each of the six schools visited by the ER team. The ER team was unquestionably able to access all of the documents, data, and pertinent information necessary to conduct a thorough and comprehensive external review process.

The system's approach to completing the institution's Executive Summary and Self-Assessment was thorough and comprehensive contributing to an insight into the operation of the system. The process to develop the Self-Assessment indicator ratings at both the system and school level was collaborative in design and reflected an approach involving systematic input from all stakeholder groups. Based on the results of the team's review of artifacts and evidence, the team determined that the self-assessment process indicated a conscientious and accurate representation of the status of the system's performance and capacity for continuous improvement.

Using the evidence collected, the team engaged in dialogue and deliberations concerning the degree to which the institution met the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators.

Over the course of the visit, the ER team's analysis of the standards and indicators identified several prevailing themes and trends. It was evident that a major strength of the system was a unified and clear sense of purpose that strives to foster collaboration with all stakeholder groups. An example of the

system's collaborative efforts with stakeholders was visible in the broad involvement and support of system improvement efforts by community leaders, parents, as well as staff and students. Numerous examples of joint system and community initiatives were provided by the system's leadership. There is a clear "sense of family and community", according to many stakeholders interviewed, that prevails in all aspects of the system's operation, both internally and externally.

A key factor in the unified purpose of the system was the focus of the system's leadership at all levels to strive to communicate high expectations for learning for all students. This purpose is further supported by leadership efforts to develop system and school strategic plans to identify appropriately aligned goals and action plans to achieve system-wide academic growth. It was evident in the system's decision-making process that the strategic plans and goals were collaboratively designed with meaningful input, systematic review, and appropriate input from all stakeholder groups.

Supportive of system growth and effectiveness was a governing board that provides effective oversight and policy direction to allow the opportunity for system leadership to conduct the day-to-day operation of the system and its divisions. System leadership and the governing board maintain clear and defined roles and responsibilities that are mutually supportive of continuous system improvement decision-making. Contributing to the strength of the board's role in the system was their on-going professional development and personally expressed commitment to the success of the system.

The system demonstrates a clear focus and priority on the need to ensure that all students are supported academically at high academic levels. The system has an academic performance record that is nationally regarded as among the best in the nation with over 98% of their graduates attending four-year colleges and universities annually. It was clear to the ER team that academic excellence is a hallmark of the system at all levels.

Examples of efforts to engage and support the academic growth of special needs students, including an aggressive process to identify gifted and talented learners were visible in all schools. A focus on providing support for the social and emotional needs of students was also prevalent. Community outreach efforts to inform and engage parents in collaborative solutions to address the needs of students beyond their academic endeavors were well documented by system leadership.

Curriculum design and implementation strategies have been initiated to align the instructional program and incorporate the use of common measures of student growth and appropriate assessments of academic performance. There has been progress in the elementary grades to incorporate a standards-based report card model. The system's instructional program would be enhanced by the development of a process to assess and report student progress K-12 that more accurately reflects the attainment of content knowledge and skills and is aligned across all grades and content areas.

The system perceives itself as a "learning community." Professional development planning and staff growth is a core component of the system. The system's support for a comprehensive professional development program that strives to provide a research-based approach to professional practice was seen as a viable function of the system. Review of the professional evaluation process clearly indicated an effort to provide an alignment between professional development planning and the results of staff

evaluations. In addition, system leadership has prioritized the hiring of high quality staff in both professional and support staff roles and provides comprehensive training and mentoring programs to support their ongoing professional development.

Schools within the system have generally embraced the professional learning community approach to foster a data-driven process to guide instructional planning and curriculum refinement. Several schools have developed and implemented a professional learning community approach with fidelity and there appeared to be an effort to continue to develop a data-driven approach to school goals, curriculum revision, and student achievement across the system.

The availability and allocation of sufficient resources in support of student learning was evident in all areas of the system. System leadership aggressively pursues external funding sources and partnerships with community-based entities to provide further resources to the educational program and to support both the personal and academic needs of all students. The residents of the community strongly support the financial needs of the system through their support of mill levies and bond proposals. Additionally, the community has developed a non-profit foundation that provides millions of dollars in financial support to the system, especially in the areas of professional development and infusion of technology.

The system's facilities are clean, safe, and well-maintained and provide an excellent environment for student learning. Attention to designing appropriate safety and crisis plans has been a high priority for all school and system leaders.

Review of evidence and interviews of stakeholders revealed a systemic and systematic commitment to communicate results of system-wide performance and strategic planning outcomes. A continuous record of growth in student performance on multiple academic assessment measures is well documented and communicated effectively to all community stakeholders.

The system currently has over 4,000 students and 6 schools. All teachers are identified as highly qualified and approximately 50 teachers have earned National Board Certification. A strong emphasis on building professional skills and leadership development from within the system is exemplified by the system's financial support of a doctoral cohort program for staff members in partnership with Samford University.

With the existing collaborative support of all stakeholders, the system has the potential and capacity for continued long-term growth and high performance.

During the on-site review, members of the External Review Team evaluated the learning environment by observing classrooms and general operations of the institution. Using data from these observations, the team evaluated the quality of instruction and learning that took place classified around seven constructs or environments: equity, high expectations, support, engagement, progress monitoring and feedback, management, and use of technology.

The learning environment of the system was observed and assessed in all grade levels and content areas utilizing the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool. A total of 38 observations in all six

schools were completed by the team. The team found generally stronger domains in the areas of Well-Managed Learning, Supportive Learning, Active Learning, and High Expectations environments. The team specifically observed a system-wide focus in classrooms of the learners being supported to understand content, active engagement of students, instructional activities that are challenging, respectful teacher-student interactions, and attention to students working collaboratively.

The domains of equitable learning and progress monitoring also provided evidence of relatively strong indicators within each category. Classrooms observed indicated an equal access and engagement of all learners as a prevailing theme across all schools observed. Evidence of student response to teacher feedback to improve understanding was also consistently visible. The absence of classroom examples of exemplary student work was an indicator in the High Expectation domain that could be strengthened.

Finally, the team found that the Digital Learning environment provided access to on-line learning opportunities and the utilization of digital tools to support learning. The implementation of a "bring your own device" approach to technology integration in the classroom exemplified a pro-active approach to engaging students in digital learning experiences. The results of classroom observations reflected the absence of systemic evidence of instructional technology and opportunities for digital learning in systematic use across all classrooms visited, and therefore, the domain was not rated as strongly as the others.

The ER team visit was well organized and provided the review team an in-depth observation of the operation and capacity of the system. The team would like to thank the system's leadership and all staff members for their hospitality and cooperation in allowing us to provide a thorough and comprehensive opportunity to conduct the review. Stakeholders of the system were very insightful and open during the interview process and provided a valuable resource to the team's work and the resulting report. The ER team strongly supports a recommendation that Mountain Brook City Schools be granted a new five-year term of accreditation by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. Design and incorporate a system-wide approach to assess student progress and assign grades that are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistently aligned across all grade levels and courses.

   Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.10

   Through interviews with a variety of stakeholders and a review of the artifacts the visiting team found that while there has been considerable review and revision of the grading scale there is not a consistent use of a common grading policy that accurately reflects student mastery of standards. The team found evidence that some professional learning communities across the system have begun to review and revise grading policies, but it is not a pervasive, systematic and systemic initiative that is fully implemented. A systematic and systemic grading and reporting policy will provide all stakeholders relevant and meaningful results of individual and school academic progress; allow for comparative analysis of longitudinal data trends; and provide relevant information to drive professional learning team conversations.

Part III: Addenda

Next Steps

The institution should:

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

About AdvancED

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

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