

Quality Assurance Review Team Report for Abbeville County School District

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**Initial District Accreditation Five-Year Visit
Council on Accreditation and School Improvement
October 7 - 10, 2007**



Introduction

A Quality Assurance Review team representing the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) made a Quality Assurance Review visit to the Abbeville County School District in Abbeville, South Carolina on October 7 - 10, 2007. The review visit is the final step in the process of seeking district accreditation by the Abbeville County School District from the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In seeking District Accreditation, the Abbeville County School District must provide evidence that the system:

1. meets the Standards for Accreditation;
2. engages in a systemic and continuous process of improvement; and,
3. implements methods for quality assurance that provide for effective operations and functions.

In conducting the Quality Assurance Review, the review team was responsible for:

1. assessing the capacity of the system to meet the standards;
2. assessing the efficacy and impact of the improvement process;
3. assessing the effectiveness of the system's methods for quality assurance;
4. identifying strengths of the system deserving of commendation; and
5. developing recommendations which are designed to help strengthen the school system.

In fulfillment of the team's responsibilities, members:

1. reviewed documentation provided by the school system;
2. developed points of inquiry for the on-site review;
3. established, in collaboration with district personnel, a schedule of activities and interactions that would provide for significant stakeholder involvement;
4. conducted interviews of a representative set of stakeholders throughout the district; and
5. engaged in professional deliberations as a team to consider the capacity of the school system to meet the requirements for district accreditation.

The mission statement for the district was originally written several years ago, and has been revisited recently. No changes have been made to it since its inception. The vision statement was "crafted" by a team of stakeholders during the process of developing a new Strategic Plan. Each of the schools drafted a strategic plan aligned with the district plan. These plans were referred to as their School Improvement Plans. Narratives for each of the ten Standards for SACS CASI were written by teams of stakeholders, chaired by one of the central office administrators.

The Superintendent is currently in his third year at Abbeville, and almost the entire administrative staff has been in their positions less than two years. As a result of some serious issues, the recent data history of the district is very sparse. This entire staff has worked tirelessly to bring Abbeville County Schools into compliance with the SACS CASI Standards in preparation for this Quality Assurance Visit. A great deal of credit for their success must go to the Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction and her staff.

The Quality Assurance Review is pleased to note that the school system provided many opportunities for various stakeholders to contribute throughout the process of seeking district accreditation. It is the perception of the Quality Assurance Review team that school system personnel with community support faithfully and effectively conducted the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study in fulfillment of the District Accreditation requirements and in preparation for the Quality Assurance Review visit.

In fulfillment of the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study process, the school system personnel provided documented evidence for each of the Standards for Accreditation, summarized the district's systemic process of continuous improvement, and identified the methods and strategies implemented throughout the school district that provide for quality assurance of the district's operations, procedures, and functions for the benefit of student learning. In addition to the summary of documentation provided to the Quality Assurance Review team, the district provided team members access to all system information including improvement plans at the school and system levels, student achievement data, the policies and procedures, financial information, and all other information and data maintained and monitored by the school district.

During the on-site visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review team interviewed the Superintendent of Schools, seven members of the Board of Trustees, 29 Principals and other school administrators, seven central office administrators, 23 parents, 59 teachers, 17 business partners and community members, and 14 students. In considering the evidence as provided through data, documentation, observation, and dialogue, the Quality Assurance Team:

- sought a district perspective;
- pursued evidence that could be correlated through multiple sources;
- examined the context and capacity of the school system in relation to its vision, mission, and beliefs; and
- applied the criteria for accreditation.

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for District Accreditation is that the Abbeville County School District provides evidence that it meets the ten standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the ten standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

Summary

The Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction coordinated and facilitated the district's compilation and consideration of evidence related to each of the ten standards for accreditation. District and school personnel were involved in the compilation and consideration of the documentation for each of the standards for accreditation.

BELIEFS and MISSION

A quality system develops and communicates a vision, beliefs and mission that provide a focus for the quality of the work of the students and the quality of the work of the system and schools.

The Quality Assurance Review Team (QART) saw evidence of a long standing vision and mission which appeared deeply imbedded in the cultures within the district and the individual schools. The Superintendent and Board of Trustees is firm in their beliefs that the Abbeville County School system exists for the greatest development possible of each individual student and that learning is to be a life-long skill. The district has created a framework upon which all schools will acquire equity through the use of school improvement plans, a common curriculum and equal resources. The district has shown itself to be very aware of its economic issues, the changing population, and the need to achieve balance in a changing work force. Clearly, the Superintendent and the Board see as one of their greatest challenges the need to attract and retain highly qualified teachers throughout the system.

The QART reviewed the District's Strategic Plan and individual school improvement plans designed to move student instruction and achievement forward. However, much work is needed to align the mission and vision with the School Improvement Plan (SIP). While interviewing stakeholders, it became evident that there is not a deep and clear understanding of the school improvement process. There can not be an alignment of the district's vision and mission until all stakeholders completely understand the process and take an active role in creating the plans.

School Improvement Plans, when constructed with information gained from a district-wide needs assessment as well as school needs assessments, can be the deciding factor in achieving the enhanced instruction for all students which is the County's vision. School Improvement Plans used in conjunction with research, highly skilled teachers, and the best practices used in teaching and learning will assist the district in its goal of an excellent education for all students.

The QART suggests that immediate and quality training be given to teachers in data analysis and disaggregation. From that data plans should be reviewed as to individual school goals and activities which can clearly measure the achievement of those goals. In completing this process and sharing the information with all stakeholders, to include parents and community representatives, the Abbeville County School system will be well under way for phase two of its systemic reform to create a model of excellence in education.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

A quality system provides for and promotes stability in the leadership, governance and organizational structure which include a focus in developing and maintaining a vision; an emphasis on improving student learning; and support for innovative efforts that produce desired results.

The Quality Assurance Review Team (QART) finds that the Superintendent has been the impetus for the design and implementation of a clear and focused vision of creating schools of excellence for the Abbeville County School District. This vision is conveyed through a myriad of organizational strategies including a District Strategic Plan and an infrastructure that supports positive communication among the Board of Trustees, the Central Office, and all ten schools. This sense of everyone being on a plan to improve education for all children has provided stability and created a renewed sense of trust in the leadership. This trust in the leadership has opened communication among all stakeholders, including schools, community, and businesses. This has paved the way for collaboration and innovations, giving the Superintendent the freedom to realign, redirect, and consolidate resources to operate a fiscally responsible system.

Specifically, the QART reviewed samples of written policies, school improvement plans, customer surveys, department roles and expectations, achievement data and plans of action to handle all concerns of the system. It was evident that all system plans and policies have been reviewed by the Superintendent and other stakeholders and most were updated and revised to meet the needs of a changing district. Plans indicate that clear lines of protocol and communication are being established.

Effective collaboration networks of stakeholders support improving learning and teaching. The Team interviewed the Superintendent, Board of Trustees, parents, administrators and representatives of businesses and the community. These interviews were very complimentary of the Administration and the improvements they have made in all areas. During interviews, phrases such as “genuine”, “approachable”, “knows what they are doing”, “a blessing”, “good communicators” and “proactive” were heard repeatedly. The Board and community credit the Administration with bringing them all together and infusing “new energy” into a system that appeared to be in decline due to loss of manufacturing. The beginning of systemic reform included getting input from many different sources and putting personnel into place that could function as a support base to effectively operate the district, and preserve executive, administrative and Board roles.

The Quality Assurance Review Team visited schools to determine if stakeholders such as school based administrators and teachers were able to make decisions closest to the children. Among the resources observed were test data, use of instruction to meet the needs of subgroups of the population, infusion of technology into the learning environment, and a functional collaborative network of stakeholders that support and improve learning and teaching. Evidence to support the district's infusion of its mission/vision/beliefs and system wide goals for achieving student learning include principal and teacher interviews, input from parents and students, and preparation for learning seen in classrooms.

In the area of Governance, it appears that the people placed in support positions in the Central Office have been hired because "they were the best person for the job." The words "collaborative", "cooperation", "family", and "support" were repeated in interviews at all levels. Alignment can be seen at all levels and an attitude of trust, common beliefs, and values has been established.

The QART determined that compliance to the Standard, *Governance and Leadership*, is evident at both the Central Office and at the individual school sites visited. Interviews indicate that Abbeville County is undergoing complete systemic change. With the development of the District's Strategic Plan, the review of all roles, responsibilities, processes and procedures the system now appears able to move forward. The new positive and open communication has had the trickle-down effect to principals, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. Principals reported that they have the authority necessary to make decisions to meet the needs of their school.

The QART believes that Abbeville County is now ready for systemic change phase two, which should focus directly on student achievement. Since leadership capability was noted at all sites, effort should be made to increase professional development in the areas of school improvement, data analysis, and the composition of meaningful and measurable goals for improvement of student achievement. The leadership should undertake training of stakeholders so that they will understand the process of developing goals and activities for a school improvement plan.

The Abbeville County School System has all the important skills in place to make a significant difference. They have trusted leadership at all levels, competent people in key roles, capable teachers, parents, and other stakeholders willing to move forward. The District Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction has made wise decisions to establish data teams and bring in a more useful assessment instrument, the MAP. It is time to continue focused action in revisiting goals and activities. The talent is available.

CURRICULUM

A quality system offers a research-based curriculum based on clearly defined expectations for student learning that is subject to review and revision at regular intervals.

To address the need for a defined curriculum aligned to the South Carolina State Standards, Abbeville County School District obtained curriculum pacing guides developed by a neighboring school district. Initially, the district's teachers were told that use of the guides was not mandated, but they were asked to use the guides and to provide feedback regarding their appropriateness. Later, after a change in the district's leadership, expectations for use of these guides altered. Teachers were told that the district expected them to utilize the curriculum pacing guides to define learner objectives and instruction. Presently, the guides are used as the defined curriculum of the district in grade K5 – 8 while being modified to more exactly accommodate the identified needs of the district. While, in general, the content of all pacing guides may not be comprehensive, that is not the case for the document used by Abbeville County School District. From a review of the documents and from interviews with school and district personnel, the Team recognizes that the content of these curriculum pacing guides includes learner objectives; are aligned to state standards; and include instructional strategies and activities that provide opportunities for the application of higher order thinking skills, addressing diverse learning styles, and ensuring consistency throughout the district in grades 5K - 8. The use of the pacing guides obviously defines student learning goals and essential knowledge and skills in each content area for grades K5 - 8.

Based on interviews with district administrators, school personnel, and parents, the Team is aware that the district has made financial and programmatic decisions which reflect commitment to equity and diversity. To this end the district has modified the process of textbook and instructional materials selection from independent school-by-school decisions to district-wide consensus. This change, along with the fact that even in the face of significant financial reductions, the district has protected classroom instruction from the impact of these reductions, is indicative of commitment to equity. In addition, through interviews and observations, the Team understands that organized, system-wide efforts are in place to recruit and maintain faculty and administration that more nearly reflect the population served by the school district. Since last school year, the district's minority teacher/administrator population has increased by 50% to a total of twenty-seven (27). Relative to this commitment, one community representative expressed, "This is not 'utopia,' but the district is making legitimate efforts to improve."

Abbeville County School District encourages each student to excel and has established a vision that states, "*Abbeville County School District will be a model of excellence in education.*" The Team heard repeatedly from school personnel, district personnel, parents, students, and community representatives that the mission of Abbeville County schools is to "prepare students to become lifelong learners and to prepare students for their futures in higher education or work."

The Team confirmed through review of documents and interviews that concerted and systemic efforts are being made by the district to improve the ability of administrators

and faculty to analyze test results so that data can drive instructional and programmatic decisions and ultimately influence student achievement. Each school has a Data Team that is learning how to disaggregate and analyze data and to ensure that the resulting awareness is used appropriately to meet students' needs. The ability to conduct disaggregated analyses, along with an increased emphasis on continuing study of "best practice," the use of MAP testing, and the use of Test View, should result in improved effectiveness in identifying and addressing varied student learning styles as well as improved higher order thinking activities, increased academic rigor, and the development of active student learning.

Through the use of the adopted curriculum guides and data analysis, the district's written curricula offer balanced content, consistency and continuity, and alignment across all grades (K5 – 8) and are based on current data, research and sound principles of teaching and learning. Also, the district's obvious commitment to expanding and upgrading technology for instructional and administrative purposes will enhance the district's movement to excellence.

Due to the concerted efforts of district curriculum leaders and the conscientious work of school administrators and teaching personnel, structures are clearly in place to move the district's curriculum forward.

There has been no evidence presented to indicate that Abbeville County School District provides defined curriculum, beyond the use of State Standards, in grades 9 - 12. Presently, reviewed documents and interviews indicate that the curriculum guides provided by the district extend only from 5K – grade 8. Instructional effectiveness and student achievement should be enhanced by the expansion of defined curriculum for subject areas taught in secondary grades as well.

While the district clearly has in place a system for training personnel in the analysis of disaggregated data and in making decisions based on that analysis, the Team found little evidence of collaborative school improvement planning. The team strongly recommends that the district improve its efforts by providing training in the tasks of obtaining stakeholder input and the school improvement planning process. The district and individual schools have plans for improving stakeholder participation, and training in the planning process should enhance these efforts and ultimately improve student achievement.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

A quality system develops and employs instructional strategies and activities in support of student achievement of the expectations for learning defined by the curriculum.

The Quality Assurance Review Team (QART) finds that analysis and use of assessment data to improve student learning is in the beginning stages of instructional design. The establishment of a Data Team by the District Coordinator of Curriculum was a first step in gaining control of data in order to design and employ instructional strategies and activities reflective of research and best practices. The team recognizes the importance of

data and the strong commitment shown by the Superintendent, principals and teachers to utilize data to drive the curriculum for all students. This decision may assist in achieving equity and will guide renewed focus on identifying individual learning needs and abilities. This focus is critical to developing differentiated instruction.

The QART believes that before instruction can be aligned to the data several changes must be accomplished. Professional development for teachers and staff must be identified and implemented in the area of data analysis as soon as possible. It was clear from interviewing teachers that the interest is there but level of skills for implementation is lacking. Evidence from reading the individual school improvement plans indicates that there is a lack of understanding of the overall research based school improvement process. School improvement plans should be made more user-friendly, detailing not only the goal but what activities should be implemented to achieve them. Training workshops for the parent and community stakeholders who comprise the School Advisory Council should be held early enough in the school year that parents and community stakeholders will have the skills to understand what they are writing. Multiple interviews with these stakeholders revealed that they had only a rudimentary understanding, if any, of the process.

The QART finds that teachers observed appeared to be focused on their instructional mission and protective of their instructional time to support student learning. This was observed as the Team visited classrooms and the instructional processes continued without interruption. Instructional activities observed indicate that efforts are being made to increase instruction which stimulates and enhances intellectual and creative development of higher order thinking skills which require students to apply their learning. This can clearly be seen in the district's adoption of technology and its infusion into all classrooms.

The QART recognizes the importance of the use of the newly adopted Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) as a significant first step in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of students' academic progress. The Team strongly suggests that once teachers are trained that the use of formative and summative assessments be conducted to ensure that students are appropriately placed in groups for learning. The most important part of any change is the buy-in from stakeholders. This is clearly seen in interviewing many groups. This buy-in coupled with increased professional development for teachers could increase equity and effectiveness of instruction and thus move the district closer to its goal of more students achieving "proficient" status. What the QART did not see was a comprehensive program of information and media services aligned to its beliefs, mission and goals in all schools. In most schools the team found that there are no specific activities tied to the goals, they do not appear easily measured, and many teachers are not in control of the data disaggregation and implementation skills needed.

ASSESSMENT, MEASUREMENT, and EFFECTIVE RESULTS

A quality system uses effective and continuous performance management systems for assessing, aligning, and improving student learning and operation performance, including organizational and instructional effectiveness, at all levels and areas of the system.

It is evident to the QART, through its conversations with district staff, parents, board members and community members, that the district has developed a comprehensive assessment plan for the students. They have gone above the state requirements of PACT and HSAP as they use MAP to identify student strengths and weaknesses for grades two through ten. The district will use this information along with other test data to make data-driven decisions at the school and district level.

Expectations are being established related to student learning using collected and analyzed data through the school and district data teams. As stakeholders move through this process they are moving with caution to ensure that the best decisions are made for the students related to the instructional program.

Plans are in place to conduct a periodic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness as the district and schools work for school improvement. Curriculum decisions are being made and goals are being developed based on data collected by the school/district data teams.

The district has committed its efforts to improving communication with all its stakeholders. This effort has carried over to communicating the progress of students through the school/district report card, newspapers, the website, parent conferences and student report card pick-up days.

Throughout the process the schools/district need to ensure that stakeholder input is being sought as they make decisions about a vast and changing demographic student population. As data is analyzed, the schools and district should review all subgroup performance to ensure that the educational decisions made are the best for all the students served.

RESOURCES

A quality system has qualified staff that is supported by the financial and physical resources necessary to fulfill the vision, mission and goals of the system.

Financial Resources

The financial accounts of Abbeville County Schools are in accordance with accepted accounting practices as evidenced by a copy of the annual audit which was made available to the QAR team. While it was made very evident during the interviews that the declining enrollment has had a major budgeting impact on the district's financial well-being, the district has made every effort to assure the continuity and stability of services. When services have had to be curtailed, little impact was felt at the instructional level. It

is evident to the QAR team that further loss of revenue through continued declining enrollment or loss of funding sources will make it very difficult to provide or continue to enhance program equity throughout the system.

Under the leadership of the current administration, a financial accounting manual was developed and implemented and new budget controls were initiated. All employees are now covered with Fidelity Bond Insurance. Through interviews with the Superintendent and finance officer, it was shown that the system has a \$25.5 million operating budget. Further there is a 34.4 mill debt service and 74 mill for operating schools.

Human Resources

Personnel practices/procedures have been developed for the employment of all personnel and include interview teams and common interview questions. An updated job description handbook has been developed. An employee salary study has been conducted. One of the innovative programs highlighted by the administration during interviews is the Teacher Assistant-to-Teacher program. This program provides an opportunity for teacher assistants to earn a teaching certificate with the tuition borne by the district. There have already been successful graduates from this initiative. A system that makes this kind of effort to “grow their own” has improved its ability to recruit and retain qualified teachers. An issue that plagues all school systems, including Abbeville, is the ability to attract minority staff at all levels, including central office. The district has created task forces of educators and community leaders who have very successfully been working to bring minority certified staff to Abbeville. Through this effort, they have increased the number of certified staff by 50% in just one year, from 18 to 27.

Small, rural school districts are challenged to find and support meaningful professional development opportunities for their staff. Another initiative that is being implemented is a coordinated school calendar with neighboring districts in the Western Piedmont Educational Consortium. Besides providing common student release days to help working parents, coordinating joint in-service opportunities for teachers greatly enhances the possibilities for teachers in all districts.

STUDENT SERVICES

A quality system identifies and has a network of services that support the development and well-being, including the health and safety, of each student.

Through on-site visits, and interviews with stakeholders, the QAR Team found that the Abbeville School System is working to build a comprehensive network of support services to benefit a diverse population of students. The Interagency collaboration along with district participation in the TEAM grant is providing mental health services and programs to the elementary schools. Evidence of other activities to support the health and counseling services include:

- Full-time guidance counselors at all schools

- 9 Nurses who serve all of the schools
- Mental Health Counselors in the elementary schools
- Additional counselors as a result of the TEAM grant
- Drug Education programs
- Interventionist to address attendance and pregnancy prevention
- An Anti-bullying policy
- Positive Behavior and Supports program in three schools

The district provides support and services to ensure the safety of all students as evidenced by:

- Security locks at the entrance of all schools
- SROs provided to schools
- Cameras on some buses and camera boxes on all buses
- Guidelines and plans have been written to include:
 - District Inclement Weather Plan
 - Crisis Management
 - Student's Rights and Responsibility handbook

The QAR Team suggests that evacuation diagrams for each school be included in the District Crisis Management notebook in order to provide essential information in the event of a crisis should it be needed by the emergency response teams.

Special Services and Title 1 programs provide support services to students through activities such as reduced student/teacher ratios, teacher assistants, after school programs, and collaboration with the local colleges.

The Food Service Program provides nutritious meals through the breakfast and lunch programs that result in high participation at all schools. Students are given choices of entrees and menus are shared with parents.

Opportunities for the development of student leadership and citizenship are evident in most schools through co-curricular activities that include Beta Clubs, Student Councils, and participation in programs such as Governor's School.

One of the strengths of the student services lies with its communication and coordination with school, home, and community. Newsletters, articles in the local newspaper, surveys, and regular meetings are some of the evidence of information sharing. The district's commitment to improved communication is strongly evident in every area.

STAFF AND STAKEHOLDERS COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

A quality system develops and supports organizational patterns or structures that promote effective communications and relationships between and among the schools, stakeholders and system.

It is evident to the QART, through its conversations with district staff, parents, board members, and community members, that the district does, very effectively, promote excellent communication between the schools, the central office, and all stakeholders.

From the Superintendent's office to the classroom the team saw evidence of a determination to involve all stakeholders in the process of nurturing and growing the Abbeville School District. The administration has worked very hard to develop community involvement and support for the school district. Examples were found in the different task forces developed to address such issues as policy revision, attendance, and behavioral issues, periodic meetings for community input and collaboration, and meetings with the various agencies that provide services to the students of the school district.

The QART, in its interviews with district administrators, school-based administrators, and teaching staff, was able to see evidence of a strong connection between the district office and the instructional staff at all levels of learning. Morale is high, and there is a great sense on the part of teachers, parents, and community members that the district is committed to working with them to enable student success. This is seen in the awareness of a true openness on the part of the district to keep all channels of communication open to all stakeholders, and the very clear belief among those stakeholders that true collaboration is occurring among all groups involved in the educational process in the Abbeville School District.

The QART applauds the entire Abbeville School District for its commitment to creating a positive environment for the accomplishing of greater student achievement. The Team, also, encourages the district, from the district office down to the classroom, to continue building a sense of community that can only enhance the learning experience for the students of the Abbeville School District.

FACILITIES

A quality system has the necessary resources to provide the facilities, sites and equipment for the educational programs and services to be fully implemented throughout the system and individual schools.

It is evident to the QART that the Abbeville School District has a process in place that includes plans and implementation for ensuring that the system sites, facilities, and equipment are maintained to provide an environment that is healthy and safe for all stakeholders in the system. The Team found all facilities to be well maintained, with an evident sense of pride among all stakeholders.

The Team found, also, that there is a plan in place for maintaining and improving the sites, facilities, and equipment. While there have been no new buildings built for a number of years, the district has had a continuing program of renovations and upgrades for schools at all levels.

CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF IMPROVEMENT

A quality system establishes, implements and monitors a continuous process of educational improvement clearly focused on student performance.

The QART reviewed the School Improvement Plans provided by the schools. After review it was evident that the each school has a plan in place. The desire to improve instruction is noted, however, the current school improvement plans lack an alignment to the district mission and vision. This is due in part to lack of specificity identifying the activities to support the goals.

Evidence from the interviews indicated that professional development (Instructional and Data driven) is at the emerging stage and is being implemented and monitored school-wide through collecting data and surveys. Training in data disaggregation will enable teachers to better utilize data to drive instruction. It appears to the Team that little training in interpreting data and differentiating instruction is the biggest impediment to achieving their goal of increasing learner proficiency. Opportunities for staff and stakeholders to be more involved in the planning and decision making process is needed for better collaboration.

Once the school disaggregate and analyze the data (test scores and survey results), they can identify needs through a comprehensive needs assessment, and develop action plans to address all subgroups, content areas and concerns. The QART recommends that administrators investigate ways to include all staff members and stakeholders in the development of the SIP. The effective use of data and research is not evident in the development or design of instructional planning for students. There is very little physical evidence of data as an ongoing source that drives instruction. Data information sources such as a data room, data boards, notebooks, etc. were limited.

The QAR believes that specific feedback as part of the monitoring and evaluation process is needed to ensure that collaborative planning time which focuses on quality instruction and challenging content is being implemented. However, teachers need to deepen their understanding and implementation of academic rigor. High expectations must equate with challenging content and the use of higher order thinking skills.

The School Improvement Plan should serve as a tool to monitor various means of assessing student progress. The plan must identify a more clearly defined system to provide feedback to teachers and stakeholders before the goal of implementing the state standards is achieved.

Commendations and Recommendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team provides the following commendations and recommendations in response to the school system's execution of and participation in the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study in fulfillment of the requirements for district accreditation.

Strengths, Accomplishment, and Commendations

Abbeville County School District has a significant number of strengths and accomplishments which characterize the quality of the school district and its capacity to support student learning. Some of the strengths and accomplishments that contribute to the quality and success of the school district include the following:

- Developing Data Teams at each school
- Introducing MAP Testing at all schools
- Realigning and consolidating resources
- Attaining and promoting strong community support
- Having 100% Highly Qualified Teachers by NCLB Standards
- Earning the 5th best completion rate in South Carolina for adult education
- Attaining a 95.5% student attendance rate
- Pursuing participation in the High Schools That Work program
- Increasing the Palmetto Gold and Silver Awards

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Abbeville County School District **for:**

- Possessing visionary administrative leadership
- Initiating systemic change for improvement
- Using MAP Testing to improve instruction
- Establishing Data Teams to drive instruction
- Attaining and fostering a positive relationship between central office and the Board of Trustees
- Maintaining a focus on instruction with reduced resources
- Effectively communicating with all stakeholders
- Obtaining and adapting a 5K-Grade 8 uniform defined curriculum
- Committing to 21st Century Technology
- Meeting the seven standards of the Perkins' Goals for five years at the Career Center
- Aligning the school calendar with neighboring districts in the WPEC
- Developing and promoting the Teacher Assistant-To-Teacher program
- Maintaining the cleanliness of all the facilities and campuses

Limitations, Challenges, and Recommendations

The capacity of any organization to improve is directly related to its ability to recognize, acknowledge, and act on its strengths and limitations. Although the Abbeville County School District is guided and characterized by several strengths and accomplishments, there are challenges and limitations facing the school district that are opportunities for improvement. Some of the limitations and challenges include the following:

- Dealing with a declining enrollment
- Involving all stakeholders in the School Improvement Process
- Safeguarding necessary services and programs affected by the declining enrollment and the loss of funds
- Using analysis of assessment results effectively
- Providing equitable course and program offerings at all schools throughout the district
- Closing the achievement gap between subgroups
- Working with a limited data history
- Expanding community/school/business partnerships in a small, rural community
- Increasing parental involvement at all levels

The Quality Assurance Review Team recommends that the Abbeville County School District:

1. Provide comprehensive professional development in the School Improvement Process
2. Implement written measurable strategies at the school, with benchmarks and evaluation criteria, to monitor the effectiveness of improvement plans as they impact student achievement
3. Expand the defined curriculum to include subject areas in grades 9-12
4. Develop plans to address issues of declining enrollment and equity in course offerings and programs

Closing Summary

The Quality Assurance Review Team found the Abbeville County School District to be an effective school system led by a visionary, skilled and talented professional staff, dedicated board of trustees, and a supportive community that collectively encourage and support student success at all levels of the system. It is evident throughout the system that instructional improvement that results in improving student achievement is the highest priority.

The Quality Assurance Review Team certifies that the school system has satisfactorily met the expectations and responsibilities of the SACS Guided Self-Study. Additionally, the Quality Assurance Review Team certifies that the Abbeville County School District meets all the standards for accreditation for District Accreditation. Consequently, the Quality Assurance Review Team recommends to the SACS CASI Board of Directors that the Abbeville County School District be awarded District Accreditation.

With the primary focus of this process being on improving student performance, the Quality Assurance Review Team sincerely hopes that the recommendations presented in this report will help in the continuing efforts to improve the quality of the learning experience provided to all students in the Abbeville County School District. In order for the system and its schools to improve, the professional staff must continually assess, plan, implement, monitor, evaluate and reassess. The success of such an effort is largely dependent on the school system's understanding and level of commitment to a process of improvement that is systemic and continuous.

The Quality Assurance Review Team recommends that the school system with the support of stakeholders in the community immediately begin the Implementation Phase of the accreditation process. It is through the implementation phase that the instructional and organizational capacity of the school system can be strengthened and students' achievement of the desired results for learning will be accomplished. As such, throughout the Implementation Phase the school system should ensure that the following steps are taken:

1. Review and communicate the findings and observations contained in the report;
2. Consider and take action, where appropriate, on the recommendations contained in this report;
3. Continue to monitor accreditation requirements for the system and its schools;
4. Ensure that strategies identified at the system and school levels are executed to accomplish specific goals to improve student learning;
5. Update and communicate to all stakeholders the system and school level profiles of student performance at least annually;
6. Document growth in student learning and instructional and organizational effectiveness; and
7. Review and revise, as necessary, the improvement plans at the system and school level.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the professional staff at the system and school levels, members of the Board of Trustees, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality extended during the visit. The Quality Assurance Review Team challenges the professional staff and the Board of Trustees to receive and study this report and, through consensus, accept and act on those recommendations they believe will improve or enhance the quality and capacity of the school system to improve student learning. Additionally the team wishes the school system and its students much success in pursuit of student achievement through the continuous process of educational improvement.

Abbeville County QAR Team Members

Dave Stipe has been an English and social studies teacher, counselor, principal, director of personnel, director of middle schools, and assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in Michigan and North Carolina. Dave retired after 43 years in education from the Onslow County, NC, Schools. He is currently an Advanc-Ed Field Consultant and has chaired numerous district accreditation teams, and is Chair of the Abbeville County QAR team

Randall Cook has been Social Studies Specialist (6-12) for the School Board of Lee County, Florida for seven years and serves on the Florida Council of Social Studies Supervisors. He has taught middle school as well as American history and world history in high school. He is a graduate of Trevecca University in Tennessee and his masters from the University of Missouri. Randall has been working with SACS CASI for eight years and has served on three District Accreditation teams in Florida and Virginia.

Dr. Tom Faulkenberry In his 38 years in education, has been a teacher, counselor, coach, assistant principal and principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent. Currently he is Dean of the School of Education and Graduate Studies at Converse College. Tom earned his B.S. from Erskine College, M.Ed. from Francis Marion University, and his Ph.D from U. of South Carolina. He has served on numerous school and district QAR teams, and is Vice-Chair of the Abbeville County QAR team.

Mary Beth Huber is Elementary Curriculum Specialist for Calcasieu Parish, LA. She also serves as District K-3 Coordinator, School Improvement Coordinator for SACS CASI District Accreditation. Mary Beth has been an elementary teacher, curriculum coordinator. She has her B.A. and M.Ed from McNeese State University. An educator for 28 years Mary Beth has served on several school level QAR teams and as vice-chair for a district level team.

David Jenkins has been an educator in Newberry County, SC, for 34 years is currently the Director of Elementary Education. Besides being a teacher and coach, David has been a middle and elementary principal for 23 years. In 2001, David received the William B. Harvey Award given by R. L. Bryan and South Carolina School of Administration. He has served on several school level QAR teams.

Andrew McGee is Coordinator for the **Office** of School Improvement, DeKalb County, Georgia. He has taught at a private academy and as an elementary teacher at both a Title 1 school and as gifted teacher in a non-Title 1 school. Andrew has taught elementary and middle school for 18 years. He became the district lead math teacher in 1997. Andrew was named Teacher of the Year in 1996/97 and earned the Mayor's Outstanding Teacher Award. He recently became the President of the Georgia Compensatory Educational Leadership Organization.

Dr. Patricia Patterson has been an elementary Principal in Broward County, Florida since 2002. She has taught elementary, middle and vocational high school levels as well as an assistant principal and principal over the past 37 years. Patricia has a B.A. in elementary education, a M.S. in Guidance/Counseling, and Ed.D in Curriculum/Instruction. She is the author of several professional journal articles and grants, and has been a presenter at state and national conferences. Patricia has served on several school and district level QAR teams.

Kathy Whitmire has her B.S. and M.Ed from University of Georgia, and Administration certification from Clemson. She taught special education for 13 years, served as a P.E.T. Trainer, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent for instruction. For the past three years, Kathy was Executive Director of Cherokee Creek School for Boys. She was named SC Educator of the Year in 2003 by the ASCD. Heavily involved in brain research, Kathy has made many presentations at state and national conferences.

Abbeville County Visit Schedule
SACS Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Team Visit
October 7-10, 2007

SUNDAY **Quality Assurance Review Team (QART) arrives**
5:00-6:30pm QART dinner at **Belmont Inn**
7:00pm—9:00pm Team Orientation Training/Meeting
Hotel Meeting Room: **Belmont** (*every evening*)

MONDAY

Time	Events	QART Meets with	WHO?
7:30am	Meet in hotel lobby and ready to depart		All QART members
8:00 - 8:30am	Chair reviews schedule and logistics		All QART members
8:30 - 9:15am	Superintendent's Overview of mission/vision, summary--continuous improvement planning process, system plan, improvement goals, results, quality assurance	Dr. Ivan Randolph Superintendent and appropriate staff	All QART members
9:15 - 10:00am	Interview	Superintendent Dr. Ivan Randolph	All QART members
10:05 - 10:50am	Interview <i>Chair-Team A;</i> <i>Vice Chair-Team B</i>	3 Board members: Buster Taylor(chair) Mark Burton, James Tisdale	Team A
		Asst. Superintendent: Kathy Stevenson Curriculum Coordinators: Sherri Smith, Jean Smith	Team B
11:00 - 11:45am	Interview--	3 Board members: Corinna O'Bannon, Dr.Bill Crenshaw, Samuel Bell	Team B
		Special Services, Joyce Cunningham; Title I, etc., Sherwin Johnson; Technology, Matt Kimsey	Team A
Noon—12:45pm	Lunch		All QART members
1:00- 1:45pm	Interview	Principals whose schools are not being visited: Nick Hyduke, Steve Garrett	Team B
		3 Board members: Dr. Alan Kolb Tim Rhodes Joseph Reynolds	Team A

1:45 - 2:30pm	Interview	Finance, Shelley Chrisley; Maintenance, Sam Jones; Adult Education, Wayne Stevenson	Team B
		Supt.'s Advisory Council : Diedre McCullough, Rachel Rooney, Angela Pruitt, Joyce Bush	Team A
2:45 - 3:30pm	Interview	Community members : Byron Smith, Susan Cheek, Rosilyn Mims, Johnny Goodwin, Andy Timmerman, Elizabeth Garner, Nancy Crocker, Brad Evans, Scott Moulder, Steve McDade	All QART members
4:30pm	Depart for hotel		
5:45 - 7:00pm	Team Dinner	Hotel Meeting room	
7:15 - 9:15pm	QAR Team Meeting Share noteworthy observations, dialogue concerning Standards draft reports, plan for Tuesday	Hotel—meeting room	All QART members

TUESDAY

SCHOOL VISITS

Each QAR mini team of 2 members will visit two schools, one before lunch and one after lunch. **The specific schedule for school visits is included on “Team Member Assignments”.** Central Office Supervisors will transport team members from the hotel to the schools (morning and afternoon), to lunch and back to the hotel.

General Visit Schedule:

- **By 8:00am**--Arrive at school
- **8:00-8:30am**--School walk through with principal or designee (plus student escorts where possible; Team should use this opportunity to ask questions of students.)
- Interview each of the following groups at the school
 - 8:30-9:15am**—School’s Leadership Team (Principal and others)
 - 9:30-10:15am**--School’s Improvement Team
 - 10:30-11:15am**--Group of 6-10 school stakeholders such as a mixture of parents that are not employees; community members; business partners; and new teachers, counselors and/or media specialists who have not otherwise been involved in the interviews.
- Lunch—**11:25am-12:30pm** – with principals, supervisor(s), team members. Travel to next school.
- **12:30-1:00pm**-- School walk through with principal or designee (plus student escorts where possible; Team should use this opportunity to ask questions of students.)
- Interview each of the following groups at the school
 - 1:00-1:45pm**-- School’s Leadership Team (Principal and others)
 - 2:00-2:45pm**-- School’s Improvement Team
 - 3:00-3:45pm**-- Group of 6-10 school stakeholders such as a mixture of parents who are not employees, community members, business partners, and new teachers, counselors, media specialists who have not otherwise been involved in the interviews.

Time	Events	QART Meets with	WHO?
5:45pm—7:00pm	Team Dinner	Hotel—meeting room	
7:15pm—9:15pm	QAR Team Meeting Share noteworthy observations from the day's data gathering; review the schedule of Central Office interviews, begin drafts of Standards narratives	Hotel—meeting room	All QART members

WEDNESDAY

Time	Events	QART Meets with	WHO?
7:30am	Check out of hotel and be ready to leave hotel. Meet in lobby. If traveling by air (bring luggage; it will be transferred into the vehicle that will take you back to the airport) If traveling by personal vehicle, drive car.	CO staff who will transport or guide members to the (location for meeting)	All QART members
8:00 - 10am	Follow-up interviews with key Central Office staff to complete Accreditation Standards' verification(as needed) Chair and Vice Chair circulate to interview groups.	8:30-9:30am Standards' Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance and Leadership Curriculum and Instructional Design Resources 9:45-10:45am Standards' Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment, Measurement, Results Physical Facilities Student Services Continuous Process of Improvement 	All QART members
10am-Noon	Work time for finalizing all reports—submit reports Chair and Vice Chair refine Oral Exit Report.	NA	All QART members
Noon — 2:00pm	Working Lunch All 10 standards' reports presented orally to Team. Team reviews Oral Exit Report findings; comes to consensus on findings--commendations and recommendations on District Accreditation for Abbeville County Schools. Complete Accreditation Certificate		All QART members
2:30pm	Turn in reports to Tom, hard copy, electronic copy, and Standards Tool Dave and Tom meet with Supt. and key staff to review commendations and recommendations that will be presented in the Oral Exit Report		Chair and Vice Chair
3:00 - 4:00pm	SACS District Accreditation Oral Exit Report during a called Board of Education meeting; Departure of Team members after meeting.		Chair QART members

Quality Assurance Review Certification – District

(For use with Quality Assurance Reviews for District Accreditation)

Council on Accreditation and School Improvement

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

SCHOOL DISTRICT: Abbeville County, S.C. **Date(s) of Visit:** October 7-10, 2007

I. Evidence of Meeting Standards

Standard	Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations with Recommendation(s)	Does Not Meet Expectations List deficient indicators, if any (e.g. 3.5, 6.7, or 4.6)
Standard 1: Beliefs and Mission		X	
Standard 2: Governance and Leadership	X		
Standard 3: Curriculum		X	
Standard 4: Instructional Design	X		
Standard 5: Assessment, Measurement, and Effective Results	X		
Standard 6: Resources	X		
Standard 7: Student Services	X		
Standard 8: Staff and Stakeholder Communications and Relationships	X		
Standard 9: Physical Facilities	X		
Standard 10: Continuous Process of Improvement		X	

II. Demonstration of Continuous Improvement

Use the following rubric to identify the school district's level of effectiveness in engaging and demonstrating a continuous process of improvement.

Absent	Emerging	Effective	Exemplary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is little or no evidence of a continuous process of improvement. There is limited awareness among staff of the process of continuous improvement and its importance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The improvement process is episodic (sometimes but not consistently evident). There is growing awareness among most staff of the improvement process and its importance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The improvement process is almost always evident. There is general awareness among staff of the improvement process and its importance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The improvement process is consistently evident or routine, aligned with other practices, and focused on achieving the vision and expectations for student learning. Almost all staff is aware of the improvement process and understands its importance and how it impacts other people and practices in the school.

LEVEL OF EFFECTIVENESS: (Check the appropriate box.)

☐ ABSENT
 ☐ EMERGING
 ☒ EFFECTIVE
 ☐ EXEMPLARY

III. Providing Quality Assurance

Absent	Emerging	Effective	Exemplary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is little or no evidence of methods or procedures designed to monitor and support the teaching and learning process. ○ There is limited awareness among staff of current levels of effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Methods for quality assurance are episodic (sometimes but not consistently evident). ○ There is growing awareness among staff that methods of quality assurance are being implemented to support, assist, and monitor the teaching and learning process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Methods for quality assurance are almost always evident. ○ There is general awareness among staff that methods of quality assurance are in place to support, assist, and monitor the teaching and learning process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Methods for quality assurance are consistently evident or routine, aligned with other practices, and focused on achieving the vision and expectations for student learning. ○ Almost all staff is aware of the methods for quality assurance and understands its importance and how it impacts other people and practices in the school.

LEVEL OF EFFECTIVENESS: (Check the appropriate box.)

☐ **ABSENT**

☐ **EMERGING**

☒ **EFFECTIVE**

☐ **EXEMPLARY**

IV. Recommendation to SACS CASI for District Accreditation:

☒ Recommend initial accreditation

☐ Do not recommend accreditation at this time

(Note: chair should provide below or on an attached sheet the conditions that must be met including standard deficiencies for initial accreditation.)

V. Quality Assurance Review Team

Chair: Dave Stipe

Member: Dr. Tom Faulkenberry

Member: Randall Cook

Member: Mary Beth Huber

Member: David Jenkins

Member: Andrew McGee

Member: Dr. Patricia Patterson

Member: Kathy Whitmire

VI. Special Comments or Notations by the Chair