Report of the
External Review
for
Hoover City Board of Education

2810 Metropolitan Way

Hoover, AL, 35243-2944
US

Mr. Andy Craig, Superintendent

Date: February 9, 2014 - February 12, 2014

AdvancED

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Introduction to the External Review

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

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

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

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

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

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

Average Indicator Score for this Institution	2.97

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

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

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

Standard 1			
The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	- 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	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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 • 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	3.0
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	• 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 • 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	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.4	Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	• 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 • Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders • The district data profile • The district strategic plan	3.0

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. Hoover City Schools provides multiple avenues for students to achieve success and places a strong emphasis on instructional rigor and equitable access to programs and services.

   Academies such as law, education, dental/medical, and performing arts are examples of offerings in the school system designed to meet student interests needs. The students have access to these offerings in addition to their regular schedule. Courses are selected by the students' career path interest. The 1:1 initiative in grades 3 through 12 provides each individual student with a device to enhance learning experiences through technology while at school and/or at home. Participation in these programs allows the students to graduate career ready with marketable skills. A personal electronic device makes it possible for students to pursue special interests at school or while at home.

1.3

Opportunities for Improvement	*Indicator*

1. Create, implement, and monitor a system-wide cultural diversity plan to include involvement and input of all stakeholder groups, continuing education and/or professional development for stakeholder groups, and on-going cultural experiences/opportunities for students and staff.

   Observations, interviews, and survey data from all stakeholders indicated a need for greater emphasis on the recognition, understanding and education of the school district's growing diverse population. The data clearly shows a growing diverse population; however, the interviews and observations discovered a lack of knowledge regarding how to handle issues that the growing population brings to bear on the system and how to capitalize on the positives this population contributes. Implementing these suggestions will greatly enhance human relations among the various cultures and broaden understanding and acceptance of an increasingly diverse school system.

1.3

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

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

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

Standard 2			
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	• Interviews • Observations • Professional development plans • Student handbooks • Accreditation Report • District operations manuals	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	• Communication plan to inform all staff on code of ethics, responsibilities, conflict of interest • Proof of legal counsel • Accreditation Report • Observations • Interviews • Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest	3.0
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	• 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 • Accreditation Report • Stakeholder input and feedback	3.0
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	• Professional development offerings and plans • Examples of decisions aligned with the school's purpose statement • Interviews • Observations • Examples of decisions aligned with the district's purpose and direction • Accreditation Report • Balanced Scorecard	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	• Accreditation Report • Interviews • Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys • Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan • Involvement of stakeholders in district strategic plan • Observations	3.0
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	• Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation • Observations	3.0

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

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

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

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

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The system's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	• Interviews • Course, program, or school schedules • Student work across courses or programs • Course or program descriptions • Survey results • Lesson plans • Observations • Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices • Posted learning objectives • Enrollment patterns for various courses and programs • Accreditation Report	3.0
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.	• Curriculum guides • A description of the systematic review process for curriculum, instruction, and assessment • Accreditation Report • Surveys results • Observations • Interviews • Curriculum writing process	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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 • 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 • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Observations	3.0
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	• Curriculum maps • Accreditation Report • Supervision and evaluation procedures • Surveys results • Administrative classroom observation protocols and logs • Interviews • Observations	3.0
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	• Observations • Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees • Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings • Survey results • Interviews • Peer coaching guidelines and procedures • Accreditation Report	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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 • Accreditation Report	3.0
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 • Interviews • Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices	3.0
3.8	The system and all of its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of their children's learning progress.	• Performance-based report cards • Survey results • 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	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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.	• Accreditation Report • Description of formalized structures for adults to advocate on behalf of students • Interviews • List of students matched to adults who advocate on their behalf • Observations	3.0
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	• Interviews • Survey results • Sample communications to stakeholders about grading and reporting • 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	3.0
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	• Evaluation tools for professional learning • Survey results • Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs • Accreditation Report • Interviews	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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 • Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning • Data used to identify unique learning needs of students	3.0

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

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

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

Standard 4			
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.1	The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ, and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, and educational programs.	• Accreditation Report • District budgets or financial plans for the last three years • District quality assurance procedures for monitoring qualified staff across all schools • Interviews • 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	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs, and system operations.	• Examples of school schedules • Accreditation Report • 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 • Balanced Scorecard	4.0
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	• Observations • Accreditation Report • Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements • Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments	3.0
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 • Interviews • Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments • Accreditation Report • Observations	3.0
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	• Interviews • Accreditation Report • District education delivery model intended for school implementation including media and information resources to support the education program • Data on media and information resources available to students and staff	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	• 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 • District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level • 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 • Observations	4.0
4.7	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	• Interviews • Student assessment system for identifying student needs • Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support • Schedule of family services, e.g., parent classes, survival skills • Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education • List of support services available to students	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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 • Accreditation Report • Description of IEP process • District quality assurance procedures that monitor program effectiveness of student support services • Interviews • Description of referral process	3.0

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. The system provides a sustained and responsive technology infrastructure with equipment to support teaching, learning, and operational needs of all students and staff at a high level.

   Teachers, staff, and school leadership report that technology infrastructure and support are substantial for the acquisition of technology devices in schools. Support staff for technology instruction and operations has responded to school and system needs and exceeded expectations as indicated through interviews, surveys, and components of the technology plan. Teachers are supportive and use technology tools for instruction and students regularly use their devices throughout the school day. The deployment of devices appropriate for each level from grades 3 through 12 indicates a high level of technology commitment to support the instructional process. Equity of access to technology empowers students to be college and career ready in the 21st century.

   4.6

2. The system has demonstrated a high level of stewardship in providing and maintaining long-term financial health and resource management to support its purpose and direction.

   The system has been strategic in managing resources and maintaining buildings within the confines of declining revenue streams. Even with a nearly two thousand-dollar loss per student, the system has maintained appropriate staffing and educational resources to meet the needs of all students. Building principals have reported that their budgets are adequate to meet student needs. Stakeholder Surveys support the adequacy of resources. The system has effectively anticipated the budget expenditures and estimated revenues as supported by artifacts and presentations. There has been a laser-like focus by system leadership on the Strategic Goals and the Balanced Scorecard. Maintaining a healthy and fiscally responsible financial infrastructure ensures that programs and services for clients are provided at a very high level and in a manner that is consistent with the purpose and direction, and stakeholder expectations of the Hoover City School System.

   4.2

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

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

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

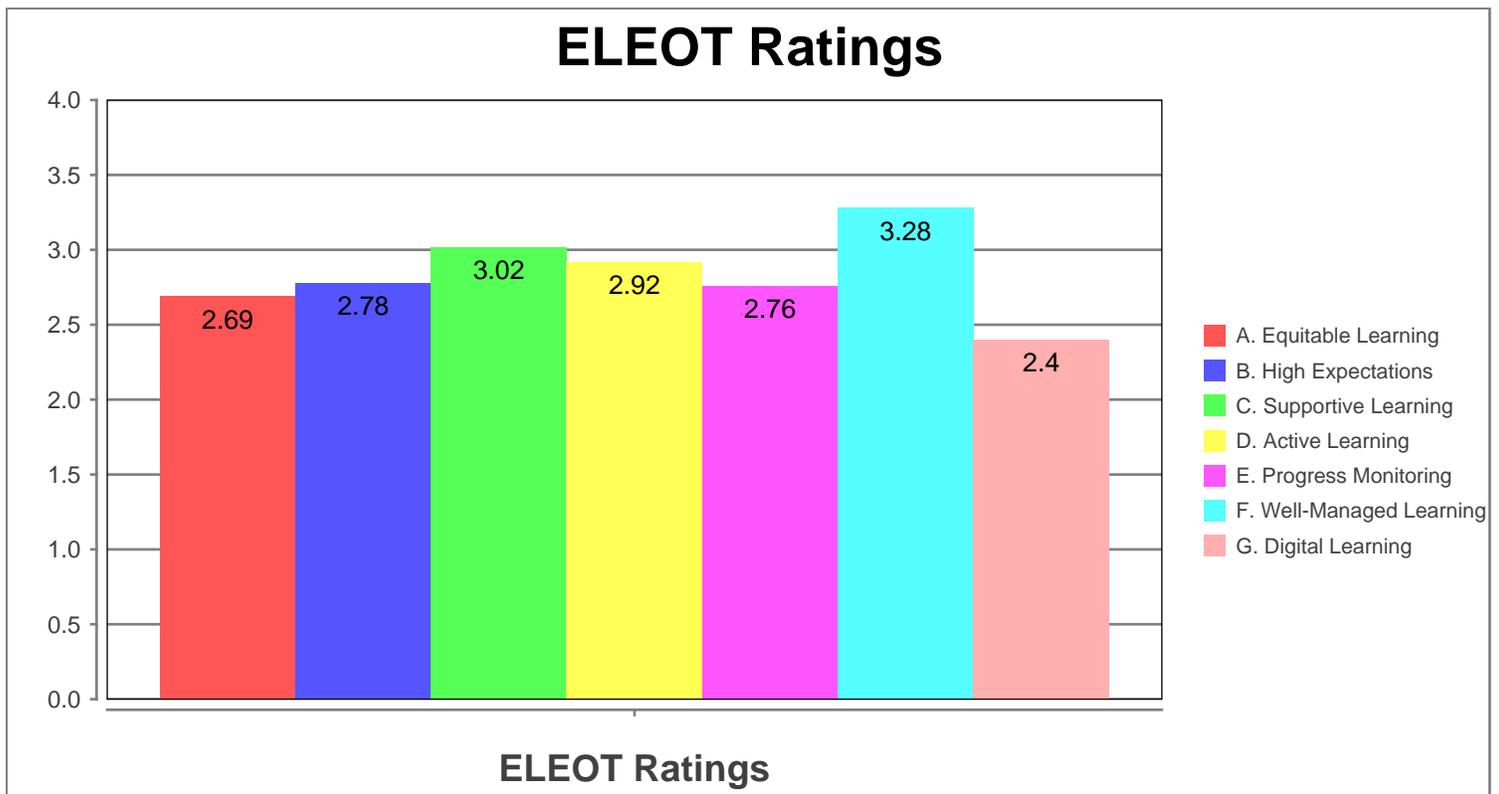| Standard 5			
The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	• Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols • Survey results • Interviews • Observations • Accreditation Report • Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free • Balanced Scorecard	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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 • Survey results • Written protocols and procedures for data collection and analysis • 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 • Balanced Scorecard	3.0
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 • Survey results • Observations • Interviews • Balanced Scorecard, Summer Professional Development	2.0
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 • Observations • Evidence of student readiness for the next level • Evidence of student growth • Evidence of student success at the next level • Balanced Scorecard	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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.	• Accreditation Report • Survey results • Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and 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 • Interviews • Balanced Scorecard	3.0

Learning Environment

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

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

ELEOT Ratings chart. Bar values: A. Equitable Learning 2.69; B. High Expectations 2.78; C. Supportive Learning 3.02; D. Active Learning 2.92; E. Progress Monitoring 2.76; F. Well-Managed Learning 3.28; G. Digital Learning 2.4.

Legend:
- A. Equitable Learning
- B. High Expectations
- C. Supportive Learning
- D. Active Learning
- E. Progress Monitoring
- F. Well-Managed Learning
- G. Digital Learning

Student Performance

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

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

Stakeholder Feedback

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

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

Stakeholder Feedback Evaluation	
Evaluative Criteria	Performance Level
Questionnaire Administration	4.0
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	4.0

Individual Institution Results

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

Institution	Indicator Averages	Questionnaire Administration	Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	Assessment Quality	Test Administration	Quality of Learning	Equity of Learning
Berry Middle School	3.85	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Bluff Park Elementary School	3.67	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0
Brock's Gap Intermediate School	2.94	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
Deer Valley Elementary School	3.12	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
Green Valley Elementary School	3.67	1.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	2.0
Greystone Elementary School	3.33	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
Harriette W. Gwin Elementary School	3.61	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	4.0
Hoover High School	3.97	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0
Ira F. Simmons Middle School	3.27	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0
Riverchase Elementary School	3.55	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	3.0
Robert F. Bumpus Middle School	3.03	1.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	2.0
Rocky Ridge Elementary School	3.58	4.0	2.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
Shades Mountain Elementary School	3.36	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
South Shades Crest School	2.7	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	2.0
Spain Park High School	3.88	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0
Trace Crossings School	3.24	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0

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 AdvancED External Review Team for Hoover City Schools spent three and one half days in the school system visiting schools and the central office. Formal team visits were made to six schools. Due to inclement weather the team had to reverse its visitation schedule and visit schools on the first full day as schools would be closed for the remainder of the visit. Plans were to do a brief walk-through of Crossroads, an alternative and second chance center. Due to the closing of schools this was not possible. All schools were well-prepared for the review and conversed with team members in an open, honest, sharing manner.

The central office was also well-prepared for the external review. All aspects of the process including the schedule and related logistics were thoughtfully planned and executed. Travel, housing, and hospitality were well planned which provided the team with a comfortable work environment.

The External Review Team members actually began their work long before arriving on-site; they engaged in a pre-visit conference call to discuss the visit and receive instructions regarding the review of the large amount of evidence amassed for the review. All required documentation/evidence of the internal review were available for the external review and found to be acceptable and complete.

During the review, the team met with central office leaders, school board members, school level administrators, teachers, and students. Again, due to inclement weather the team had to speak with parent and community stakeholders via teleconference. Among the 196 interviews conducted, there were 54 administrators, 76 teachers, 12 support staff members, 40 students, and 12 or more parent/community stakeholders.

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

The review of Standards and Indicators identified several strengths of Hoover City Schools. The External Review Team noted that the system has been an excellent steward of its fiscal resources; its contingency/fund balance far exceeds the recommended amount set by the state as it has at least 8 months of operating expenses available as a contingency as opposed to two or three months as recommended. Additionally, the team found ultra-modern facilities equipped with leading edge digital technologies for students and staff throughout the system. Without exception the facilities were found to be of good design, spacious, clean, and well maintained.

Instructional materials were found to be appropriate and abundant with class sizes at an acceptable level. The efforts of well-qualified staffs in schools are enhanced by volunteers.

During conversations with stakeholder groups, in almost every instance the issue of diversity within the system was

mentioned as being either a strength and/or challenge. Some considered it a strength because it allows for greater understanding of cultures and adds a new dimension that makes the system a microcosm of society. Other see it as a challenge as the system seeks to ensure that all cultures are equally respected and equally accommodated in manners consistent with the Vision and Purpose. The system is facing significant growth and stakeholders see that as a challenge to maintaining appropriate school and class sizes, maintaining the level and quality of programs and services, as well as meeting other expectations of the system.

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.

During visits to schools team members observed learning environments and found them to be well-managed and supportive. Traditional teaching methods were found to be the norm at the secondary level while elementary schools embraced differentiated instruction. The vast majority of teachers observed by team members used technology during instruction and likewise, students were engaged with technology devices to take notes, access the Internet, read e-books, and submit assignments and class work via the teacher's web page.

The External Review Team observed 57 classrooms with each visit being at least 20 minutes in length. Team members used Educational Learning Environments Observational Tool (ELEOT) to assess seven environments on a 4-point scale. Average overall ratings for each environment are as follows:

- Equitable Learning Environment - 2.69
- High Expectations Environment - 2.78
- Supportive Learning Environment - 3.02
- Active Learning Environment - 2.92
- Progress Monitoring and Feedback - 2.76
- Well-Managed Learning Environment - 3.28
- Digital Learning Environment - 2.40

In the past, accreditation reviews resulted in an accreditation recommendation on status. Labels such as advised, warned, probation, or all clear were used to describe the status of a school relative to the criteria.   Beginning with school year, 2013-14, AdvancED is introducing a new framework to describe the result of an accreditation review. Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduces an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ). The IEQ is comprised of three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) use of resources to support and optimize learning. Therefore, your institution will no longer receive an accreditation status. Instead, your institution will be accredited with an IEQ score. In the case where an institution is failing to meet established criteria, the accreditation will be under review thereby requiring frequent monitoring.

The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and Indicators; the Analysis of Student Performance; and the Engagement and Involvement of Stakeholders. Within each domain institutions will be able to connect to the individual performance levels that are applied in support of the AdvancED Standards and

evaluative criteria. Within the performance levels are detailed descriptors that can be a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Required Action as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected Indicator.

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

IEQ Institutional Score: 302

Teaching and Learning Impact: 295
(Standards 3 and 5; Student Performance Criteria)

Leadership Capacity: 300
(Standards 1 and 2; Stakeholder Engagement Criteria)

Resource Utilization: 325
(Standard 4)

The External Review Team recommends that Hoover City Schools be accredited by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission for a five-year term of accreditation.

The External Review Team commends the School Board, superintendent and his staff, and school principals and their staffs for continued commitment to meeting the AdvancED Standards and providing quality education and services to students, parents, and other stakeholders in the school community. The team offers special thanks to the Director of Federal Programs who guided the self-assessments process and overall planning for a very successful review.

Improvement Priority

1. Develop a component for the district's professional development plan that ensures the acquisition of adequate data analysis skills to enable teachers at all levels to provide differentiated instructional strategies to meet the specific learning needs of all learners; and monitor the application of the skills and use of the strategies especially at the secondary level.

   Related Indicator(s) or Assurance(s):
   5.3 Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.

   Description:
   While listening to presentations and engaging in discussions with stakeholders, the team noted that the system places a priority on enhancing teaching and learning through the use of differentiated instruction. Observations during classroom visits revealed significant use of differentiated instruction at the elementary level, a very small amount at the middle school level, and none at the high school level. This led the team to believe that there is a need for a greater emphasis on teacher training and development in the use of differentiated instruction as a tool to enhance instruction so that they may move toward a more individualized approach to teaching and learning, especially at the secondary level. Increasing teacher skill in the use of differentiated instruction in conjunction with continual individual assessment will position teachers to recognize the diversity in learning and thereby structure lessons to address that diversity. The focus in the classroom will then be on issues and concepts rather than the chapter in the book. The outcome will be that students will begin to explore and expand their understanding of key concepts of the lessons.

2. Expand the focus of the Strategic Plan to be more inclusive of stakeholder populations represented in the school system with a greater depth of awareness of the plan as part of the purpose and direction for the next five years in order to reach a maximum number of stakeholders.

   Related Indicator(s) or Assurance(s):
   1.1 The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.

   Description:
   Evidence from interviews and surveys suggests stakeholder involvement around the Strategic Plan was limited in recruiting a representative group of stakeholders. The system has gone through a significant demographic shift in population in the last five years, which warrants a more inclusive approach to bring a more representative group of stakeholders for input into the purpose and direction discussion. A further examination of the process to promote the purpose and implementation of the Strategic Plan to stakeholders from the boardroom, to the classroom, to parents, and to the community patrons needs to be conducted. Evidence from interviews and surveys suggests that some gaps may exist in the awareness of the strategic plan as it relates to continuous school improvement at the school level with staff and students. Given the Board and system

administration monitor the progress of the Strategic Plan, a concerted effort to engage a more inclusive stakeholder group from schools in the next cycle of strategic planning needs to be addressed to ensure the alignment of school goals with system goals. These actions will strengthen the next cycle of strategic planning and provide a more inclusive approach to the validity of input in guiding the purpose and direction of the system.

Addenda

The External Review Team

Lead Evaluator:
Dr. James W Brown

Associate Lead Evaluator:
Mrs. Belinda W Roberts

Reviewer:
Mrs. Virginia J Massey

Team Member:
Dr. Brindlea Wilson Griffin

Dr. Michael Jeffers

Mrs. Dixie J Lavender

Mrs. Tamera Ann WInkler

Next Steps

The institution should:

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

About AdvancED

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

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

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