



External Review

Stewart County High School

Stewart County Schools

John Hamilton, Principal
P.O. Box 706
Lumpkin, GA 31815

Dr. Gary G Dorough, Lead Evaluator

Date: November 13, 2012 - November 15, 2012

Copyright ©2012 by Advance Education, Inc. AdvancED grants to the Institution, which is the subject of the External Review Team Report, and its designees and stakeholders a non-exclusive, perpetual, irrevocable, royalty-free license and release to reproduce, reprint and distribute this report in accordance with and as protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States of America and all foreign countries. All other rights not expressly conveyed are reserved by AdvancED.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the External Review Process.....	1
Part I: Findings.....	2
Accreditation Standards and Indicators.....	2
Learning Environment.....	14
Part II: Conclusion.....	15
Summary of the External Review.....	15
Required Actions.....	18
Part III: Addenda.....	21
Next Steps.....	21
Celebrating Accreditation.....	21
About AdvancED.....	21

Introduction to the External Review Process

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

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

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

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

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

Part I: Findings

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

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

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

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

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction

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

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

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	3.0

External Review

Stewart County High School

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Minutes from meetings related to development of the school's purpose•Survey results•Examples of communications to stakeholders about the school's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook)•Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the school's purpose	3
1.2	The school's leadership and staff commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the school's statement of purpose•The school's statement of purpose	3
1.3	The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•The school data profile•Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders•Agenda, minutes from continuous improvement planning meetings•The school continuous improvement plan	3

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.

1.3

School leaders implement a documented, systematic continuous improvement process for improving student learning and the conditions that support learning. All stakeholder groups are engaged in the process. School personnel maintain a profile with current and comprehensive data on student and school performance. The school has a designated room to display the analyses of data used to identify goals for the improvement of achievement and instruction that are aligned with the school's purpose. Teachers analyze and monitor EOCT (End of Course Tests) , student achievement in all four core areas, discipline data, and student and teacher attendance data. The SIP (School Improvement Plan) artifact indicates that improvement goals have measurable performance targets, identifies measurable objectives, strategies, activities, resources, and timelines for achieving improvement goals. School leaders hold all school personnel accountable and evaluate the overall quality of the implementation of all interventions and strategies. The process is reviewed and evaluated. Documentation that the process yields improved student achievement and instruction is available and communicated to stakeholders.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

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

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

Standard		Standard Performance Level	
The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.		3.83	
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •School handbooks •Governing body policies, procedures, and practices •Staff handbooks •Student handbooks 	4

External Review

Stewart County High School

2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•List of assigned staff for compliance•Proof of legal counsel•Governing body policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest•Governing code of ethics•Assurances, certifications•Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies	4
2.3	The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Stakeholder input and feedback•Roles and responsibilities of school leadership•School improvement plan developed by the school•Communications regarding board actions•Maintenance of consistent academic oversight, planning, and resource allocation•Agendas and minutes of meetings	4
2.4	Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of decisions in support of the school's continuous improvement plan•Examples of decisions aligned with the school's statement of purpose	4
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Communication plan•Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan	3
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation•Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice and student success noted	4

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

A high-quality and effective system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership"

(Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of quantifiable and intangible characteristics, which include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The school's curriculum and instructional program should develop learners' skills that lead them to think about the world in complex ways (Conley, 2007) and prepare them to have knowledge that extends beyond the academic areas. In order to achieve these goals, teachers must have pedagogical skills as well as content knowledge (Baumert et al, 2010). The acquisition and refinement of teachers' pedagogical skills occur most effectively through collaboration and professional development. These are a "necessary approach to improving teacher quality" (Colbert et al, 2008). According to Marks, Louis, & Printy (2002), school staff that engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective schools, "supports teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

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

Standard		Standard Performance Level	
The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.		3.0	
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The school's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Course schedules •Lesson plans •Posted learning objectives •Course descriptions •Descriptions of instructional techniques 	3
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum •Standards-based report cards •Common assessments •Curriculum writing process 	3

External Review

Stewart County High School

3.3	Teachers engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Professional development focused on these strategies•Findings from supervisor walk-thrus and observations•Agenda items addressing these strategies	2
3.4	School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Peer or mentoring opportunities and interactions•Curriculum maps•Documentation of collection of lesson plans and grade books•Administrative classroom observation protocols and logs	3
3.5	Teachers participate in collaborative learning communities to improve instruction and student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration•Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees•Peer coaching guidelines and procedures	3
3.6	Teachers implement the school's instructional process in support of student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance•Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction	2
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the school's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices•Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff	3
3.8	The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days•Parental/family/caregiver involvement plan including activities, timeframes, and evaluation process•Calendar outlining when and how families are provided information on child's progress	4

External Review

Stewart County High School

3.9	The school has a formal structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Curriculum and activities of formal adult advocate structure •List of students matched to adult advocate 	4
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sample report cards for each grade level and for all courses •Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting •Samples communications to stakeholders about grading and reporting •Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices 	3
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs •Crosswalk between professional learning and school purpose and direction 	3
3.12	The school provides and coordinates learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Data used to identify unique learning needs of students •List of learning support services and student population served by such services 	3

Powerful Practices**Indicator**

1. School leadership has created and supports structures for collaboration.

3.5

Teacher and administrative interviews confirm that the school leadership has created and supports structures for collaboration by providing time for teachers to meet in study groups at least once each week during their planning period, in data teams and content teams after school, and in all-day unit planning teams three or four times during the year. During these meetings, teachers discuss and share instructional and discipline strategies, collect and analyze academic, attendance, and discipline data, develop unit plans, review and analyze assessment data, and participate in professional learning.

2. The school employs a myriad of means to communicate with parents and the community. 3.8
 Parents are informed on a daily, weekly, and monthly bases about activities of the school and pertinent information about their child's progress. An example is a very active Parent Council. The school employs a Family Community Specialist that coordinates parental involvement activities and acts as a liaison between the school and the community. Every month of the school year the, school holds an open house known as "Parents Knight" to give parents an opportunity to have conversations with their child's teachers and to review student work. The school is applauded for requiring every student to carry at all times a weekly Expectation Report Card signed by every teacher that informs parents of their child's grades and discipline for each week. Parents are expected to sign this report on a weekly basis. School news and other pertinent information is communicated through the local newspaper, school website, and a monthly school newsletter.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Increase efforts to encourage students to opt for Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings. 3.1

Interviews with teachers and the administrative staff revealed that only two students were scheduled in the school's two Advance Placement courses. Advanced Placement courses offer a standard level of achievement that provides a reflection of excellence and is recognized by more than 3,600 colleges and universities that annually receive AP exam scores. More than 90% of 4-year colleges in the U.S. provide credit or advanced placement for qualifying scores.

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

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

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

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.		3.57
Indicator	Source of Evidence	Performance Level

External Review

Stewart County High School

4.1	Qualified professional and support staff are sufficient in number to fulfill their roles and responsibilities necessary to support the school's purpose, direction, and the educational program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assessments of staffing needs •Documentation of highly qualified staff 	4
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •School schedule •Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources •School calendar •Alignment of budget with school purpose and direction 	4
4.3	The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Documentation of emergency procedures such as fire drills, evacuation and other emergency procedures. •Safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes 	4
4.4	Students and school personnel use a range of media and information resources to support the school's educational programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information •Data on media and information resources available to students and staff •Budget related to media and information resource acquisition 	3
4.5	The technology infrastructure supports the school's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure •Policies relative to technology use 	3
4.6	The school provides support services to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education •Student assessment system for identifying student needs •Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support •List of support services available to students 	4
4.7	The school provides services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Description of referral process •List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning •Description of IEP process 	3

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.

4.3

School leaders facilitate the development and implementation of policies, practices, and procedures that ensure a safe and orderly learning environment for students and staff. Teacher, student, and parent interviews as well as Review Team observations confirm that the physical plant is well-maintained, clean, and safe. All stakeholders expressed their satisfaction with the execution of daily safety procedures throughout the campus. A well-maintained and clean and safe school climate positively affects student and staff perceptions of the learning environment. Clean, safe schools enhance the overall teaching and learning process in that school.

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

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

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

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

External Review

Stewart County High School

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The school establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free•Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local assessments on student learning and school performance•Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols	3
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze, and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning	3
5.3	Professional and support staff are trained in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data•Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data•Documentation of attendance and training related to data use	3
5.4	The school engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of use of results to evaluate continuous improvement action plans•Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data•Evidence of student readiness for the next level•Evidence of student success at the next level•Evidence of student growth•Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning	3

External Review

Stewart County High School

5.5	Leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•School quality control procedures for monitoring information about student learning, conditions that support learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals•Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups•Communication plan regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders•Minutes of board meetings regarding achievement of student learning goals	4
-----	---	---	---

Learning Environment

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

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

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT)

<i>Environments</i>	<i>Level</i>
Enter the Equitable Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.5
Enter the High Expectations Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.3
Enter the Supportive Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.0
Enter the Active Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.7
Enter the Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.4
Enter the Well-Managed Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.2
Enter the Digital Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.2

Part II: Conclusion

Summary of the External Review

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

An External Review Team representing the SACS CASI Georgia State Office (SACS-CASI-GA), a division of AdvancED, visited Stewart County Middle/High School in Lumpkin, Georgia, United States on 11/13/2012-11/15/2012.

During the review, members of the External Review Team interviewed 2 members of the administrative team, 12 students, 10 parents, and 20 teachers. In addition, the media specialist, ROTC instructor, counselor and curriculum specialist were interviewed. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the five AdvancED Standards.

Prior to the external review, the team examined the school's Self Assessment and Executive Summary. Interviews revealed that a focus team comprised of administrators, teachers, students and community members met numerous times throughout the spring and summer and solicited input from all stakeholders in their Self Assessment process. Interviews confirm that the Standards Self Assessment was generated from a stakeholder approach reflecting desire to maintain a school with a mission that provides a safe, nurturing atmosphere in which to guide an impoverished student body through a standards-based classroom curriculum with character enrichment.

The school's profile was also examined by the Review Team and was found to comprehensively represent the school, its students, and the school community. The school has initiated a collection of demographic and student achievement data for use in continuous improvement planning.

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.

Interviews, classroom observations, and reviews of artifacts revealed a number of Powerful Practices being employed by the school as well as opportunities for the school to better serve its students. The Powerful Practices observed are:

A common organizing framework for instruction in all classrooms informs the teaching and learning process. The school is commended for designing and using a variety of academic support structures to meet the instructional needs of students who are identified as at-risk of not meeting standards and/or not passing EOCT's. Examples include Monday School (a day set aside for remediation), "Knight Time"(a daily assigned period of time for remediation), an accelerated reading program, front loading 9th grade students a week prior to the beginning of the school term for a thorough high school orientation, and daily after school teacher tutorials.

School leadership has created and supports structures for collaboration by providing time for teachers to meet in study groups at least once each week during their planning period, in data teams and content teams after school, and in all-day unit planning teams three or four times during the year.

Staff members are provided numerous opportunities to participate in instructional leadership development experiences and to serve in instructional leadership roles, i.e., serve on Design Team, conduct study group meetings, deliver professional learning, serve as mentors, participate in peer focus walks, and present at state and national conferences.

The principal consistently employs management and organizational practices that provide a supportive learning environment for teachers and students. The administration maintains high visibility in the building and at school and community events.

Opportunities are provided for staff members and other stakeholders to provide input and to share in decision-making and problem-solving. This ensures shared responsibility and ownership for the achievement of student and organizational targets.

The culture of classrooms reflects a consistently supportive and risk-free learning environment, as evidenced in 96% of classrooms observed.

The school employs a myriad of means to communicate with parents and the community. Examples include Parent Council, Family Community Specialist, monthly Parents' "Knight" Conversations, weekly Expectation Report Card, local newspaper, website, school newsletters, home visits, and telephone calls.

Interviews, classroom observations, and artifact review revealed the following opportunities for the school to better serve its students:

Use a variety of assessment tools consistently to monitor and adjust instruction in all core areas such as peer response groups, constructed responses, rubrics, reflective assessments, performance tasks, journals, and projects.

Ensure that research-based instruction becomes consistent practice by engaging all students actively in work that is authentic and standards-driven. Encourage all learners to use higher-order thinking skills and processes and expand the use of performance tasks that require students to produce work that demonstrates conceptual understanding of the standards.

Ensure that all teachers differentiate instruction to support and meet each student's instructional needs by frequently using purposeful, flexible groups based on data (diagnostic or readiness, interests, and learning styles). Execute lessons that are differentiated by process, product and/or content by using a variety of strategies, e.g., tiered lessons, parallel tasks, scaffolding, targeted mini-lessons, anchor activities, open-ended questions.

Integrate a variety of flexible grouping strategies with specific instructional purposes in order to move to research-based strategies that promote student engagement.

Increase teacher and student use of available modern electronic instructional technology as one way to enhance differentiation of instruction, support learning of specific content, increase student engagement, reinforce higher-order thinking skills, collect formative assessment data to adjust instruction, and facilitate student investigation and analysis of information.

Provide additional professional learning for all teachers in the appropriate use of available technology.

Increase rigor and high expectations for achievement of all students by ensuring that teachers collaborate to develop a common understanding of the intended outcome(s) of the standards. Teachers should communicate the language of the standard throughout the sequencing of the lesson and incorporate all elements of the CCGPS (Common Core Georgia Performance Standards) at a rigorous level where student work requires higher-order reasoning and independent application of CCGPS.

Engage students in working with teachers to jointly establish challenging learning goals and to evaluate their own performance using benchmark work, anchor papers, posted examples of student work noting areas that meet the standards/elements, rubrics, scoring guides, checklists, and teacher feedback from written commentary that references the language of the standards.

Seek additional opportunities to involve the faith community, community service agencies, and business partnerships in reinforcing the ability of the school to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of all students.

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

The External Review Team observed 27 classrooms. The team found that materials and resources are effectively allocated and that classroom management is conducive to student learning. Instruction is provided in a safe and orderly environment. Instructional time is maximized and the culture of the classrooms reflects a risk-free learning environment. An instructional framework is posted in all classrooms with an opening, work session, and closing along with I Can statements. However, observations also revealed that some lesson/units were not clearly aligned with the states' curriculum and the learning goal(s) were not communicated to students by the instructor.

The Review Team observed higher order thinking skills and processes in only a third of the classrooms visited. Although teachers have had extensive training in the area of differentiation of instruction, observations revealed little use of differentiated instruction and classroom grouping strategies. Teachers grouped students for tasks and often students were working on the same content, product, or using the

same process. The school has been adequately retrofitted for the use of modern technology and interviews and artifact perusal indicate that teachers have also been involved in professional learning to integrate technology into lessons/units. The team only observed teachers integrating the use of technology effectively in 19% of the classrooms visited and students were effectively using technology during the class period in only 41% of classrooms.

The External Review Team found Stewart County Middle/High to be a quality school led by a skilled, dedicated and talented professional staff, involved parents, and a supportive community that collectively encourages and supports student success. It is evident throughout the school that instructional improvement that results in improving student achievement is the highest priority.

The Review Team certifies that the school has satisfactorily met the requirements of an Advanc-ED Accreditation External Review and certifies that Stewart County Middle/High School meets all the standards for re-accreditation. Consequently, the Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, that Stewart County Middle/High School be awarded Accreditation.

The External Review Team expresses appreciation to the professional staff at the school, members of the Board of Education, parents, and other community representatives for their hospitality extended during the visit. The External Review Team challenges the professional staff and the Board of Education to receive and study this report and through consensus, act on the recommendations in order to improve and enhance the quality and capacity of the school 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.

Required Actions

1. Ensure that research-based instructional strategies are consistently and pervasively implemented.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.3

Observations and interviews revealed that teachers perceive they are using a variety of research-based instructional strategies. However, classroom observation data indicate emerging to operational implementation of standards-based instructional strategies used to meet the instructional needs of students. Ensuring that research-based practices are consistently and pervasively implemented will promote active student engagement and significantly impact student achievement. Teachers who were interviewed stated that they emphasize and encourage learners to use higher-order thinking skills. However, student work products, classroom discussions, and teacher questioning do not routinely reflect higher order thinking skills specifically related to the elements of the standards.

Classroom observations showed that higher-order thinking skills and processes were used by teachers during instruction in only 33% of the classrooms visited and evident in student work in only 44%. To ensure that the rigor of grade-level work is consistent from class to class, use the language of the standards and elements throughout the instructional period. Also, greater emphasis on thinking skills, processes, and habits of mind will enhance student engagement. The Review Team noted that questions referenced during instruction were frequently at the recall level. Consider posting examples of higher-order thinking skills questioning techniques in all classrooms as a reminder to teachers to increase the use of this research-based practice.

2. Ensure that all teachers differentiate instruction to support and meet each student's instructional needs.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.12

The Review Team observed very little differentiation of instruction in the 27 classrooms that were observed. Teacher interviews indicated that some staff members are unclear as to what constitutes differentiated instruction. It is recommended that the school review the common definition and ensure a true shared understanding of differentiated instruction. A long-term commitment to professional learning in this area will maximize learning opportunities for all students.

A variety of flexible grouping practices enhances opportunities for differentiated instruction. Teachers indicated that they do not consistently or often use flexible grouping based on diagnostic and formative assessments. In the classrooms observed, the teacher implemented flexible grouping strategies in only 15% of the visits. Teachers are encouraged to use flexible grouping based on assessment data and instructional needs to enhance achievement of individual students

3. Integrate modern technology into daily instruction more effectively.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 4.5

During classroom observations, the Review Team observed teachers effectively integrating technology into the lesson in only 19% of the 27 classrooms visited. The school will benefit from additional professional development on integrating modern technology into the curriculum as an effective tool to support conceptual understanding of content, increase student engagement, reinforce higher-order thinking skills, increase opportunities for differentiation of instruction, collect formative assessment data, and reinforce students' ability to investigate and analyze information. Research indicates that when students use technology as a tool or a support for communicating with others, they are more likely to be actively thinking about information, making choices, and executing skills than is typical in teacher-led lessons.

4. Ensure that teachers use recent, relevant assessment data to continually monitor and adjust instruction and to provide feedback to students on a frequent and consistent basis.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 5.1

Staff surveys indicated that not all teachers administer multiple diagnostic assessments to adjust instruction in order to accommodate students' readiness levels. Using the results of pre-tests to identify student needs and designing instruction to meet those needs is a critical next step.

Teachers stated that they use a variety of formative assessments in order to monitor student progress and to adjust instruction. However, classroom observations revealed formative assessments in only 59% of visits. Observers noted that the assessments frequently focused on an informal check for understanding and quality standards-based feedback was often not provided. Although interviews indicated that "clickers" (a student-teacher response system) are available and used by teachers, there was no evidence of them being used in any of the 27 classroom visits. Emphasizing the importance of using formative assessment data to identify student learning needs and of providing timely and effective narrative feedback to students will improve instruction and student achievement.

Diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments along with timely feedback all play a vital role in revealing the needs of students and adjusting instruction accordingly.

Part III: Addenda

Next Steps

The institution should:

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

About AdvancED

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

External Review

Stewart County High School

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