



External Review

Stewart County Middle School

Stewart County Schools

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Introduction to the External Review Process

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

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

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

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

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

Part I: Findings

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

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

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

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

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction

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

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

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The 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.	3.33

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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">•Documentation or description of the process for creating the school's purpose including the role of stakeholders•Minutes from meetings related to development of the school's purpose•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•Survey results•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	4

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. Rules, policies, and procedures are clearly-stated, widely-circulated, and consistently understood by the principal, teachers, students, and stakeholders.

1.2

Minutes of faculty meetings and meetings with stakeholders include many references to the school's vision, mission, and goals, as well as expectations for student behavior and performance rules. Positive motivational ideas are posted throughout the school. Clear, coherent rules and expectations and consistent enforcement result in a safe, orderly environment. Such an environment facilitates student learning.

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.		3.5	
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 •Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions •Staff handbooks •Student handbooks 	4

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2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Governing body minutes relating to training•Governing body policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest•Governing code of ethics•Assurances, certifications•Communications about program regulations•Communication plan to inform all staff on code of ethics, responsibilities, conflict of interest	3
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">•School improvement plan developed by the school•Communications regarding board actions•Agendas and minutes of meetings•Personnel Handbook, Design Team Members	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 collaboration and shared leadership•Survey results•Examples of decisions in support of the school's continuous improvement plan•Survey for Four-day Week, Study Group Minutes, Design Team Planning Session	3
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Communication plan•Minutes from meetings with stakeholders•Survey responses•Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan	3

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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 •Representative supervision and evaluation reports •Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice and student success noted •Job specific criteria •PLU Calendar, SMART Goals, Evaluation Forms, Focus Walk Results, RESA Consultants 	4
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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
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The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.		3.42	
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">•Learning expectations for different courses•Representative samples of student work across courses•Course schedules•Lesson plans•Posted learning objectives•Enrollment patterns for various courses•Descriptions of instructional techniques•Digital Notebook, Standard Based Classroom, Thinking Maps, Instructional Framework, I Can Statements	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•Common assessments•Curriculum guides•Products – scope and sequence, curriculum maps•Digital Notebook, CCGPS Resources, disaggregated data	3
3.3	Teachers engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Agenda items addressing these strategies•Teacher evaluation criteria•Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource•Interdisciplinary projects•Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool•Professional Development, Findings from Supervisor Walk-throughs, Meeting Notebooks	3

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3.4	School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Supervision and evaluation procedures •Peer or mentoring opportunities and interactions •Curriculum maps •Examples of improvements to instructional practices resulting from the evaluation process •Documentation of collection of lesson plans and grade books •Administrative classroom observation protocols and logs •Digital Notebook, GPS Notebook, Peer Walks, Data, observations, coaching comments, posted framework, and I Can Statements 	4
3.5	Teachers participate in collaborative learning communities to improve instruction and student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings •Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration •Common language, protocols and reporting tools •Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees •Examples of cross curricular projects, interdisciplinary instruction, and classroom action research project •Peer coaching guidelines and procedures •Meeting Protocol, Meeting Structure 	4
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 •Samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student learning •I Can Statements, Instructional Framework, Digital Notebook 	3

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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•Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to school beliefs and values about teaching and learning•Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff•Records of meetings and walk thrus/feedback sessions•Beginning Teachers Institute, Teacher Institute	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">•Survey results•Calendar outlining when and how families are provided information on child's progress•Parent Notification Booklet, Expectation Report Card, Monthly Parent Conversations, Awards Day, Parent Council, Newsletters, Conferences, Progress Reports	4
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">•List of students matched to adult advocate•Description of formal adult advocate structures•Caring Adult in the Building, Counseling Sessions, Caring List, Seven Habits of Effective Teens	3
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•Samples communications to stakeholders about grading and reporting•Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices•Newsletters, Monthly Calendars, Disaggregated Data, Syllabus	4

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3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Evaluation tools for professional learning•Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs•Observable Results, PLU Roster, PLU Calendar, Achievement Results	4
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•Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning•PLU Topics, Statewide Longitudinal Data System, RTI Process, CAB	3

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The principal and teachers have a deep understanding of curriculum, assessment, and instruction and they regularly analyze data to make decisions about instructional practices.

3.2

The school has a data room that includes historical test data by grade for all subjects during the past six years. They also have report card data for the current year. Design Team minutes reflect the discussion of academic strengths, weaknesses, and areas of regular progress. A constant awareness of how well students are progressing and how to make adjustments when they are not are key ways to monitor student progress.

2. Teachers participate in learning teams throughout the year and they meet to plan instruction on a regular basis. Their collaborative work is aligned with the school improvement goals.

3.5

The school improvement plan is available along with Design Team minutes reflecting the discussion of data analyses and changes made to instruction. Making changes to instructional strategies based upon students' academic needs helps ensure that students' learning needs are being met.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. The school should establish a process by which the effectiveness of professional learning is not only measured by the teachers' acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also by documented changes in teacher practices based upon that learning.

3.5

Developing a method of evaluating changes in teacher practices based upon their professional learning and the effectiveness of those changes will enhance the quality of teaching practices. Minutes of the Design Team reflect a range of topics that were discussed as well as the data that were analyzed. No results exist that document the effectiveness of changes in teacher practices resulting from these meetings.

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
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"> •Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff •Documentation of highly qualified staff •School budgets for the last three years •Advertisements for Vacancies, Retention Stipends, Leadership Minutes, Interview Questions, Published Budget 	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 •Alignment of budget with school purpose and direction •Professional Development Plan, After School Roster, Intercession Roster 	4

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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 compliance with local and state inspections requirements•Documentation of emergency procedures such as fire drills, evacuation and other emergency procedures.•Maintenance schedules•System for maintenance requests•Crisis Management Manual, Board Walk-throughs, Evacuation Maps, Summer cleaning Schedule	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•Budget related to media and information resource acquisition•Media Schedule, Reading count List, List of Media Resources, RESA Survey	3
4.5	The technology infrastructure supports the school's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Policies relative to technology use•Assessments to inform development of technology plan•Technology Committee, Parent resource Lab, Career Center, RESA Survey	4
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">•Schedule of family services, e.g., parent classes, survival skills•List of support services available to students•Seven habits of Effective Teens, Caring Adults in the Building, Consultant, Parent Involvement Coordinator, Family Community Specialist, Counselor	3
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•RTI Process, Counseling Orientations and Sessions	3

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.		3.8	
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"> •Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols •Study Island, USA Test Prep, On Line Assessment System, Coach Connected, Carnegie Learning, Coach Books 	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 •Written protocols and procedures for data collection and analysis •Data Teams, Data Room, SMART Goals, Statewide Longitudinal Data System, Disaggregated Data 	4

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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•Survey results•Policies specific to data training•Documentation of attendance and training related to data use•PLU Plan, Prior Approval Forms	4
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 growth•Data Room, Disaggregated Data, Data Notebooks, Data Charts	4
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•Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals•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•Stakeholder Luncheons, School Improvement Plan, Title I Plan, Parent Council, Peer walks, Focus Walks, GLISI Teams	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).	2.6
Enter the High Expectations Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.4
Enter the Supportive Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.3
Enter the Active Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.9
Enter the Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.5
Enter the Well-Managed Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.6
Enter the Digital Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	1.2

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.

The onsite review lasted for two and a half days. The school was highly-prepared and housed a well-organized data room that contained numerous documents and artifacts. The External Review Team was well-received and treated hospitably. Additionally, the school was open and honest in its self-assessment and was eager to share information. Presentations were made by the principal and the principal was also interviewed. In addition, the media specialist, seven teachers, eight students, eight parents, and the parent facilitator were also interviewed. Overall, a total of 26 stakeholders were interviewed.

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.

Stewart County is a small, poor, rural county in Southwest Georgia. Stewart County Middle School is defined by its incredibly small size and the high level of poverty among its students. The total enrollment in grades six through eight during the visit was 109. That enrollment level greatly restricts the flexibility of scheduling and the availability of state funding. The ability to offer elective courses in the arts and careers is practically nonexistent. Projections are that the population will continue to decline.

The scarcity of state earnings is made worse by the lack of local resources. One of the cost-saving measures that the school system has undertaken is to conduct classes for additional time on Tuesdays through Fridays and not having class on Mondays.

Many positive attributes exist for the school and all standards were rated at level three or four. There is a clearly stated vision, a clear mission, and precise goals established. These are all widely distributed and emphasized on a regular basis. The school is clean and orderly and interactions among professional staff and between staff and students are marked by mutual respect. Parents feel very welcome at the school and they are very satisfied with the principal and teachers.

The principal and the teachers analyze test data, report cards, and other measures of student performance regularly. All are aware of current progress levels for the school, various subject areas, and individual students. Teachers meet regularly to review progress and to make adjustments to teaching.

Though size and financial resource challenges exist, there is still room for further school improvement. This room for further improvement includes ensuring the high performance of all students, increasing the effective use of technology, and measuring the effectiveness of professional learning. Focused professional learning that increases teacher use of higher-order questioning and tasks, differentiated instruction, and flexible grouping strategies will result in higher student performance. Coupled with that is the need to magnify the effective use of technology by teachers and students. Teachers who already use

technology effectively are a valuable resource for assisting those teachers who are not yet proficient.

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.

In spite of all of the size and fiscal constraints it faces, the school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. The school has also been named one of 56 High Progress Schools in Georgia and a Title I School of Distinction. The school is proud of its standards-based classrooms and its steady improvements on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT).

Progressing off the Needs improvement List has some drawbacks. As a "Needs Improvement" school, Stewart County Middle School qualified for funds for additional instruction after school and during the summer. Making Adequate Yearly Progress disqualifies the school from receiving those funds.

The External Review Team thanks the principal, teachers, students, and parents for their gracious hospitality and cooperation during the recent visit.

While student enrollment has dropped, the professional staff at the school has remained stable. An advantage to this stability is the fact that the principal and the faculty are committed to refusing to accept excuses for students not learning or not behaving. Their challenge is to sustain the academic progress that has been made, while increasing student capacity to learn through a variety of teaching practices and more effective use of technology. They must also review the focus of professional learning and ensure that it leads to positive changes in student achievement.

The review team recommends that the school be granted a new five-year term of accreditation by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. The school must provide ongoing professional learning to ensure high performance for all students by increasing the teacher use of higher-order thinking questioning techniques and performance tasks; flexible grouping strategies to move away from a majority of whole group instruction; differentiated instruction, and student direct use of technology.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.3

Classroom observations, lesson plans, and teacher surveys reveal that whole group instruction is the predominant form of instruction delivery. Active engagement is often associated with effective student learning. The frequent use of differentiated instruction, higher-order thinking skills, and flexible grouping are more likely to engage all types of learners than whole group instruction.

2. The school must increase teacher and student use of technology as an effective tool to support the understanding and application of core content, to reinforce higher-order thinking skills, and to increase opportunities for the differentiation of instruction.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 4.4

Classroom observations and a review of lesson plans illustrate that available electronic resources in classrooms were used mainly like overhead and opaque projectors. Limited creative use was made of these tools. The creative use of technological resources for simulations, original productions, and as search engines would expand subject matter knowledge, facilitate these use of higher-order thinking skills, and make these tools more effective learning aids.

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 Middle 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.