

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Dodge County School System**
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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), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

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About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

Background. Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and Schools (SACS CASI) accredit public and private schools and districts in 30 states, the Navajo Nation, Latin America, and the Department of Defense Schools worldwide.

In 2006, NCA CASI, SACS CASI, and the research and development arm of the accrediting associations, the National Study of School Evaluation, unified to form AdvancED. Dedicated to advancing excellence in education, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 23,000 schools in 65 countries, serving 15 million students.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help schools, school districts, and educational service agencies continuously improve.

The Accreditation Process. To earn and maintain accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, school districts and their schools must:

- 1) Meet the AdvancED Standards and Policies for Quality School Systems.** School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards and policies which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement.** School districts and their schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose that the school district is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school and district effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results).
- 3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.** School districts and schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, school districts host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the school district improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school district and a written report detailing the team's required actions. The school district acts on the team's required actions and submits a progress report two years following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school district community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help school districts and their schools maximize student success and improve organizational effectiveness

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

Purpose. The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

1. Evaluate the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and policies.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and required actions to improve the district and its schools.
4. Make an accreditation recommendation for review by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

A key aim of the Quality Assurance Review is to verify that the school district is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

School District Preparation. To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school district and the community complete the AdvancED Standards Assessment Report. The report engages the district in an in-depth self assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school district identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that it is meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school district examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school district effectiveness.

Summary of Team Activities. The Quality Assurance Review Team is led by an AdvancED certified District Lead Evaluator and comprised of professionals from outside the school district. The team reviews the findings of the school district's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school district, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school district's adherence to the standards for accreditation. The team provides an oral exit report and prepares a written Quality Assurance Review Team Report designed to help the school district and its schools improve.

The Quality Assurance Review Team Report. Following the visit, the review team completes the Quality Assurance Review report. After review by a nationally-trained reader, the report is submitted to the district. The report contains commendations and required actions for improvement.

Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions. The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the required actions. Following the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, the school district must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress it has made on the team's required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district is addressing the required actions.

Accreditation Recommendation. The Quality Assurance Review team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school district following action from the commission.

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI Georgia State Office (SACS-CASI-GA), a division of AdvancED, visited Dodge County School System on 10/03/2010 - 10/06/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 23 administrators, 90 teachers, 26 support staff, 72 parents and business partners, 58 students, and 7 Board of Education members for a total of 276 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 5 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documenting and Using Results
5. Resource and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems with a school district and systematic methods of attaining high student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of the standards lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards. The Quality Assurance Review Team used the AdvancED standards to guide its review of the school district, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school district and its schools function as a whole and embody the practices and characteristics of a quality school district.

Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

The Quality Assurance Review Team also examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team's findings in this area can be found following the standard reports.

The team used the standard reports and quality assurance findings to identify common themes, significant accomplishments, and pressing needs facing the district. These became the basis for the overall commendations and required actions that are provided below. The commendations and required actions should serve as the focus for the district as it acts on the team's findings. They represent the areas that the team believes will have the greatest impact in helping the district further its improvement efforts. The standard reports and quality assurance findings can be used to help reinforce and enrich the district's understanding of the commendations and required actions.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Dodge County School System for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted.

Commendation 1

Commendation Statement:

The School Board & leadership have demonstrated a willingness and commitment to move the district forward with a focus on continuously improving all aspects of the system.

Evidence:

Through the development of Board Policies, the budget, and the Administrative Procedures Manual, the system leadership and Board have demonstrated a strong will and vision to support the collaboratively developed school improvement plans and the identified goals of the system. This support is evident in human, material, fiscal, and physical resources being provided throughout a challenging financial situation.

Rationale:

This strength of leadership support shows the community that education is important and that the Board and all district personnel are committed to continuously improving. When commitment and vision combine with resources used wisely in a systematic manner, the attainment of the goals will be more readily met.

Commendation 2

Commendation Statement:

The community's active involvement in supporting the students of Dodge County School System is outstanding and has a direct positive impact on teaching and learning.

Evidence:

Community support and involvement are evident at the district level and at the school sites. Several local agencies work with the school system to support students and families, including Girls and Boys Club and Dodge Connection: A Communities in Schools Approach, Inc. Each AdvancED Standard Committee had a community/business member as well as a parent serving in the self-assessment process.

Rationale:

"It takes a village to raise a child," is a quotation often used to describe the advantages of having all come together for support of the children. This is exemplified throughout Dodge County as the community and businesses work with the school system in pursuit of the mission for all students to graduate. This goal is pervasive from Kindergarten through grade twelve.

Commendation 3

Commendation Statement:

The Board and the system leadership have made challenging financial decisions in a systematic manner based on how to best support the district goals.

Evidence:

Despite difficult financial times, the Board and system leadership have kept their focus on school improvement. This is evident in providing professional development in the areas of differentiation and the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). The system has also provided parent mentors, academic support coaches, and a curriculum director to support the improvement initiatives.

Rationale:

These commitments by the district in support of the educational program have had a significant impact on student achievement as test scores have risen, the graduation rate has improved, and with data being used in a more effective way.

Commendation 4

Commendation Statement:

A shared focus and commitment among all stakeholders to incorporate the system's goals and individual school plans for the purpose of increasing academic achievement is evident.

Evidence:

The system's Board-approved goals were developed in a collaborative manner with school, district, parent, and community input. Individual school improvement plans address goals that support the system's goals, including math score improvement, differentiated instruction, and improved reading/ELA scores. Professional development activities have addressed each of these areas in the pursuit of student improvement.

Rationale:

A focus with schools, district, community, and the Board supporting the same vision increases the probability of increased student achievement. The commitment of necessary resources to address the efforts for high student performance is vital.

Required Actions

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall effectiveness of the school district. The Dodge County School System will be held accountable for making progress on each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the required actions.

Required Action 1

Required Action:

Proactively address future revenue through a Board-approved prioritized plan on how to maintain and sustain services and resources that are currently provided for by grants that will expire.

Evidence:

Currently, the system receives a number of grants that provide personnel and resources to the system and the

schools. These resources, such as academic coaches in each school building, have made a significant impact on the instructional program. Considering future situations and the fiscal situation, the team has concerns about the sustainability of many of the resources presently being provided by grant sources that are directly supporting the teaching and learning.

Rationale:

Being proactive as a school system in exploring and pursuing funding options, in a planned and systematic manner for grants that will expire, provides the opportunity for continuity of successful practices.

Required Action 2

Required Action:

Communicate and use the results of improvement efforts to ensure that decisions are being made for curriculum and instruction that support the system's continuous improvement efforts.

Evidence:

The system monitors implementation of instructional strategies that support student achievement and county improvement goals at the school level through focus walks and classroom observations. However, little evidence was shown to support that there is a systemic process to communicate this data at the school level so that decisions can be made for the revision and adjustment of curriculum and instruction. Evidence was not available to show that new improvement efforts for the system or the school are informed by the results of this data other than as feedback for individuals to evaluate their own professional needs.

Rationale:

Systemic review of system level and school level data regarding the implementation of the action steps on the continuous improvement plan by stakeholders will ensure that there is significant improvement of student performance, system, and school effectiveness as stakeholders engage in the continuous improvement process.

Required Action 3

Required Action:

Fully implement one systemic process with district and school metrics that drive improvement, allocation of resources, professional development, and monitoring of the system's pursuit of its vision.

Evidence:

The system's efforts to establish a solid foundation for future improvement is being realized; however, it is now time for the district to establish and commit to a clear set of performance metrics to monitor and determine its ability to meet future objectives. Through interviews and a review of documentation, there was evidence of the district's leadership in providing new academic initiatives and support for school improvement. However, there was little evidence of a clear set of measurable objectives that the district is holding itself accountable to achieve. Although there have recently been significant improvement initiatives in many areas including student achievement, the district needs to clearly define the performance benchmarks that the district and its schools will seek to achieve each year. Such benchmarks need to provide a longitudinal and clear pathway to meeting or exceeding state and federal expectations.

Rationale:

The capacity of a school district to monitor and determine the impact of improvement efforts is dependent upon quantifying and measuring clearly stated expectations. A systemic approach to improvement must clearly

communicate the performance metrics that Dodge County School System is holding itself accountable to achieving at both the school and district levels. Thus, all entities within the system are focused on the shared vision and expectations that will build capacity for excellence.

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools: The team reviewed the district's adherence to each of the AdvancED standards. The findings from this review are provided in the next section of this report.

Next Steps

The school district 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 commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.
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 school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.
5. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/arn, provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help school districts and their schools with continuous improvement.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for review and action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school district. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school district should celebrate its achievement with the community. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and other related items can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school district, its schools, and community in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the commendations and address the required actions noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school district to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

The Quality Assurance Review Team divided into standard teams to review each standard and prepare a standards report summarizing the team's findings. These standard reports, along with the quality assurance findings that follow these reports, provided the basis for the team's identification of over-arching commendations and required actions presented earlier in this report. The reports submitted by each team are provided on the following pages for the district's review and use. Each report reflects its respective team's unique voice, perspective, and deliberations. The reports can be used to help enrich and deepen the district's understanding of the overall commendations and required actions.

Standard 1: Vision & Purpose

Standard: The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

Description:

Dodge County School System (DCSS) has collaboratively developed a mission, vision, belief statements, and goals with all stakeholder groups being involved. The mission, "Dedicated to Our Desire to Graduate Everyone," is well understood and supported by stakeholders as evidence through interviews with district and school-based groups. Stakeholder understanding and support of the mission has been developed through multiple means of communicating that the mission of graduation for all is inclusive of K-12 and services being provided in the district. The vision components are evident in all school buildings in poster format as well as being printed in district materials and on the school's website. Team members even observed school children giving a cheer addressing the district mission.

To further advance the mission, additional support measures developed by the district include core values, belief statements, and goals. The district goals include:

- Continue to increase graduation rate,
- Increase focus on academics and student achievement,
- Increase stakeholder involvement and
- Increase differentiation in classrooms to meet the needs of all students.

The review process of the district's vision was systematically organized by the district's Standard One committee which included representatives from each school, community, parents, and administration. Individual schools and school councils had the opportunity to provide input through the committee representatives. This wide involvement in creating the vision component revisions was instrumental in developing the full support and focus that is prevalent in the district.

Dodge County School System has developed a comprehensive profile that includes information regarding its students, school effectiveness, and the community. The community description includes historical information and demographic information in both narrative and graphic formats. A summary of student

performance across the district is provided and includes comparison data. The school system has recently published a "State of the Schools 2010-2011" booklet which is presently being distributed throughout the schools and community. This booklet provides a comprehensive description of the academic programs with pertinent data of results. It was a community effort with many business partners providing fiscal support through advertisements.

It was evident to the team that the district has been diligent in providing leadership with constantly having the mission as the focus for impacting teaching and learning. Professional development activities have been implemented that address differentiated instruction, subgroup low performance on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) in the areas of math, reading and writing, and a motivational workshop. All K-12 schools have access to academic coaches to provide support for all teachers and students. The academic coaches work collaboratively with administrators and central office to ensure that all remain focused on the vision, purpose, and goals. The district works closely with its schools to ensure that each school's improvement plan contains measurable goals that are aligned with the system vision and goals. Although the system's vision and purpose is beginning to guide the teaching and learning process, it is less evident that it guides the strategic direction of all departments and services in the system. The team believes that one systemic process with all district departments and schools will DCSS's pursuit with its mission.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The process of revising the mission was a collaborative effort involving input from several groups of stakeholders.
- The communication strategies utilized by the system have generated support of the mission and goals by school personnel, parents, and community.
- The profile provides a comprehensive description of the system including student performance, school effectiveness, and community demographics.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Expand an emphasis of the revised mission to guiding the strategic direction of all system departments and services.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Dodge County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "ion & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2: Governance & Leadership

Standard: The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

Description:

DCSS establishes and communicates policies and procedures for an effective operation of the system. This is apparent through the organizational chart, the fact that school board members attend Georgia School Board Association (GSBA) trainings, and the School Board is presently seeking the GSBA "Standards Board" process. The School Board Policy Manual lays out the governance policies for the Board and Superintendent. Other meaningful artifacts that clarify governance roles are school and county level professional development plans, and the system Administrative Procedures Manual.

Through interviews, observations, and review of artifacts, the team evidenced a cohesive Board focused on fulfilling the system's mission. The administration and the School Board meet twice a year through a "Retreat" to discuss the system improvement plans and to update and revise their policies and administrative procedures to ensure continued compliance with requirements. For stakeholder input, the Board and Superintendent have formal processes to gather input from the various stakeholders, including "School Councils," "Leadership Teams," adhoc parent committees, and active involvement with community organizations. Additionally, a number of surveys have been used to gather stakeholder input on a variety of issues. The Superintendent provides updated system news through a weekly letter published in the local newspaper.

The addition of a system level Curriculum Coordinator has enabled the system to have a solid district-wide approach to support the schools in the implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards. This has also given a system level approach on mustering resources in a limited financial environment to focus on academic achievement. The addition of the Academic Coach Teachers has given the teachers and other system personnel an opportunity to review data in an effective way to improve instruction.

The Board and administrative staff have worked hard to obtain grants and business partner donations to help maintain and add to quality despite state and local government budget reductions. This is evident through the hiring of academic coaches, an inclusion coordinator, parent mentors, and a very comprehensive technology plan. DCSS presently has multiple grants that have a positive impact on teaching and learning through resources provided by the grants. The QAR team believes it is necessary for the system to proactively address how best to maintain the services once the grants expire.

DCSS fosters a learning community that involves all stakeholders. The team found evidence from artifacts and interviews that all stakeholders are informed of improvement efforts, have multiple opportunities for input to decisions, and share an ownership to the district's mission. Shared leadership opportunities are evident throughout as the district pursues the mission in a focused, informed manner.

An evaluation system is in place that provides for the growth of employees and includes professional growth plans with opportunities for improvement. Professional development activities address the mission and are focused on the academic needs of the students and the culture of the system.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The Superintendent and Board lead the district with high expectations for success.
- There is a strong effort to continually increase communication among all stakeholders.
- There is a strong commitment by the Board and Superintendent to provide leadership and cohesiveness toward academic achievement.
- The Board and the administrative staff have acted as strong stewards of system resources.
- The system fosters a learning community that involves all stakeholders with opportunities for input and involvement.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Communicate and publicize the annual budgeting process and final budget through a more formal process.
- Formalize the system level communications through a system level "Communications Plan."
- Pursue alternative fiscal resources to maintain the successful services presently being provided through grants that will expire.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall

assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Dodge County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "ernance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3: Teaching & Learning

Standard: The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Description:

The school district implements curriculum aligned with Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) as is required of all Georgia Public School Systems. The in depth performance standards have created a need for the district to develop curriculum guides, pacing charts, and assessment instruments to clearly outline student expectations. Teachers throughout the system are working collaboratively to construct units of study based on best practices in support of the system's curriculum.

The team observed evidence of student expectations within the school sites that established the system's expectation to graduate all students. New curriculum such as Reader's Workshop and Writer's Workshop, have been implemented based on system wide data identifying a decline in reading/language arts in almost all grades. In addition, through data analysis, the system recognized the need for an increase in writing scores school wide. To enable students to better comprehend and perform higher level thinking skills, the current Language Arts and Writing Programs were modified.

Furthermore, the system acknowledged the lowest test scores district wide to be in the area of math. To provide a deeper understanding of math standards, the research collected by the district leaders resulted in a change in teaching practices in other subject areas, specifically English Language Arts (ELA)/Writing instruction. The team believes this change in curriculum should directly affect math performance as students' reading, comprehension, processing, and analyzing skills increase. It should be noted that the Quality Assurance Team (QAR) Team observed evidence of best practices through observations and teacher/student commentaries during school visits.

District leaders implemented the use of academic coaches at all school sites and provided an inclusion coach to assist regular and special education teachers. Co-teaching and differentiated instruction is being utilized to some extent, but teachers recognize the need for further professional development to better equip themselves with these teaching strategies. The QAR Team discovered that district assessments through pre/post testing, benchmark testing, and CRCT analysis provided the tools for differentiating instruction, progress monitoring, student interventions, and a clearer understanding of student needs. The system has employed techniques for receiving data and works to implement curriculum to support their findings. The frequent assessments are analyzed and school administrators, along with academic coaches, provide frequent feedback to district level personnel.

In an effort to close achievement gaps, the system understands the need for utilizing area resources to prepare students for higher level educational opportunities. Dual enrollment through the Heart of Georgia Technical College and Middle Georgia College provides eligible students with an opportunity to "jump start" their secondary educational experience and further increase knowledge, skill, and productivity. Documentation of schedules and lesson planning supported the significance of instructional time. It was also noted that discipline practices put into action provided an environment conducive to learning. Vertical and horizontal collaboration is occurring as educators plan with like grade levels within the same building as well as other school sites located within the district. A shared drive on the e system server

allows for communication between school sites to further foster collaborative planning and sharing of best practices.

The district maintains a positive and progressive school climate that affects students, employees, and stakeholders. This district is to be commended for the ongoing support provided by community and parent stakeholders and their unwavering determination to support the learning environment.

Instructional technology is widely utilized to prepare students to function in today's high tech society. To facilitate current instructional technology, the district has provided such tools as: video cameras, student laptops, computer labs, graphing calculators, smart boards, and a vast array of software. The district does have a functional technology plan.

Surveys are commonly utilized to assemble information from students, parents, district employees, and community stakeholders as a means to gather pertinent information. Professional development opportunities, parent support groups, and community needs are formulated based on the results of these findings.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- A focus on academic improvements and best practices is evident at all levels.
- District personnel are utilizing student data to incorporate more appropriate curriculum, resources, and instructional teaching practices.
- Academic Coaches have been placed in each school setting to provide support in the endeavor to achieve a higher student and teacher success rate.
- The outstanding support and involvement of the community and parent stakeholders are directly impacting student achievement.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Provide ongoing professional development to strengthen teachers' efforts in the area of differentiated instruction.
- Research and implement resources to meet the needs of struggling students in the content area of math.
- Enhance the continuation and implementation of recent academic improvement efforts until these initiatives are internalized within the instructional setting.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Dodge County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Learning & Learning" standard.

Standard 4: Documenting & Using Results

Standard: The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

Description:

Dodge County School System established a comprehensive assessment system that includes state, system, building level, and classroom assessments. The assessments support the system's goal to "increase differentiation in classrooms to meet the needs of all students" by using multiple sources of data as indicators of student performance to plan for instruction. Benchmark assessments have been developed to support preparation of students for the state mandated CRCT. Use of classroom assessments and running records are further evidence of student academic achievement and use of data to impact teaching and learning.

The Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team noted that the system has multiple sources of data available to support decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Collaborative groups at the system and school levels have begun the process of disaggregating this data to affect real change in the instruction that takes place in the classroom.

The system analyzes instructional programs and organizational effectiveness to ensure that each lends support to the other. The hiring of a curriculum director and collaborative coach at the system level and instructional coaches at each school is evidence of the system's commitment for continuous improvement of teaching and learning. The coaches work directly with teachers to increase research-based instructional strategies in the classroom.

Student performance results and system effectiveness is reported to stakeholders utilizing a variety of methods. The system shares data in the local media, on the system web site, and regularly-scheduled academic reports during local Board of Education meetings. The "State of the Schools 2010-2011" report is a communication tool developed by the system to share information with schools, parents, and community regarding student assessment data and programs offered through the system.

Through interviews with system leadership, the QAR team noted that the system has begun the process of using outside sources of data to evaluate student performance and the effectiveness of its programs. Trend data of Dodge County graduates in state colleges is presently available to the system. The post-graduate tracking of students with disabilities is in beginning stages of development. Analyses of both data sources will allow the system to determine the impact of system programs in preparing students for success when they graduate from the local high school.

Dodge County Board of Education Policy indicates that the system maintains a secure, accurate, and complete student record system in accordance with state and federal regulations. Interviews of system personnel and stakeholders indicate that records are available to parents for review. System and school personnel have access to records for the purpose of analyzing data to support instructional programs within the system and to develop plans for the differentiated instruction of individual students.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- A process for establishing collaborative teams to review data and implement instructional programs is embraced.
- The system recognizes its responsibility to ensure the success of students in the post-graduate world

with the implementation of quality instructional programs.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Apply the analyzed data for curriculum improvement and instructional strategies to enhance student achievement.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Dodge County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "umenting & Using Results" standard.

Standard 5: Resource & Support Systems

Standard: The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Description:

The school system has established and communicated procedures, plans and processes to address the identified needs in the areas of Human Resources, Physical Resources and Support Systems.

In the area of Human Resources the system has established centralized procedures and practices that standardize the recruitment and selection process of hiring personnel. This assists the schools in meeting legal and best practice requirements, while empowering them to hire the candidate best suited for the school. The schools have implemented "induction plans" for staff as well as a professional growth plan for all staff. The schools are able to design these plans to meet the needs of their schools.

In the area of financial resources, the Board and Superintendent have implemented a responsible budget in light of austere conditions state-wide and nation-wide. They used their school improvement plan as the basis for allocating funds to the various programs. Consequently, some programs were added this year to address student needs. The team noted that challenging fiscal decisions reached by the leadership and Board were focused on pursuing the system's vision.

The physical conditions of the schools are excellent. The maintenance and renovation status of the schools are outlined and implemented according to the Facilities Plan that is submitted to the state of Georgia for purposes of earning State Entitlement funding. The system has used Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds and State Entitlement funds appropriately. The buildings are bright and clean. Additions are presently being addressed at both elementary schools.

To address the school system improvement plan, the system has done well to provide support services and support systems for students and schools. They have a 100% "High Qualified" status for staff, and have developed a Response to Intervention Checklist for use by staff. Additionally, they have implemented a very functional Technology Plan with the help of grants and other funding.

The Response to Invention (RTI) checklist addresses student needs with Tier 1 focusing on effective differentiated instruction and progress monitoring; Tier 2 interventions help remediate students not successful with Tier 1; and Tier 3 interventions include individualized support. Students with special needs begins at Tier 4 with the referral process. Student support services include school nurses at each school, counselors, a social worker, homebound teacher, parent involvement coordinators, school resource

office and school psychologist. Counselors address mentoring, appraisal, consulting, referral, and educational and career planning. Student support services address issues of economic hardships, medical issues, school attendance, mental health issues, transportation, and safety. Security and crisis management plans are available. DCSS support services combine with local agencies to provide for the needs of students and their families.

All staff participate in a program of professional development where professional learning communities and other research-based practices exist in all schools. Professional development activities support the goals of the system through acquiring knowledge and building skills necessary to achieve the goals. Activities addressing reading, writing and differentiated instruction have recently been held and are being supported in the schools through academic coaches. There have also been activities addressing improvement of the school culture.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- There are hiring procedures at the system level that provide consistency throughout the system.
- The "New Teacher" Induction Plans and professional growth plans serve as valuable tools to improve teaching and learning.
- There is low turn-over in staff.
- The Technology Plan's implementation to enhance instructional practices is evident.
- Multiple grants have been received to provide needed services.
- Professional development opportunities are available and encouraged.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Combine the components of the Consolidated Application with the School Improvement Plan.
- Develop a plan to maintain services once grants expire.
- Develop a formal "Facilities Maintenance Plan" that lays out a process and time-lines for priorities and projects for local stakeholder use that is based on the plan submitted to the state.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Dodge County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Source & Support Systems" standard.

Standard 6: Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

Standard: The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Description:

The district embraces collaboration with community stakeholders as a vital support system for student success. Business, community, and parental support are widely observed through active participation of these stakeholders. Parent volunteers, grants, incentives, and programs are an essential component of the Dodge County School System. The positive impact of the business community is evident throughout the system.

Communication is an important factor in the successful relationship between district employees and stakeholders. The system seeks responses from stakeholders by engaging them in surveys, forming committees to address needs, and fostering an "open door policy" where personnel are readily accessible.

The team documented communication to inform stakeholders of pertinent information through newspaper articles, websites, eboard, paper copies sent home through students, civic participation, data boards, and other technology. Information is consistently provided to ensure a better understanding of educational topics and/or concerns by all stakeholders.

This open line of communication is also recognized in the school setting through ongoing teacher/parent contact in the form of newsletters, Progress Reports, N-TEC Crisis Communication System, Student Information System, specialized programs held during day and evening hours, websites, Weekly Communicators, and Student Agendas. A "State of the Schools 2010-2011" has been published to provide comprehensive information regarding the educational programs and is presently being distributed to schools, parents, and the community.

The knowledge and skills of community stakeholders and parents are requested through mentoring programs, parent involvement, student and school partnerships, parent and student support groups.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Community support is widespread and abundant throughout the school system.
- Stakeholders have a vested interest in the success of all students and actively participate in various events.
- Stakeholders are passionate about their desire to partner with, and enhance the lives of students by providing academic and emotional support in pursuing the system's vision.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Explore additional opportunities to utilize the stakeholder's knowledge and skills, for example, in the content area of math to increase student success.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Dodge County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

Standard 7: Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Standard: The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

Description:

The system has engaged in a continuous process of improvement that articulates the vision and purpose the system is pursuing. Staff, parents, community leaders, and students were able to articulate the vision and to identify how fulfillment of system goals will impact the community via student performance. Staff and students note that focus on the vision changed conversations within the classroom to that of preparing students for life outside of their K-12 schooling.

The system has a process in place for the continuous review of trend data during the school year as well as at the end of each school year. Sources of data include assessment information from system benchmarks, classroom formative evaluations, state mandated assessments (CRCT, EOCT (End of Course Tests),

Graduation Test), quality assurance walk-throughs, observation of instruction, and feedback from the community in the form of surveys and input during board of education and community meetings. The QAR team received a draft copy of the new district improvement plan which will enhance the focus among all entities of DCSS. The plan indicates that the data collected will be used to direct future improvement efforts.

Evidence in the form of meeting agendas, sign-in sheets, and interviews with stakeholders shows that the continuous improvement process includes input from all stakeholders. During interviews, school staff articulated multiple opportunities for participation at the system level and at the school level. Teams of stakeholders met at the system level and committee representatives took the information back to their stakeholder groups for discussion and input. The system committee met to revise the vision and purpose based on feedback members received. The proposed vision and purpose statements were published in local media and on the school web site for feedback before they were formally adopted by the system.

Continuous improvement plans were available from all schools (2009-2010). Updated draft plans for continuous improvement (2010-2011) were available for review by the QAR team. The school plans are aligned with the system's vision and expectations for student learning. The plans focus on learning for all students through differentiated instruction based on sub-group performance and the expectation that all students will graduate from Dodge County schools. School level plans include action steps to ensure that there is a continued focus on student achievement and that stakeholders are involved in supporting the system vision and mission.

The draft copy of the system continuous improvement plan provides evidence that the system engages in research-based professional development for system and school personnel to assist them in achieving system goals. Interviews with system and school staff indicate that professional development opportunities are based on evaluation of student achievement data, classroom observations and walk-throughs, and self-assessments (Class Keys). There are multiple professional development opportunities supported by DCSS including Reader's Workshop, Writer's Workshop, and differentiated instruction. Professional development is offered through Heart of Georgia Regional Educational Services, Georgia Learning Resources System, Professional Development on Demand online resource, Bright from the Start, and other resources as needed. The school calendar was developed to include opportunities for professional development and collaborative planning at the system and school level. Although there was no system-wide professional development plan, stakeholders indicate that they are participating in on-going professional development opportunities to support continuous improvement efforts.

The system has begun the process of monitoring the results of continuous improvement efforts and communicating the results of those efforts to stakeholders. There is evidence in the form of focus walk-throughs and stakeholder interviews indicating that stakeholders are aware of and have participated in the monitoring process for continuous improvement efforts. However, the QAR team believes that feedback from review of this data needs to be provided in a more systemic way to ensure all stakeholders are fully involved in the continuous improvement process.

The QAR team found that evidence exists that the system documents the effectiveness and impact of its continuous improvement process. The system's draft copy of the continuous improvement plan includes a differentiated instruction checklist and a differentiated action plan monitoring checklist. The system reviews student assessment data to ensure a continued focus on student achievement and the increase on the graduation rate. Input from surveys, community participation opportunities at board of education meetings and community meetings, and agendas/sign-in sheets from school parent meetings are monitored to evaluate and document the impact and effectiveness of continuous improvement efforts to increase stakeholder involvement.

The system provides direction and assistance to its schools to support continuous improvements efforts. Materials and technology are purchased for the implementation of initiatives to support system goals. As staff identifies needs for professional development, materials, and technology resources to support system goals, administration works to ensure that these needs are met.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Continuous improvement efforts are sustained and the system has demonstrated its commitment to supporting on-going student progress, system, and school effectiveness.
- The school system has a deliberate process for review of data to support on-going collaborative improvement.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Communicate the results of monitoring data to all stakeholders to ensure that decisions made for curriculum and instruction support the system's continuous improvement efforts.
- Develop a formalized process for ensuring that the AdvancED Standards are being met at the school level.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Dodge County School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

Quality Assurance Findings

The Quality Assurance Review Team examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team provides the following findings in this area.

Description

DCSS utilized an inclusive process with stakeholders from the district, schools, and community in the self-assessment process for district accreditation purposes. All schools had representation serving on each standard committee with the additional responsibility to work with their school on the school's adherence to the standard. Each school developed its own School Improvement Plan in support of the district goals. This procedure worked due to the small size (4 schools) of the district, but the team believes it is important for sustainability purposes of future improvement efforts that the district formalize the process and procedures. A recently developed district improvement plan provides the framework for the system's continuous improvement, but it could be strengthened by involving other departments with the curriculum department in the development.

Through artifact review and interviews the district demonstrated a budget process, capital improvement planning process, testing process, and hiring process. To develop a systemic plan/process that includes all entities of the district would be beneficial for support, monitoring, and consistency of future improvement efforts. Academic performance has improved in many areas and a comprehensive district improvement plan with clear performance targets focused on the system goals would provide for a systematic process critical for alignment, predictability, and the internalizing of a continuous improvement culture.

Data has been collected and analyzed by the academic coaches with effective tools used for communicating results. The profile is comprehensive with descriptors and graphs. The next level should be to apply these results for ongoing quality assurance work whereby the district is able to predict performance based on its knowledge of how current processes are functioning.

Although the schools were familiar with the standards and had representation on each district standard committee, along with local school improvement teams, the Quality Assurance Review team believes that the process could be strengthened for the district to ensure adherence to the AdvancED standards at the school level. The district should have a process with the schools and district departments self-reporting on their adherence to the standards annually and a periodic internal on-site review of schools.

Strengths

- The small size of the district allows for formal and informal communication channels to function successfully.
- The community, district, and each school had representation on the each standard committee for district accreditation purposes and individual school follow-up with standards adherence.
- Forums for dialogue are organized with various groups including community, open public forums with the Board, content and grade level collaboration within and among schools, and regularly scheduled meetings between district and school leadership.

Opportunities

- Develop and implement a formalized systemic plan inclusive of schools and district departments to self-report on their adherence to the AdvancED standards that provides for the review and analysis process as well as follow-up procedures.

Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Dodge County School System on 10/03/2010 - 10/06/2010.

North Dodge Elementary School	167 Orphans Cemetery Rd	Eastman	Georgia	31023-3631
South Dodge Elementary School	1118 McRae Hwy	Eastman	Georgia	31023-7140
Dodge County Middle School	5911 Oak St	Eastman	Georgia	31023-8920
Dodge County High School	350 Pearl Bates Ave	Eastman	Georgia	31023-5530
Dodge Pre-K	401 Harrell Ave	Eastman	Georgia	31023-6727

Conclusion

The commendations and required actions in this report are designed to focus the school district on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and system effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and required actions only have meaning when acted upon by the school district and its schools. The strength of this report lies in the school district's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school district is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified required actions for improvement that the school district will need to address. Following this review, the school district will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's required actions.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the district leadership, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the district and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS-CASI-GA accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Patricia Woodruff, Chair/Lead Evaluator (International Education Consultant)
- Mrs. Lori Squires, Vice Chair (Wesley Lakes Elementary School)
- Dr. John DeCotis, Team Member
- Ms. Allyson Matthews, Team Member (West Bainbridge Elementary)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

The AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As school districts reach higher levels of implementation of the standards, they will have a greater capacity to support ever-increasing student performance and organizational effectiveness. Each of the seven standards listed below has corresponding indicators and impact statements which can be accessed at www.advanc-ed.org.

Vision and Purpose

The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

Governance and Leadership

The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

Teaching and Learning

The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Documenting and Using Results

The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

Resource and Support Systems

The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.