

Report of the External Review Team for Aiken County School District

1000 Brookhaven Dr
Aiken
SC 29803-2109
US

**Dr. Elizabeth Everitt
Superintendent**

Date: November 16, 2014 - November 19, 2014



Copyright (c) 2015 by Advance Education, Inc. AdvancED™ grants to the Institution, which is the subject of the External Review Team Report, and its designees and stakeholders a non-exclusive, perpetual, irrevocable, royalty-free license and release to reproduce, reprint, and distribute this report in accordance with and as protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States of America and all foreign countries. All other rights not expressly conveyed are reserved by AdvancED™.

Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Results 9

 Teaching and Learning Impact 9

 Standard 3 - Teaching and Assessing for Learning 10

 Standard 5 - Using Results for Continuous Improvement 11

 Student Performance Diagnostic 11

 Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™) 13

 eleot™ Data Summary 15

 Findings 18

 Leadership Capacity 20

 Standard 1 - Purpose and Direction 21

 Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership 21

 Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic 22

 Resource Utilization 23

 Standard 4 - Resources and Support Systems 23

 Findings 24

Conclusion 25

 Accreditation Recommendation 28

Addenda 29

 Individual Institution Results (Self-reported) 29

 Team Roster 31

 Next Steps 34

 About AdvancED 35

 References 36

Introduction

The External Review is an integral component of AdvancED Performance Accreditation and provides the institution with a comprehensive evaluation guided by the results of diagnostic instruments, in-depth review of data and documentation, and the professional judgment of a team of qualified and highly trained evaluators. A series of diagnostic instruments examines the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the capacity of leadership to effect continuous improvement, and the degree to which the institution optimizes its use of available resources to facilitate and support student success. The results of this evaluation are represented in the Index of Education Quality (IEQ™) and through critical observations, namely, Powerful Practices, Opportunities for Improvement, and Improvement Priorities.

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 specific to their institution type, demonstrate acceptable levels of student performance and the continuous improvement of student performance, and provide evidence of stakeholder engagement and satisfaction. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the conditions, processes, and practices within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness.

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 Standards were developed by a committee comprised of talented 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 define institutional quality and guide continuous improvement. Prior to implementation, an internationally recognized panel of experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research reviewed the standards and provided feedback, guidance and endorsement.

The AdvancED External Review Team uses AdvancED Standards, associated indicators and criteria related to student performance and stakeholder engagement to guide its evaluation. The Team examines adherence to standards as well as how the institution functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics expected of an accredited institution. The Standards, indicators and related criteria are evaluated using indicator-specific performance levels. The Team rates each indicator and criterion on a scale of 1 to 4. The final scores assigned to the indicators and criteria represent the average of the External Review Team members' individual ratings.

The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation. It energizes and equips the institution's leadership and stakeholders 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 the in-depth examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with all stakeholder groups, and extensive observations of learning, instruction, and operations.

Use of Diagnostic Tools

A key to examining the institution is the design and use of diagnostic tools that reveal the effectiveness with which an institution creates conditions and implements processes and practices that impact student performance and success. In preparation for the External Review the institution conducted a Self Assessment that applied the standards and criteria for accreditation. The institution provided evidence to support its conclusions vis a vis organizational effectiveness in ensuring acceptable and improving levels of student performance.

- an indicator-based tool that connects the specific elements of the criteria to evidence gathered by the team;
- a student performance analytic that examines the quality of assessment instruments used by the institution, the integrity of the administration of the assessment to students, the quality of the learning results including the impact of instruction on student learning at all levels of performance, and the equity of learning that examines the results of student learning across all demographics;
- a stakeholder engagement instrument that examines the fidelity of administration and results of perception surveys seeking the perspective of students, parents, and teachers;
- a state-of-the-art, learner-centric observation instrument, the Effective Learning Environments

Opportunities for Improvement

Every institution can and must improve no matter what levels of performance it has achieved in its past. During the process of the review, the External Review Team identified areas of improvement where the institution is meeting the expectations for accreditation but in the professional judgment of the Team these are Opportunities for Improvement that should be considered by the institution. Using the criteria described in the corresponding rubric(s) to the Opportunity for Improvement, the institution can identify what elements of practice must be addressed to guide the improvement.

Improvement Priorities

The expectations for accreditation are clearly defined in a series of the rubric-based AdvancED Standards, indicators and evaluative criteria focused on the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the capacity of the institution to be guided by effective leadership, and the allocation and use of resources to

improvement efforts from parents, teachers, and students. Reports of the system and all schools were completed and accessible by team members by the designated due date. The system organized and provided evidence through an electronic link for team members to review prior to the visit. Throughout the External Review, system and school leaders, faculty, and staff provided candid responses to interview questions and reflections about their continuous improvement efforts.

The External Review Team expresses its appreciation to the staff and stakeholders of Aiken County School District for the warm welcome, hospitality, and delicious meals throughout the visit. The school system is commended for providing individual materials related to the 11 schools that were visited to assist the External Review Team with planning classroom observations and interview questions. The system provided a comfortable work space and appropriate materials to assist in completing the work of the Team. The school system is commended for their preparations for the Team's visit, prompt responses to the Team's requests for materials and adjustments to the schedule and commitment to school improvement.

Stakeholders were interviewed by members of the External Review Team to gain their perspectives on topics relevant to the institution's effectiveness and student performance. The feedback gained through the stakeholder interviews was considered with other evidences and data to support the findings of the External Review. The following chart depicts the numbers of persons interviewed representative of various stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Interviewed	Number
Superintendents	1
Board Members	6
Pastors	1
Administrators	68
Instructional Staff	90
Support Staff	32
Students	90
Parents/Community/Business Leaders	33
Total	321

Results

Teaching and Learning Impact

The impact of teaching and learning on student achievement is the primary expectation of every institution. The relationship between teacher and learner must be productive and effective for student success. The impact of teaching and learning includes an analysis of student performance results, instructional quality, learner and family engagement, support services for student learning, curriculum quality and efficacy, and college and career readiness data. These are all key indicators of an institution's impact on teaching and learning.

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

2002), staff members whocon sgOc aussx,e iDizaoskys, S.,Panes, S., 0 Tys,H to MChicata). Acn "5 of teacand Loh

key strategies that performance-driven systems use: (1) building a foundation for data-driven decision making, (2) establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement, (3) investing in an information management system, (4) selecting the right data, (5) building institutional capacity for data-driven decision making, and (6) analyzing and acting on data to improve performance. Other research studies, though largely without comparison groups, suggested that data-driven decision-making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Lafee, 2002; McIntire, 2002).

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

Standard 3 - Teaching and Assessing for Learning

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



Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
3.8	The system and all of its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of their children's learning progress.	2.38	2.97
3.9	The system designs and evaluates structures in all schools whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports that student's educational experience.	2.00	2.46
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.	3.12	2.57
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	3.25	2.60
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	3.00	2.63

Standard 5 - Using Results for Continuous Improvement

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	3.12	2.67
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	2.62	2.48
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	2.50	2.14
5.4	The school system engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	2.75	2.45
5.5	System and school leaders monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders.	2.88	2.85

Student Performance Diagnostic

The quality of assessments used to measure student learning, assurance that assessments are administered with procedural fidelity and appropriate accommodations, assessment results that reflect the quality of

learning, and closing gaps in achievement among subpopulations of students are all important indicators for evaluating overall student performance.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Assessment Quality	3.75	3.32
Test Administration	3.75	3.62
Equity of Learning	1.50	2.52
Quality of Learning	3.00	3.06

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™)

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. Every member of the External Review Team is required to be trained and pass a certification exam that establishes inter-rater reliability. Team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a four-point scale (4=very evident; 3=evident; 2=somewhat evident; 1=not evident). Observations are conducted in a variety of venues including classrooms, computer labs, and other learning environments. The External Review Team uses the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™) to assess the quality of learning environments. The External Review Team uses the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™) to assess the quality of learning environments. The External Review Team uses the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™) to assess the quality of learning environments.

Network Average ratings in the four environments of high expectations, active learning, progress monitoring and feedback, and digital learning environments. The environment that received the lowest rating was that of digital learning environment with a system average rating of 1.70. These ratings reflect strengths and challenges acknowledged by the system as evidenced by well-managed, orderly operation of classrooms as a strength and recognition that active learning techniques that specifically address the achievement needs of individual students need to be reviewed and instituted by the system as a challenge.

During school visits, the External Review Team saw evidence that teachers implement highly effective management techniques. Students responded respectfully to teachers and classmates in all classrooms observed supporting the high rating in well-managed learning environment. One team member commented that she didn't see even one student with a cell phone, an unusual occurrence during this time of increasing social media and use of digital devices. All team members noted that they observed instances of mutual respect displayed between teachers and students as well as between students. Moreover, team members noted numerous instances of teachers assisting students in small groups to help students understand lesson concepts and complete class assignments. One team member observed an example of especially high enthusiasm demonstrated by middle school students in a social studies class. Students participated in an electronic game prepared by the teacher in multiple choice format. Items featured fact and higher-order questions related to the current study of South Carolina's role in the American Revolution.

External Review Team members observed limited use of technology by students and teachers, but team members saw evidence of numerous efforts by teachers to secure funding to increase technology through grant writing and contributions from community business resources. Team members also observed inconsistent attention to addressing individual needs of students through differentiation of instruction. In selected instances, group work following direct instruction required all students to complete identical follow-up activities on the same instructional level.

During observations, the Team noted well-managed classroom environments with instructional support and engaging activities for students. Students interacted respectfully with teachers and their peers. The Team noted evidence that teachers and students were fully using instructional time. During school visits the Team saw evidence that the school system is supportive of the instructional program with above average results in three environments including supportive learning and well-managed learning environments. Domains that are areas for further consideration by system leadership are active learning and feedback and digital learning

~~Environments~~

and feedback, and digital learning environments. The environment that received the lowest rating was that of



C. Supportive Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.30	Demonstrates or expresses that learning experiences are positive	50.63%	30.38%	17.72%	1.27%
2.	3.33	Demonstrates positive attitude about the classroom and learning	50.63%	31.65%	17.72%	0.00%
3.	3.16	Takes risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	41.77%	36.71%	17.72%	3.80%
4.	3.30	Is provided support and assistance to understand content and accomplish tasks	49.37%	35.44%	11.39%	3.80%
5.	2.61	Is provided additional/alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge for her/his needs	27.85%	29.11%	18.99%	24.05%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.14						

D. Active Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.14	Has several opportunities to engage in discussions with teacher and other students	45.57%	29.11%	18.99%	6.33%
2.	2.42	Makes connections from content to real-				

E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.80	Is asked and/or quizzed about individual progress/learning	26.58%	35.44%	29.11%	8.86%
2.	3.09	Responds to teacher feedback to improve understanding	35.44%	40.51%	21.52%	2.53%
3.	2.95	Demonstrates or verbalizes understanding of the lesson/content	27.85%	43.04%	25.32%	3.80%
4.	2.32	Understands how her/his work is assessed	17.72%	27.85%	22.78%	31.65%
5.	2.61	Has opportunities to revise/improve work based on feedback	25.32%	27.85%	29.11%	17.72%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.75						

F. Well-Managed Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.62	Speaks and interacts respectfully with teacher(s) and peers	68.35%	25.32%	6.33%	0.00%
2.	3.56	Follows classroom rules and works well with others	67.09%	21.52%	11.39%	0.00%
3.	3.27	Transitions smoothly and efficiently to activities	50.63%	32.91%	8.86%	7.59%
4.	2.82	Collaborates with other students during student-centered activities				

G. Digital Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	1.91	Uses digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	13.92%	18.99%	11.39%	55.70%
2.	1.72	Uses digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	10.13%	16.46%	8.86%	64.56%
3.	1.47	Uses digital tools/technology to communicate and work collaboratively for learning	7.59%	5.06%	13.92%	73.42%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 1.70						

Findings

Improvement Priority

Identify, implement, and monitor additional strategies to close the achievement gaps among subgroups while maintaining high expectations for all students.

(Indicators 3.3)

Evidence and Rationale

Through interviews and a review of data, the team found achievement gaps among subgroups including African American females, economically disadvantaged students, English Language Learners (ELL), and students with disabilities. In their self-assessments, the system and some schools listed these gaps as areas needing to be addressed. Classroom observations revealed limited use of differentiated learning opportunities and activities to meet the needs of all learners.

Ensuring that students are engaged in active instruction that is targeted to meet individualized learning needs will improve student achievement and close achievement gaps.

Opportunity for Improvement

Develop a formal program whereby each student is well known by an adult advocate.

(Indicators 3.9)

Evidence and Rationale

Based on interviews and the system's accreditation report, the Team noted the absence of a systemic program to provide an adult advocate for each student. Some schools are implementing formal structures of support for students while other locations depend on the sense that everyone knows everyone to support students through

their educational experiences.

Leadership Capacity

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress towards its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its institutional purpose and direction, the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives, the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways, and the capacity to enact strategies to improve results of student learning.

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

s Td 0 -1 -16.5 Td () rep to alconducted in lement of organizationaltion's leader
Ad vancED has found throu

Standard 1 - Purpose and Direction

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	3.00	2.67
1.2	The system ensures that each school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	3.00	2.69
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	3.00	2.87
1.4	Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	2.88	2.64

Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	3.50	2.96
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	3.50	2.99
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	3.50	3.20
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	3.25	3.00
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	3.00	2.69

Resource Utilization

The use and distribution of resources must be aligned and supportive of the needs of an institution and the students served. Institutions must ensure that resources are aligned with the stated mission and are distributed equitably so that the needs of students are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes an examination of the allocation and use of resources, the equity of resource distribution to need, the



Findings

Opportunity for Improvement

Develop a plan to provide technology infrastructure to fully support teaching, learning, and operational needs. (Indicators 4.2, 4.6)

Evidence and Rationale

System and school interviews indicate the need to address providing adequate technology to support instruction. Classroom observations revealed that schools are operating with limited technology shared by teachers, students, and staff.

Student achievement is positively impacted through access to emerging technologies that support and enrich student learning.

Powerful Practice

The system demonstrates a commitment to optimizing the use of all resources by aligning the budget to the strategic plan as evidenced in the Consolidated Annual Financial Report (CAFR).

(Indicators 4.4)

Evidence and Rationale

Review of the system's budget and strategic plan determined that the system allocates appropriate funds to accomplish the system's goals and objectives. Further review of the CAFR confirmed that the system prioritizes funding based on needs of the system which maximizes financial, community, and human resources. The commitment to allocating financial resources to advance the mission of the system and the community's expectations for a quality education allows the system to continue to improve in a fast-paced global world.

Conclusion

The External Review Team noted four themes that promote students success and organizational effectiveness for Aiken County School District. System staff plans and conducts effective professional development that targets all personnel in appropriate areas. The system provides half-day release time once a month for principals and teachers to participate in professional development and collaborative activities. The current focus of professional development in the district is attention to developing, implementing, and assessing results of formative assessments. According to interviews, the system's overview, and artifacts, professional development now has focus and a structure of implementation. One teacher commented that after participating in a professional development session, she "couldn't wait to try it with her kids tomorrow." The curriculum review and modification process is in place to adjust curriculum based on student achievement and data. System personnel refer to the curriculum as a "fluid document" that is monitored and adjusted frequently based on teacher comments as well as data. Academic officers are in schools at least monthly to conduct classroom observations with principals. Knowledge and skills as preparation for the real world are identified as important for all students. The culinary programs in the high schools demonstrate concrete commitments for future preparation.

The system engages in a systematic and comprehensive process to review and revise the system mission statement that is aligned to the system's beliefs and vision. In turn, each school aligns their school's mission to the system mission and shared values and beliefs. The superintendent's cabinet meets weekly and uses a variety of strategies to gain input on the progress of the system toward advancing its mission and purpose. During interviews, the Team confirmed that the system effectively engaged representatives from numerous stakeholder groups when reviewing and updating the vision, purpose statement, and annual budget. One parent commented, "I received an invitation to attend a meeting and was able to contribute my thoughts about the future direction of the district." Vision and purpose statements are posted in the system office, in schools, and are communicated through various formats such as board policy, the system's website, and newsletters. Meetings to discuss and develop the annual budget are scheduled early in the year. Stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute input during the budget development process while helping to maximize the use of system resources to advance the goals of the system.

The Team also was impressed with the stable function of the school board. Stakeholder feedback indicates that school board stability directly contributes to the system's continuous improvement efforts. Board policies and interviews of stakeholders provided further evidence that the board allows for leadership autonomy in local schools while being responsive to communities. Area councils foster direct feedback from the communities served within the larger geographic environment of Aiken County. The system employs in-house legal counsel. The board provides internal training to new members in order to develop a clear understanding of the appropriate role of the board. In addition, the board participates in annual training offered by the state and national school board associations. Finally, team members commend system personnel for their effective long-range planning and budgetary process which offers stakeholders time and opportunity to participate in how resources are best maximized.

External Review Team members saw and heard evidence of a caring culture. When asked to identify

strengths of the district; parents, teachers, and system level personnel identified the committed, caring culture of the system. It was apparent to one team member that teachers are invested in helping students no matter what it takes. A reading interventionist wanted a team member to meet a particular student and join with the staff in celebrating the progress the student has made.

Through interviews and a review of evidence, the External Review Team acknowledged three challenges of the system. In the system accreditation report, system personnel stated, "The district continues to be challenged to generate stakeholder input." Some parents expressed concern that they were unfamiliar with the steps needed to address concerns with the board. Additional steps and strategies need to be implemented to increase engagement of families in school activities at both the school and system levels.

Additionally, system personnel recognize the need to develop a formal structure for adult advocates to support the educational experiences of students. While some schools have well-organized structures in place, an adult advocacy program is not systemically implemented throughout the system.

A third challenge recognized by the system is that of the reduction of achievement gaps among sub-populations of students. Overall academic achievement is improving; however, system personnel acknowledged the need for intervention on behalf of students who are not achieving. While approximately 11 percent of the student population is identified as having special needs, some schools serve a larger percentage of special needs students. The system also serves a population of English Language Learners (ELL). System personnel plan to examine the current status of achievement gaps and implement actions that will address the learning needs of students in sub-populations. Selected elementary schools are currently piloting programs to target achievement gaps in student sub-populations. These schools are in the first year of implementing Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RtI). Teachers are collecting and analyzing data to target both academic and behavioral issues. Schools in the pilot program have psychologists on site. Moreover, the system has made a commitment to serving the needs of all students by being the first system in South Carolina to franchise with the state virtual school program. Currently, 250 students are enrolled in this program.

Finally, system personnel recognize the need to provide technology to support teaching and learning. Moreover, teacher training in technology use and instructional delivery will help to maximize the benefits of emerging technologies and electronic media.

As Aiken County School District enters this next cycle of continuous improvement, it should integrate findings from this review into future plans for improvement as defined by the following Improvement Priority:

Identify, implement, and monitor additional strategies to close achievement gaps among subgroups while maintaining high expectations for all students.

Aiken County School District has successfully addressed maintenance of aging facilities while providing effective professional development for all system personnel. The recent success of an increase in sales tax will provide needed revenues to support maintenance and renovation of existing facilities. The system has

taken exemplary steps to develop a long-range plan for budgetary management and resource utilization. School board stability, financial security, and professional development serve as a strong basis for future actions and continuous improvements.

Improvement Priorities

The institution should use the findings from this review to guide the continuous improvement process. The institution must address the Improvement Priorities listed below:

- Identify, implement, and monitor additional strategies to close the achievement gaps among subgroups while maintaining high expectations for all students.

Accreditation Recommendation

Index of Education Quality

The Index of Education Quality (IEQ™) provides a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of indicators and evaluative criteria. A formative tool for improvement, it identifies areas of success as well as areas in need of focus.

The IEQ™ comprises three domains: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) the use of resources and data to support and optimize learning.

The overall and domain scores can range from 100-400. The domain scores are derived from: the AdvancED Standards and indicators ratings; results of the Analysis of Student Performance; and data from Stakeholder Feedback Surveys (students, parents, and staff).

	External Review IEQ Score	AdvancED Network Average
Overall Score	298.78	282.79
Teaching and Learning Impact	283.93	274.14
Leadership Capacity	328.12	296.08
Resource Utilization	293.75	286.32

The IEQ™ results include information about how the institution is performing compared to expected criteria as well as to other institutions in the AdvancED Network. The institution should use the information in this report, including the corresponding performance rubrics, to identify specific areas of improvement.

Consequently, the External Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission that the institution earn the distinction of accreditation for a five-year term. AdvancED will review the results of the External Review to make a final determination including the appropriate next steps for the institution in response to these findings.

Addenda

Individual Institution Results (Self-reported)

Institution Name	Teaching and Learning Impact	Leadership Capacity	Resource Utilization	Overall IEQ Score
Aiken County Career and Technology Center	276.19	290.91	271.43	279.49
Aiken Elementary School	300.00	318.18	357.14	315.38
Aiken High School	252.38	290.91	285.71	269.23
Aiken Middle School	276.19	309.09	285.71	287.18
Belvedere Elementary School	304.76	354.55	285.71	315.38
Busbee Corbett Elementary Middle School	295.24	318.18	342.86	310.26
Byrd Elementary School	338.10	327.27	314.29	330.77
Chukker Creek Elementary School	242.86	281.82	242.86	253.85
Clearwater Elementary School	242.86	254.55	285.71	253.85
East Aiken School of the Arts	257.14	300.00	214.29	261.54
Gloverville Elementary School	276.19	309.09	228.57	276.92
Greendale Elementary School	314.29	372.73	385.71	343.59
Hammond Hill Elementary School	376.19	354.55	328.57	361.54
J. D. Lever Elementary School	300.00	354.55	328.57	320.51
Jackson Middle School	314.29	363.64	342.86	333.33
Jefferson Elementary School	261.90	300.00	242.86	269.23
Langley-Bath-Clearwater Middle School	219.05	227.27	185.71	215.38
Leavelle McCampbell Middle School	319.05	336.36	342.86	328.21
M. B. Kennedy Middle School	247.62	281.82	257.14	258.97
Midland Valley High School	304.76	290.91	285.71	297.44
Millbrook Elementary School	333.33	381.82	342.86	348.72
Mossy Creek Elementary School	276.19	309.09	328.57	294.87
New Ellenton Middle School	328.57	363.64	357.14	343.59

Team Roster

Member	Brief Biography
<p>Dr. Marlene Helm</p>	<p>Dr. Marlene Helm is a Branch Manager for the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services and a Lead Evaluator for Advanc-ED. She holds a Doctorate in Leadership and Curriculum and a Master's in Education from the University of Kentucky and is proud to be an alum with her undergraduate degree from Kentucky State University.</p> <p>Dr. Helm, originally from Buffalo, New York has served in numerous positions including Interim Superintendent of the Fayette County Schools, Lexington, Kentucky, Secretary of the Kentucky Education, Arts and Humanities Cabinet, Commissioner of Social Services for the local government, a teacher, professor, and College of Education Dean.</p> <p>She serves on numerous civic boards such as Habitat for Humanity and the Salvation Army and has been the recipient of many recognitions and awards most recently the Dr. Martin Luther King "Unity" award.</p>
<p>Dr. Peggy B. Johnson</p>	<p>Dr. Johnson has worked in the field of education for 30 years from a preschool to a college teaching experience. She has obtained an Ed. D. in Administration and Leadership and is working toward a new phase in education. Having taught English, AP Language, and AP Literature in public and private schools in Texas and Florida, experience was gained in a multiple of classroom situations.. As a National Board Certified teacher, Dr. Johnson has served as a supervising teacher for the University of Central Florida and NBCT mentor for many new teachers. Dr. Jonson has served on many school and district committees and serves as the Gifted Education Coordinator for the school. Working with AdvancEd has provided experiences in many types of educational facilities and has shown that education can fit the needs of any student.</p>
<p>Mrs. Leevette E Malloy</p>	<p>Mrs. Leevette E. Malloy is currently the Director of Secondary Education in Fairfield County School District, Winnsboro, South Carolina. She has served as the principal of one middle school and two high schools; a high school assistant principal; a high school curriculum resource teacher; the department chairperson for a high school Fine Arts and Foreign Languages department; and an elementary, middle, and high school teacher.</p> <p>She is a graduate of Converse College, Spartanburg, South Carolina where she received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Music Education with an emphasis in piano performance. She received a Master of Science Degree from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois in Music Education with an emphasis in piano performance. She received a Master of Education Degree from the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina in Educational Leadership with an emphasis in cd-12 school administration and she is currently enrolled in the Ph.D. Program in the same area. She is a trained Lead Evaluator and has served on prior accreditation teams.</p>
<p>Mrs. Carmen Pough Banks</p>	<p>Carmen is a retired educator of the South Carolina Department of Education. While at the SCDOE, she served as the team leader for the external review audit process responsible for creating, monitoring and evaluating the processes of school performance and developing systems of extra support. Through various assignments at the Department of Education, she has conducted national and statewide staff development sessions; monitored programs to ensure compliance to state and federal regulations; designed curriculum and related materials; administered an operational budget; conducted effective teacher training sessions; and coached and mentored principals and teachers. Since retiring, she continues to contract with the Department of Education serving as a liaison to selected schools in the state. Her business, Newton James and Associates, LLC, provides staff development for school districts across the country and within South Carolina.</p>

Member	Brief Biography
Mrs. Judy S Wesley	Judy Wesley, a lead evaluator for AdvancED, currently chairs teams throughout the United States and Latin America. Though retired from Marion School District One in SC, she is still a dedicated educator serving as a field consultant for AdvancEd and received the 2012-13 AdvancEd's Excellence in Education

Next Steps

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with 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. Consider the Opportunities for Improvement identified throughout the report that are provided by the team in the spirit of continuous improvement and the institution's commitment to improving its capacity to improve student learning.
4. Develop action plans to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward addressing the Improvement Priorities.
5. Use the report to guide and strengthen the institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
6. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Improvement Priorities. Institutions are required to respond to all Improvement Priorities. The report will be reviewed at the appropriate state, national, and/or international levels to monitor and ensure that the system has implemented the necessary actions to address the Improvement Priorities. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the responses to the Improvement Priorities and the resulting improvement.
7. Continue to meet the AdvancED Standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

About AdvancED

AdvancED is the world leader in providing improvement and accreditation services to education providers of all types in their pursuit of excellence in serving students. AdvancED serves as a trusted partner to more than 32,000 public and private schools and school systems – enrolling more than 20 million students - across the United States and 70 countries.

In 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), both founded in 1895, and the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form AdvancED: one strong, unified organization dedicated to education quality. In 2011, the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) that was founded in 1917 became part of AdvancED.

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. The Accreditation Divisions of AdvancED share research-based quality standards that cross school system, state, regional, national, and international boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified and consistent process

References

- Alwin, L. (2002). The will and the way of data use. *School Administrator*, 59(11), 11.
- Baumert, J., Kunter, M., Blum, W., Brunner, M., Voxx, T., Jordan, A., Klusmann, U., Krauss, S., Nuebrand, M., & Tsai, Y. (2010). Teachers' mathematical knowledge, cognitive activation in the classroom, and student progress. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(1), 133-180.
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (2012). *Shared purpose: the golden thread?* London: CIPD.
- Colbert, J., Brown, R., Choi, S., & Thomas, S. (2008). An investigation of the impacts of teacher-driven professional development. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 134-154.
- Conley, D.T. (2007). *Redefining college readiness (Vol. 3)*. Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center.
- Datnow, A., Park, V., & Wohlstetter, P. (2007). *Achieving with data: How high-performing school systems use data to improve instruction for elementary students*. Los Angeles, CA: Center on Educational Governance, USC.
- Dembosky, J., Pane, J., Barney, H., & Christina, R. (2005). *Data driven decision making in Southwestern Pennsylvania school districts*. Working paper. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.
- Ding, C. & Sherman, H. (2006). Teaching effectiveness and student achievement: Examining the relationship. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 29 (4), 40-51.
- Doyle, D. P. (2003). Data-driven decision making: Is it the mantra of the month or does it have staying power? *T.H.E. Journal*, 30(10), 19-21.
- Feuerstein, A., & Opfer, V. D. (1998). School board chairmen and school superintendents: An analysis of perceptions concerning special interest groups and educational governance. *Journal of School Leadership*, 8, 373-398.
- Fink, D., & Brayman, C. (2006). School leadership succession and the challenges of change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42 (62), 61-89.
- Greene, K. (1992). Models of school-board policy-making. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 28 (2), 220-236.
- Horng, E., Klasik, D., & Loeb, S. (2010). Principal time-use and school effectiveness. *American Journal of Education* 116, (4) 492-523.
- Lafee, S. (2002). Data-driven districts. *School Administrator*, 59(11), 6-7, 9-10, 12, 14-15.
- Leithwood, K., & Sun, J. (2012). The Nature and effects of transformational school leadership: A meta-analytic review of unpublished research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48 (387). 388-423.
- Marks, H., Louis, K.S., & Printy, S. (2002). The capacity for organizational learning: Implications for pedagogy and student achievement. In K. Leithwood (Ed.), *Organizational learning and school improvement* (p. 239-266). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- McIntire, T. (2002). The administrator's guide to data-driven decision making. *Technology and Learning*, 22(11), 18-33.
- Pan, D., Rudo, Z., Schneider, C., & Smith-Hansen, L. (2003). Examination of resource allocation in education: connecting spending to student performance. Austin, TX: SEDL.