External Review

Ben Hill County School System

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Introduction to the External Review Process

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

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

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

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

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

Part I: Findings

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

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

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

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

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction
Purpose and direction are critical to successful institutions. A study conducted in 2010 by the London-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that "in addition to improving performance, the research indicates that having a sense of shared purpose also improves employee engagement" and that "...lack of understanding around purpose can lead to demotivation and emotional detachment, which in turn lead to a disengaged and dissatisfied workforce."

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

Standard	Standard Performance Level

The 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.		3.25
Indicator		**Source of Evidence**	**Performance Level**
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	•District purpose statements - past and present •Minutes from meetings related to development of the district's purpose and direction •Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the district's purpose	3
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.	•Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the schools' purpose statements •Examples of written stakeholder communications or marketing materials that portray the school purpose and direction	3
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	•Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders about educational programs and equitable learning experiences •Statements of shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning •Interviews with teachers, parents, and principals.	3
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.	•Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs •Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders •The district data profile •Interviews with teachers, parents, and principals.	4

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. The Ben Hill School System uses data to develop and measure improvement goals.   1.4

   The Ben Hill School District is data-driven and strives to implement performance-based instruction throughout the system. Data from a variety of sources are collected, organized, analyzed and used to develop and evaluate improvement goals. Data drives the system and school improvement plans, professional learning activities, and classroom instruction. Research shows that developing improvement goals around the use of data to make decisions for systems and schools has a major impact on improvement and student achievement goals.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

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

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

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.			3.5
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level

2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	•District operations manuals •School handbooks •Interviews with board members, principals,and central office administrators.	4
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	•Governing authority minutes relating to training •Communication plan to inform all staff on code of ethics, responsibilities, conflict of interest •Proof of legal counsel •Governing code of ethics	4
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	•Communications regarding governing authority actions •Maintenance of consistent academic oversight, planning, and resource allocation •Agendas and minutes of meetings •Interviews with board members, principals,and central office administrators.	4
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	•Professional development offerings and plans •Examples of collaboration and shared leadership •Examples of improvement efforts and innovations in the educational programs •Examples of decisions aligned with the district's purpose and direction •Interviews with teachers, parents, and principals.	3
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	•Minutes from meetings with stakeholders •Interviews with teachers, parents, and principals.	3

2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	•Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation •Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice throughout the system and student success noted •Interviews with Board members, Principals, Teachers and Central Office Administrators.	3

Powerful Practices	*Indicator*

1. The Board of Education, superintendent, central office administrators and building level leaders of the Ben Hill County School System are a strong leadership base of experienced, supportive, knowledgeable, and accessible leaders. These leaders advocate for the vision and its focus on moving the system toward being a place where everybody wants to be a part of the learning community that leads to an individual career choice and prepares students for the future.

   There is a strong sense of connectedness within this system. Each element of the system knows and understands its role and potential to contribute to the district's purpose, student achievement, and organizational effectiveness. Collaboration and communication between all systems provides a foundation and focus for the direction of the school district and its commitment to student achievement.

   Indicator 2.1

2. Board members collaboratively work with the superintendent to maintain and re-align resources to support the school system.

   The superintendent and school board have re-aligned financial resources to sustain teachers and support staff during challenging economic times. This dedication and commitment to supporting the educational process of students demonstrates a dedication to ensuring that the education of students is impacted very little during these financially challenging times.

   Indicator 2.2

3. The Board of Education and superintendent empowers the leadership of BHCSS to meet improvement goals.

   Data Days provide the ground work for leadership teams to engage in collaborative discussions about identifying and monitoring school achievement goals. A preponderance of evidence presented during interviews and a review of artifacts supported the empowerment of the school leadership's role in the improvement process. Each school is unique as reflected in school data. The autonomy to design and implement a unique school improvement plans aids in the direction and monitoring of goals with more opportunity for buy in among the leadership, teachers and support staff of the school district.

   Indicator 2.3

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

A high-quality and effective system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership" (Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of

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

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

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.	3.08

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The system's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	•Lesson plans •Posted learning objectives •Descriptions of instructional techniques •Standards overview,interviews with teachers, students, and principals. Instructional frameworks.	3
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	•Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum •Standards overview, interviews with teachers, students, and principals. Instructional frameworks	3

3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the approved or prescribed instructional strategies and programs •Interviews with teachers, parents, and principals.	3
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	•Supervision and evaluation procedures •Documentation of collection of lesson plans, grade books, or other data record systems •Interviews with teachers, parents, and principals. Professional learning communities agendas.	3
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	•Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees •Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings •Evidence of informal conversations that reflect collaboration about student learning •Interviews with teacher and central office administrators.	3
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	•Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction •Interviews with teachers and central office administrators.	3
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	•Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to district and school beliefs and values about teaching and learning •Records of meetings and informal feedback sessions •Interviews with superintendent, central office administrators, principals and teachers.	4
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.	•Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance •Scheduled teacher/parent conferences. Interviews with superintendent, central office administrators, principals and teachers.	3

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.	•Description of formalized structures for adults to advocate on behalf of students •Stakeholder interviews. Interviews with superintendent, principals, teachers, and students.	3
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	•Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices •Sample communications to stakeholders about grading and reporting •Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting	3
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	•District professional development plan involving the district and all schools •Crosswalk between professional learning and district purpose and direction •Interviews with teachers and central office administrators.	3
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	•Schedules, lesson plans, or example student learning plans showing the implementation of learning support services •Interviews with teachers and central office administrators.	3

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. Data supported the school system's dedication to the adherence of essential benchmark standards. Couched within these mandates for educational excellence were several key components; teacher mentoring through the use of instructional coaches, ongoing professional development, and the induction and training of new teachers and administrators. Test data complied rendered positive results from students.

    Interviews, observations, and artifacts (SIP, learning logs, PLC minutes, teacher induction handbook, test data, hiring practices) revealed a strong belief that academic successes were tied to mentoring, instructional coaching, professional development, and the training and induction of school staff.
    Clearly articulated teaching and academic expectations coupled with a well trained staff produces positive student achievement results. The mentoring, coaching and induction of teachers and staff creates an atmosphere of continuous academic and professional improvement.

3.7

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Articulate and codify the system expectations of instructional practices so that all students benefit from student collaboration, self-reflection and development of critical thinking skills.

   3.4

   Interviews, ELEOT classroom observations, and lesson plans provided evidence of a lack of a widespread implementation of collaborative learning, student self-reflection, and higher order thinking skills. This was also validated by the BHCHS external Georgia Assessment for Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) review team visit of November 2011. Enhancing instructional pedagogy to move deeper into standards-based practices will set the stage for student efficacy and ownership of his/her own learning. Deliberate planning for higher order thinking builds capacity for student problem solving in connection to real life applications.

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

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

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

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.		2.75
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.1	The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ, and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, and educational programs.	•District quality assurance procedures for monitoring qualified staff across all schools •Documentation of highly qualified staff •Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for the district and schools	3

4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs, and system operations.	•Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources •Alignment of school budgets with school purpose and direction •Interviews with teachers and central office administrators.	3
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	•Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements •Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments •School safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes •Review of contracts with out-sources companies.	3
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	•District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities, learning environments •Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments	3
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	•Evaluation procedures and results of education resources •Data on media and information resources available to students and staff •Interviews with teachers and principals.	3
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	•Policies relative to technology use at the district-level and school-level •District quality control procedures that monitor the effectiveness of technology services at the district-level and school-level •Observations. Interviews with central office administration, teachers, principals and students.	1

4.7	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	•Examples of improvements made to education program and delivery models based on results of program effectiveness evaluations •List of support services available to students •Interviews with board members, principals, teachers and central office administrators.	3
4.8	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	•List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning •Description of referral process •Interviews with central office administrators, teachers and principals.	3

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

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

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

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The 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.	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	•Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model •Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness •Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free •Assessment results.	4
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.	•List of data sources related to district effectiveness •List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning •Interviews with central office administrators, teachers, principals and parents.	3
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	•Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data •Interviews with teachers and support staff.	2
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.	•Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data •Evidence of student growth •Assessment results. Interviews with teachers.	3

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.	•Minutes of meetings regarding achievement of student learning goals •Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals •Examples of district marketing tools and websites that cite student achievement results or that make promises regarding student achievement •Interviews with board members, principals,and central office administrators, teachers and stakeholders.	3

Powerful Practices   Indicator

1. District personnel and teachers are engaged in the collection, analysis and the application of learning using a variety of data sources.
    Results of student achievement performance from teacher designed assessments are stored in a data warehouse coined âThinkgateâ.   Additionally, district leadership and school faculties shared with the External review team the plethora of assessments used by district teachers and administrators for the purpose of designing lessons to meet student achievement needs.   Data Day agnedas and a review of student acheivement results confirmed that student assessment results are being used to design lessons to meet student acheivement needs. The process of school improvement begins with âdata digsâ, an analysis of the many sources of assessment, teachers and school leadership teams identify data trends in student achievement. District and school personnel shared how this provides the beginning of a framework for District and School improvement which continues until the data is summarized and the improvement cycle (Plan, Do, Check, Act) begins again.

    The analysis and use of data to identify the focus of school improvement is paramount to the academic achievement of students. Data also provides the road map for designing instructional practices for teachers and the learning process.

5.1

Opportunities for Improvement   Indicator

1. Provide professional learning opportunities to include support staff and faculty in the interpretation and use of data.   5.2

    Professional learning in data analysis has been provided to teachers and administrators in the school district. Support staff (counselors, coaches, etc.) indicate a need for professional learning in the use of data analysis to improve student achievement and support academic subjects. Support staff are key members of the school community and are instrumental in assisting in the teaching and learning process. Engaging more support personnel in the review of data and the improvement process will lower the ratio of students to adults resulting in more encouragement and support for the students who must be engaged in a rigorous curriculum. This would also support the theme of the system of "We are in this Together".

Learning Environment

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

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

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool

Environments	*Level*
A. Equitable Learning Environment	2.1
B. High Expectations Environment	2.2
C. Supportive Learning Environment	2.5
D. Active Learning Environment	2.4
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.3
F. Well-Managed Learning Environment	2.7
G. Digital Learning Environment	1.4

Part II: Conclusion

Summary of the External Review

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

The AdvancED External Review Team reviewed and studied the Self Assessment (SA), Executive Summary, Diagnostics, Assurances and many artifacts in preparation for the external review of Ben Hill County School System in Fitzgerald, GA.   The Lead Evaluator hosted a phone conference with each member of the team where they were introduced to a review of assignments, the schedule, workbooks, and workspace. An introduction to the Effective Learning Environment Observation Tool (ELEOT) and the External Review Team Resources and Tools website were also shared with the team. This preparation allowed the review team to arrive Sunday, January 27th prepared to begin the three day external review.

After professional introductions, the team began to work to review artifacts in preparation for the first standards rating. Each team member then shared findings related to their assigned standard by giving the first rating assigned to each indicator.   Following this first team meeting, the Ben Hill County School System (BHCSS) staff warmly greeted the review team to a "tailgate" dinner that was hosted by the superintendent, directors and system principals.

The District prepared for the review by providing many artifacts which clearly supported the improvement efforts occurring in the district. Most of the artifacts were on flash drives or easily located on the web which made it convenient for the team to review.   Monday morning began with an overview of the school district provided by the superintendent and continued with the team interviewing the superintendent. Each district director who was assigned a standard then provided an overview with the support of a power point. The schedule continued throughout the day and ended with interviews of board members.

The team then engaged in the Monday night work session where each team member provided a summary of information related to the assigned standard as gathered during day one of the external review. Team members then engaged in the rating of the assigned standard. Following this rich discussion and standards rating, the team received an overview of the ELEOT in preparation of school visits.

It was obvious to the review team that BHCSS personnel, board members, students and stakeholders had prepared for the Review visit. The team noted brief narratives regarding the positive improvement occurring in the district and the rich source of data that the district used to drive improvement and student learning.

There was a feeling of openness from everyone in the school district. Board members, directors, principals, teachers and other stakeholders were comfortable during interviews. A Board member noted following the exit presentation, that she was comfortable talking with Review team members. Team members shared there was a sense of transparency and confidence in the district and they were

prepared for the visit and embraced the AdvancED process.

One hundred ninety six (196) stakeholders participated in presentation and interviews over the three days the review team was in the district. Groups interviewed included board members, district and school administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, community, business partners and students. Additionally, all four schools in the system were visited by the team. The team discussed and considered all evidence assembled to make a decision regarding the level to which the system met AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators.

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

The superintendent, system directors, principals and teachers shared with the team, their beliefs about teaching and learning in the school district. Student achievement in a data standards driven school environment is clearly the focus of the school district and school. Frequently, the achievement data from formative assessments are reviewed to identify the standard(s) students are achieving and those that they continue to struggle mastering. A consistent theme heard by the team during interviews was that team planning by teachers specifically to address standards continues to be a challenge. Teachers align lessons to re-teach or remediate the knowledge or skill of the standard addressed. Support is provided to school faculty and administrators through a district director who serves on the school's leadership team and serves to support school faculties and administrators.

Elementary school students and teachers benefit from a new building equipped with the latest technology. Teachers used Promethean Interactive Boards for students to move math supportive materials and to engage learners in a lesson through an animated power point. This is the only site where digital learning and technology service was observed.   The lack of an effective technology infrastructure interferes with teachers and students using digital learning as an instructional tool. Students and teachers shared that it is difficult to enhance instruction with the use of technology due to its instability. This creates a fear that instructional material will be lost. Students shared the same concern. Additionally, the same groups shared that it may take several days or weeks for the computer to be operable following a shutdown. The board of education and superintendent are fully aware of the digital learning concerns and are aware of the need to investigate avenues to strengthen the technology infrastructure of the school system.

There is a strong commitment for the achievement of students in the Ben Hill County School System. The implementation of the state improvement framework has assisted in the improvement of student achievement in the school system. Several schools in the district have been recognized for student achievement gains over the past three years.

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

management, and use of technology.

Data supported the school system's dedication to the adherence to essential benchmark standards. Formative and summative test results showed positive results for student achievement. Another source of evidence of the District's attention to student achievement is the improvement among high school students. Three years prior to the external review, the high school became a state directed school. This resulted in a district level administrator serving on the school's leadership team, hiring instructional coaches (IC) and requiring that the IC attend all state Department of Education trainings on coaching with the state school improvement specialist assigned to the school.

The IC was tasked with focusing the instructor's attention on teaching the standards using the Department of Education's (DOE) framework (opening, work session and closing) and using teaching strategies to actively engage students in learning. In three years the high school improved from being tagged as a "Lowest Achieving School" to being named a "Reward School". After seeing and benefiting from this framework for improvement, school district administrators and teachers implemented this model K-12 which proved to be successful with increasing student achievement for schools and the school district. The system has recently been ranked at the top of the Georgia Regional Educational Agency area in the high school writing exam.

The external review team appreciates the hospitality, support and professionalism extended to the team during the visit. Any request made by an external review team member for information or an artifact was provided. The current sense of transparency that exists in the system was felt by the review team during interviews and informal discussions. The superintendent and director of Instruction and curriculum facilitated in preparing for the review and insured that the team had everything they needed for the review. The arrangements made for the review were perfect! The team acknowledges the efforts that the school district has made to increase student achievement and build a system of transparency when working toward this goal. The team encourages the district to continue with their focus in preparing students for the 21st Century.

The team completed a comprehensive review of artifacts, interviews, and observations and will convey them to AdvancED. Based on our findings, the review team recommends that Ben Hill County School System be accredited, pending further review and final action by AdvancED's Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. Devise a sustainable plan for the inclusion of a technology infrastructure with supports to ensure the continuity of services for students, teachers, and staff.

   Primary Indicator or Assurance: 4.6

School district personnel rated this indicator as a 2 on the Standard Assessment (SA) and shared during interviews that when technology is not operating properly there is a consistent wait for an undetermined amount of time for technology support. Students corroborated that it may take weeks before computers are operable. The dysfunction of technology coupled with the lack of support has resulted in a decrease in confidence in the ability to count on the use of technology as an instructional tool. Likewise, valuable data may be lost or corrupted due to inefficient technology. Another source of data was the results from the Effective Learning Environment Observation Tool (ELEOT) which indicates a rating of 1.4 on a scale of 1 to 4 on the implementation of digital learning environments. Technology is a valuable instructional and operational tool and must be functional with little frustration for students, teachers, and administrators. Technology provides a support to student learning and when used to enhance the instructional process is extremely valuable to preparing students for the 21st Century.

2. Extend professional learning to include support faculty in the interpretation and use of data.

   Primary Indicator or Assurance: 5.3

   Support faculty (counselors, coaches, club sponsors, school system social worker, etc.) indicated that they are not part of the student achievement data review teams and have not been trained. On the other hand, support faculty are integral members of the school community and are instrumental in assisting in the teaching and learning process. Students engaged in a rigorous curriculum will benefit from a knowledgeable caring adult in the building. By ensuring support faculty are engaged in meaningful advisor/advisee relationships, student achievement has the potential to improve.

3. Provide professional learning for teachers in the use and implementation of higher order thinking skills.

   Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.3

   During classroom observations using ELEOT, students demonstrated very little use of higher order thinking skills. The external review team was unable to find artifacts to sustain professional learning in this area.   External review team members concur that traditional classroom settings were observed demonstrating predominately teacher centered instruction. Successful use of higher order thinking skills results in the promotion of continued intellectual growth and builds for transference to real life situations.

Part III: Addenda

Next Steps

The institution should:

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

About AdvancED

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

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