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AdvancED®
Engagement
Review Report

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AdvancED® Performance Accreditation

» **Results for:**
Ben Hill County School System
Fitzgerald, GA

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Introduction

AdvancED Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review

Accreditation is pivotal to leveraging education quality and continuous improvement. Using a set of rigorous research based standards, the accreditation process examines the whole institution—the program, the cultural context and the community of stakeholders—to determine how well the parts work together to meet the needs of learners. Through the AdvancED Accreditation Process, highly skilled and trained Engagement Review Teams gather first-hand evidence and information pertinent to evaluating an institution's performance against the research-based AdvancED Performance Standards. Using these Standards, Engagement Review Teams assess the quality of learning environments to gain valuable insights and target improvements in teaching and learning. AdvancED provides Standards that are tailored for all education providers so that the benefits of accreditation are universal across the education community.

Through a comprehensive review of evidence and information, our experts gain a broad understanding of institution quality. Using the Standards, the review team provides valuable feedback to institutions that helps to focus and guide each institution's improvement journey. Valuable evidence and information from other stakeholders, including students, also is obtained through interviews, surveys and additional activities.

As a part of the Engagement Review, stakeholders were interviewed by members of the Engagement Review Team to gain their perspectives on topics relevant to the institution's learning environment and organizational effectiveness. The feedback gained through the stakeholder interviews was considered with other evidences and data to support the findings of the Engagement Review. The following chart depicts the numbers of persons interviewed representative of various stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Groups	Number
Board Members	4
Central Office	8
Principals	4
Teachers	67
Support Staff	10
Students	53
Parents	36
Community Partners	7
Total	189

Once all of the information is compiled and reviewed, the team develops the Engagement Review Report and presents preliminary results to the institution. Results from the Engagement Review are reported in four ratings represented by colors. These ratings provide guidance and insight into an institution's continuous improvement efforts as described below:

Color	Rating	Description
Red	Needs Improvement	Identifies key areas that need more focused improvement efforts

Color	Rating	Description
Yellow	Emerging	Represents areas to enhance and extend current improvement efforts
Green	Meets Expectations	Pinpoints quality practices that meet the Standards
Blue	Exceeds Expectations	Demonstrates noteworthy practices producing clear results that exceed expectations

AdvancED Continuous Improvement System

The AdvancED Continuous Improvement System (CIS) provides a systemic fully integrated solution to help institutions map out and navigate a successful improvement journey. In the same manner that educators are expected to understand the unique needs of every learner and tailor the education experience to drive student success, every institution must be empowered to map out and embrace their unique improvement journey. AdvancED expects institutions to use the results and the analysis of data from various interwoven components for the implementation of improvement actions to drive education quality and improved student outcomes. While each improvement journey is unique, the journey is driven by key actions. AdvancED identifies three important components of a continuous improvement process and provides feedback on the components of the journey using a rubric that identifies the three areas to guide the improvement journey. The areas are as follows:

Commitment to Continuous Improvement	Rating
The institution has collected sufficient and quality data to identify school improvement needs.	Meets Expectations
Implications from the analysis of data have been identified and used for the development of key strategic goals.	Meets Expectations
The institution demonstrates the capacity to implement their continuous improvement journey.	Meets Expectations

Continuous Improvement Journey Narrative

Ben Hill County Schools created the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan during a four-month period, using a Super Team composed of 20 members (district leaders, board of education members, school administrators, teachers, parents and community and business partners). The data reviewed included the CCRPI (state assessment), MAP Growth, progress monitoring tools and stakeholder input. The Strategic Plan is based on the three AdvancED domains (Leadership, Learning, Resources) and three target area committees developed a total of ten goals along with objectives, action steps, timelines, funding sources, persons responsible and means of evaluation. Some board members described their participation in this process as being more deeply involved than in previous planning, and community and business partners reported in interviews that they were there to help create the plan, not just to rubber stamp it. The Super Team also adopted the newest version of the mission, vision, and beliefs, which became part of the Strategic Plan. During the 2017 Summer Data Retreat, school administrators shared this plan, mission, vision and beliefs with their School Councils (school leadership team, teachers, parents) who then developed school improvement plans aligned to the district Strategic Plan.

Each goal in the Strategic Plan and in the school plans contains action steps but no strategies, so the action steps do not support a research-based strategy but are more of a list of action steps related to the goal. While data is posted on the walls in a room in the Support Center, the Team found no data document or profile of all relevant student data and professional practice data and which included causal analysis and disaggregation. The same was true at the school level. When data comes into the system, the Data Analysis Coordinator sends it out, and if he sees something particular in the data that he believes principals or district personnel should review, he makes sure they receive it.

The January 2013 External Review Report contained three Improvement Priorities. Improving the technology infrastructure so that learners could better use technology has been partially addressed in that Vartek has been

able to keep the infrastructure operating at a high level. However, learners are still not consistently using digital resources or technology as part of their learning when appropriate. Having a specific action plan for integrating digital resources could be beneficial. (See Opportunity for Improvement for Standard 3.5). The district has provided teachers with extended learning opportunities about data, and teachers reported attending sessions on interpreting and using MAP and iREADY data. However, the third Improvement Priority is still an issue in that students are not consistently engaged in rigorous coursework that requires their use of higher order thinking skills. (See Improvement Priority 2.2.)

The district leadership and schools are focused on two of the goals: to achieve one year's growth in reading and math for all students. These goals drive the school improvement plans and the PLCs. Common formative assessments in reading and math have been developed, leveled readers adopted and school schedules altered to help achieve these goals. Student portfolios contain information about mastery in reading and writing as measured by MAP.

Stakeholder interviews revealed that not all schools have shared the results of the recent AdvancED Climate and Culture Surveys, Inventories or Teaching and Pedagogy Surveys. Further, these interviews indicated that two-way communication could be stronger. (See Opportunity for Improvement 1.10.) School administrators report on the progress of their continuous improvement efforts to the superintendent at monthly meetings, and schools convey information to the Board of Education throughout the year. The Superintendent also shares data in the goal areas at Board meetings and at public forums.

The district office was recently renamed the Support Center, which the superintendent believes signaled a change in management style. Indicative of the district's commitment to continuous improvement is the outstanding way in which it prepared for the Engagement Review. Not only did district and school personnel post an amazing number of helpful documents, but they also included crosswalks between the SQFs, standards, and evidence, which expedited the Team's work. The comments and insights at the end of each quality factor also revealed a realistic view of the district's progress and needs and included some analysis of the survey results.

AdvancED Standards Diagnostic Results

The AdvancED Performance Standards Diagnostic is used by the Engagement Review Team to evaluate the institution's effectiveness based on AdvancED's Performance Standards. The diagnostic consists of three components built around each of the three Domains: **Leadership Capacity, Learning Capacity** and **Resource Capacity**. Point values are established within the diagnostic and a percentage of the points earned by the institution for each Standard is calculated from the point values for each Standard. Results are reported within four ranges identified by the colors representing Needs Improvement (Red), Emerging (Yellow), Meets Expectations (Green), and Exceeds Expectations (Blue). The results for the three Domains are presented in the tables that follow.

Leadership Capacity Domain

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress toward its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its 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 implement strategies that improve learner and educator performance.

Leadership Capacity Standards	Rating

Leadership Capacity Standards		Rating
1.1	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.	Meets Expectations
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learners.	Exceeds Expectations
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.	Meets Expectations
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	Exceeds Expectations
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.	Emerging
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.	Exceeds Expectations
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.	Emerging
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.	Meets Expectations
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.	Emerging
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.	Meets Expectations

Learning Capacity Domain

The impact of teaching and learning is the primary expectation of every system and its institutions. The establishment of a learning culture built on high expectations for learning, along with quality programs and services, which include an analysis of results, are all key indicators of the system's impact on teaching and learning.

Learning Capacity Standards		Rating
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.	Emerging
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.	Emerging
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs and skills needed for success.	Exceeds Expectations
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.	Needs Improvement
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.	Exceeds Expectations
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is aligned to standards and best practices.	Exceeds Expectations
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.	Meets Expectations

Learning Capacity Standards		Rating
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational future and career planning.	Exceeds Expectations
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.	Exceeds Expectations
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.	Meets Expectations
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.	Exceeds Expectations
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.	Emerging

Resource Capacity Domain

The use and distribution of resources align and support the needs of the system and institutions served. Systems ensure that resources are aligned with its stated purpose and direction and distributed equitably so that the needs of the system are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes support for professional learning for all staff. The system examines the allocation and use of resources to ensure appropriate levels of funding, sustainability, and system effectiveness.

Resource Capacity Standards		Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.	Meets Expectations
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Meets Expectations
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.	Exceeds Expectations
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.	Emerging
3.6	The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.	Emerging
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.	Meets Expectations
3.8	The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®®) Results

The eProve™ Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®®) is a learner-centric classroom observation tool that comprises 28 items organized in seven environments aligned with the AdvancED Standards.

The eleot® provides useful, relevant, structured, and quantifiable data on the extent to which students are engaged in activities and/or demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, and/or dispositions that are conducive to effective learning. Classroom observations are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes. Results from eleot® are reported on a scale of one to four based on the degree and quality of the engagement.

eleot®® Observations	
Total Number of eleot®® Observations	**64**
Environments	**Rating**
Equitable Learning Environment	2.82
Learners engage in differentiated learning opportunities and/or activities that meet their needs	2.28
Learners have equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	3.38
Learners are treated in a fair, clear and consistent manner	3.52
Learners demonstrate and/or have opportunities to develop empathy/respect/appreciation for differences in abilities, aptitudes, backgrounds, cultures, and/or other human characteristics, conditions and dispositions	2.11
High Expectations Environment	2.66
Learners strive to meet or are able to articulate the high expectations established by themselves and/or the teacher	2.88
Learners engage in activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	2.80
Learners demonstrate and/or are able to describe high quality work	2.56
Learners engage in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks that require the use of higher order thinking (e.g., analyzing, applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	2.80
Learners take responsibility for and are self-directed in their learning	2.27
Supportive Learning Environment	3.25
Learners demonstrate a sense of community that is positive, cohesive, engaged, and purposeful	3.16
Learners take risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	2.95
Learners are supported by the teacher, their peers and/or other resources to understand content and accomplish tasks	3.42
Learners demonstrate a congenial and supportive relationship with their teacher	3.47
Active Learning Environment	2.68
Learners' discussions/dialogues/exchanges with each other and the teacher predominate	2.67
Learners make connections from content to real-life experiences	2.52
Learners are actively engaged in the learning activities	3.00
Learners collaborate with their peers to accomplish/complete projects, activities, tasks and/or assignments	2.55
Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.88
Learners monitor their own learning progress or have mechanisms whereby their learning progress is monitored	2.77
Learners receive/respond to feedback (from teachers/peers/other resources) to improve understanding and/or revise work	3.14
Learners demonstrate and/or verbalize understanding of the lesson/content	3.16
Learners understand and/or are able to explain how their work is assessed	2.45
Well-Managed Learning Environment	3.50
Learners speak and interact respectfully with teacher(s) and each other	3.59
Learners demonstrate knowledge of and/or follow classroom rules and behavioral expectations and work well with others	3.64
Learners transition smoothly and efficiently from one activity to another	3.36
Learners use class time purposefully with minimal wasted time or disruptions	3.41

eleot®® Observations	
Total Number of eleot®® **Observations**	**64**
Environments	**Rating**
Digital Learning Environment	2.11
Learners use digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	2.22
Learners use digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	2.12
Learners use digital tools/technology to communicate and/or work collaboratively for learning	1.98

eleot®˚ Narrative

The Engagement Review Team conducted 64 classroom observations using the eleot® at the primary, elementary, middle and high schools. The district conducted 396 observations using eleot® prior to the review. The results varied in some learning environments but were very similar in several others.

Well-Managed Learning Environment was rated the highest (3.50 out of 4). Team members saw classrooms where learners demonstrated knowledge of and/or followed classroom rules and behavioral expectations and worked well with others. Learners also interacted respectfully with their teachers and peers, which aligned with responses on student, parent and teacher surveys. Observers at the primary and elementary levels saw smooth, efficient transitions and most students' being on task. Student behavior in the hallways was also good. The district observers also rated this as the highest environment.

The supportive Learning Environment earned the second highest rating (3.25). Observers noted teachers, peers and technology resources supported student earning. Learners generally appeared to have congenial and supportive relationships with their teachers. While the responses on the student climate and culture surveys showed a gradual percentage drop in describing teachers as "caring" and "helpful" decreased at the secondary levels, these were still among the highest scoring responses. The district observers also rated this as the second highest environment.

The lowest environment was Digital Learning (2.11). While teachers were using technology, students were largely using it in centers to work on reading or math skills. In some classrooms students were interacting with the Promethean Board to show solutions to math problems. Results from the middle school Student Survey for Effective Learning Environments corroborate what the Team observed, especially for items G.2 (37% all classes, 25% most) and G.3 (28% all classes, 27% most). The Team did not find results for this survey from other grade levels. District observers also saw this as the lowest rated environment.

The second lowest environment was High Expectations (2.66). Observers at all grade levels saw few instances of students engaged in challenging or rigorous activities that required them to use higher order thinking skills. On the Teacher Improvement Monitoring and Process Survey, 70% at the elementary school strongly agreed that "the curriculum in my school is focused on both supporting and challenging all students," while 56% of middle school teachers strongly agreed with that statement. When asked what four activities they most often do in class, the range of responses of "thinking" was 32-50% across the schools. "Listening to the teacher" and "completing worksheets" were among the highest rated responses at all schools. "Bored" was a frequent response on the inventories about how students feel while at school. This apparent lack of rigor is of concern to the Team as providing teachers with instruction on increasing higher order thinking and rigor was an Improvement Priority in the January 2013 External Review Report. The Engagement Review Team found that classrooms were still mostly teacher-centered with students having few or no choices (2.27).

In general, the team saw students who were compliant and on task but who were not actively engaged in their learning. They were not making connections from their learning to real-life experiences (2.52) nor were they

collaborating with their peers to complete project, activities tasks or assignments (2.55). Responses on the student surveys and inventories as well as interviews corroborated these findings. Whole group instruction predominated, and while observers saw students in centers at the primary and elementary levels, they were rotating through the same activities rather than experiencing differentiated learning (2.28).

Findings

The chart below provides an overview of the institution ratings across the three Domains.

- Needs Improvement
- Emerging
- Meets Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations
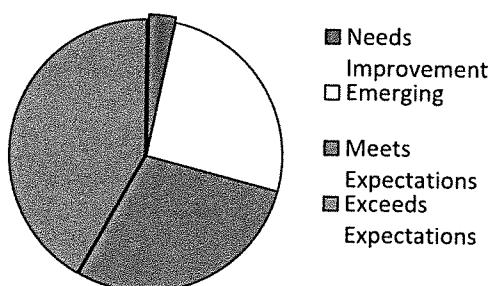
Rating	Number of Standards
Needs Improvement	1
Emerging	8
Meets Expectations	9
Exceeds Expectations	13

Powerful Practices

Powerful Practices reflect noteworthy observations and actions that have yielded clear results in student achievement or organizational effectiveness and are actions that exceed what is typically observed or expected in an institution.

Powerful Practice #1

The Ben Hill County School System School Board conducts itself in a highly professional manner, which enables the district to operate effectively and to achieve its mission and vision (1.4 and 1.5).

Primary Standard: 1.4

Evidence:

As evidenced by Exemplary Board of Education Awards from the Georgia School Boards Association (since 2016) and stakeholder interviews, the Ben Hill County School System (BHCSS) School Board actively supports and respects the leadership's responsibility to accomplish the goals for improvement in student learning and instruction, as well as manage day-to-day operations of the system and its schools. Efforts are focused on maintaining a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of the board and those of the school leadership. The school board continually reviews their roles and responsibilities in board meetings and refers parents and community members to the proper channels to address issues and situations. Board members engage in an annual self assessment. Through a systematic and defined process, the school board members participate in formal professional development through the Georgia School Boards Association and the RESA collaborative. The superintendent also provides updates about state and national issues. Through interviews of stakeholders the Engagement Review Team determined that the board is perceived to be functioning as a cohesive unit that follows appropriate laws and regulations. Further, the board uses an on-going process to maintain a comprehensive and systematically revised policy manual, which effectively guides the board's decision-making. As ascertained through interviews with the board members and principals,

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this clear delineation of responsibilities allows the school leadership to deal effectively with issues and concerns and ultimately to concentrate efforts on student achievement and instruction.

Powerful Practice #2
The staff is using student data effectively to guide instruction through its PLC work and its Response to Intervention (RtI) and Pyramid of Intervention (POI) processes (2.11).

Primary Standard: 2.11

Evidence:
Team members who attended PLC meetings during the review watched teachers and coaches discuss student performance data. The teachers and interventionists use this data to form flexible groupings for skill building and standards mastery. The schools use iREADY and MAP to guide instruction as the system works to bring students up to grade level in math and reading. Formative assessments and end of course assessments also provide teachers with information about student learning, and teachers use Instructional Response Planning Forms to record performance and grouping decisions. Professional learning about PLCs and interpreting and analyzing data is ongoing. Students have portfolios that contain their data so that they can monitor their learning progress. In response to the statement, "Assessments at my school are specifically designed to serve the instructional purposes specified by the users of the assessments," 100% of elementary and middle school teachers strongly agreed/agreed and 98% of high school teachers strongly agreed/agreed.

Powerful Practice #3
The system has developed comprehensive induction, mentoring and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness (3.3).

Primary Standard: 3.3

Evidence:
Through interviews and conversations with staff, it is evident that acquiring and retaining teachers is an ongoing concern for Ben Hill County School District, and, therefore, a strong induction and mentoring program is vital. The mentor handbook is both detailed and comprehensive with goals, calendar, strategies and forms necessary to complete the program. Mentors meet regularly with their mentees and have clear objectives for these meetings. In interviews with teachers, the team heard praise for the new teacher induction and mentoring program. One mentor stated that her mentee told her, "If it weren't for this program, I would have resigned in December." Projections for next year's staffing indicates that retention is up. Interviews with Instructional Coaches at each school indicated they were skilled, knowledgeable and focused on assisting teachers in implementing best practices in their classroom. Through the use of PLCs and the guidance of Instructional Coaches, teachers are analyzing data and changing teaching practices to ensure learner's needs are met. Instructional coaches are consistently providing assistance, direction, and modeling best practices in the classroom.

Opportunities for Improvement
Opportunities for Improvement are those actions that will guide and direct institutions to specific areas that are worthy of additional attention.

Opportunity for Improvement #1
Develop, implement, and evaluate a process for system leaders to effectively engage in two-way communication with various stakeholders to inform decisions (1.10).

Primary Standard: 1.10

Evidence:
In the Superintendent's Overview, one of the identified weaknesses was "communication as a school system." While stakeholders reported satisfaction with communication between parents and the teachers and the schools, and community stakeholders thought that the superintendent communicated with them through events such as the Community Education summit and community meetings, it was noted that there is no formal process for stakeholders to provide feedback to the system. Teachers who served on the Super Team believed that they were able to share input during the strategic planning process, but this was limited to a relatively small number of staff. All schools deployed inventories and various surveys to teachers, students and parents. However, teachers at most buildings had not seen all of these results of the various AdvancED surveys that had been administered this year. In interviews, parents and students concurred. In the schools that did review the results, it was not clear that teachers had analyzed these results. Some analysis of survey results was included in the System Quality Factor narratives, but the Team did not hear that there had been any discussion of these results or actions taken to address some of the issues they raised.

Opportunity for Improvement #2
Develop, implement, and evaluate a system-wide plan for providing learners equitable opportunities through differentiation and consistently high expectations to develop skills and achieve content and learning priorities (2.1).

Primary Standard: 2.1

Evidence:
The Engagement Review Team found that differentiated opportunities were not provided in many classrooms for all learners (2.28 rating on eleot® out of 4). eleot® results as well as teacher and student interviews revealed that while personalized learning opportunities, differentiation of instruction, and high learning expectations were evident in some classrooms, the majority of classrooms lacked instructional evidence of high expectations that are differentiated or personalized for specific learner needs. While interviews with Instructional Coaches and POI Coordinators indicated that professional learning includes support of teacher development in the planning and implementation of differentiated instruction, and some teacher interviews indicated that teachers are aware of the need to implement differentiated learning opportunities, teacher understanding of best practices in implementing and evaluating the results of differentiated opportunities was not consistently evidenced. High learning expectations that engage and either accelerate or accommodate for specific learner needs were evidenced in some classrooms through eleot® observation data, but student interviews in secondary grades indicated that students do not perceive acceleration or challenging learning opportunities to be a consistent instructional practice in their experiences. While team members found some cases of students being challenged and teacher expectations evident for academic performance to be high, these were not consistent practices. The needs of high ability students are not being addressed since the learning priorities are so focused on bringing students up to grade level. High Expectations was the second lowest rated learning environment (2.66) during the review, and it was the third lowest environment during the district observations (2.66). Some students reported having personalized learning goals, but these are concentrated on standard mastery and not on higher expectations that include higher order thinking skills. Not all students reported setting these goals, and not all teachers see the value of student goal setting based on the survey data.

Opportunity for Improvement #3
Develop, implement and evaluate a long term plan for integrating digital resources into teaching, learning and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness (3.5).

Primary Standard: 3.5

Evidence:

The Engagement Review Team observed 64 classrooms in the four schools of the Ben Hill County School District and saw an abundance of technology in the classrooms. In some classrooms, technology was being integrated in powerful ways, but this was not evident in other classrooms at all. Digital Learning was the lowest rate eleot® environment on both the Engagement Team observations (2.11) and district observations (1.64). Students at the primary and elementary levels were using curriculum-related software programs while some middle and high school students were using technology in more ways but not often in solving problems, creating original works for learning, communicating or working collaboratively for learning." While the technology plan addressed, "training and supporting students and teachers in order to ensure efficient use of technology resources," there isn't a comprehensive plan that evaluates and demonstrates improvements in professional practice, student performance and organizational effectiveness. While inside and outside sources are used to conduct training on various systems directed initiatives (1:1, Office 365), there isn't a plan for continual, ongoing training for teachers as needs arise.

Opportunity for Improvement #4
Review and revise processes for updating information resources (media and textbook) so they represent a growth toward the demand of the 21st century learning and balances fiscal restrictions with student-centered decisions (3.6).

Primary Standard: 3.6

Evidence:
Through interviews and documentation, there is little evidence of a comprehensive, documented plan that ensures allocation of resources to areas such as media and textbooks. Student interviews indicated that "textbooks are falling apart," and textbook adoptions are not taking place on a systematic basis. Interviews with media specialists indicated that media budgets have not been restored since state regulations have changed, and a tour of several media centers revealed some books in poor condition that need to be replaced.

Improvement Priorities

Improvement priorities are developed to enhance the capacity of the institution to reach a higher level of performance and reflect the areas identified by the Engagement Review Team to have the greatest impact on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

Improvement Priority #1
Develop, implement, and evaluate a system-wide plan for fostering a learning culture that promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem solving (2.2).

Primary Standard: 2.2

Evidence:
The Engagement Review Team found that learners' experiences included some creativity, innovation, critical thinking, application of knowledge, and collaborative problem solving, and that few classrooms evidenced project or problem-based learning opportunities. Inquiry-based instruction was evidenced in few classrooms. eleot® results and teacher, student, and district level interviews indicated that some faculty and staff embrace and demonstrate a set of shared beliefs that includes a focus on learner engagement, creativity and innovation, and problem solving, but project-based learning or collaborative problem-solving opportunities were evident in few classrooms. Student interviews at middle and high school levels indicated that secondary students appreciate and believe they excel through opportunities to collaborate in project-based and problem-solving learning. Culture and climate survey results indicate a gap between what teachers and students believe are common practices. Elementary students said that they seldom complete short projects (11%) or long projects (7%), which was similar to middle school (8% and 5% respectively) and high school results (9% and 12% respectively). Observers saw students working together but not necessarily collaborating in problem-based learning situations. Students

mentioned not having many choices in their learning experiences, which was substantiated by the eleot® rating for self-directed learning (2.27). During classroom observations, the Team saw students who were well-behaved and on task but not consistently actively engaged (2.68).

Improvement Priority #2
Develop and implement a formal system where each student has an adult advocate is to ensure all students are supported throughout their education experience (2.4).

Primary Standard: 2.4

Evidence:
Ben County CSS has some adult advocacy programs in place (i.e. middle school principals at-risk boys, REACH), but these serve a limited number of students. Some teachers report using Hurricane Time to monitor student progress and advise students, but this is not a consistent process. In interviews, teachers shared their beliefs that because this is a small district, they know their students. RtI does enable teachers to monitor student progress toward system goals; however, it does not serve as an advocacy program. The team further noted that addressing individual needs of students was not being effectively monitored and could find no documentation of a consistent process for all students to meet with adult mentors. Given the system's demographics and the graduation rate, a strong system-wide advocacy program could prove beneficial in meeting the needs of all students.

Accreditation Recommendation and Index of Educational Quality™ (IEQ™)

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

AdvancED provides the Index of Education Quality™ (IEQ™) as a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of standards and review criteria. A formative tool for improvement, it identifies areas of success as well as areas in need of focus. The IEQ is comprised of the Standards Diagnostic ratings from the three Domains: 1) Leadership Capacity; 2) Learning Capacity; and 3) Resource Capacity and the results of eleot® classroom observations. The IEQ results are reported on a scale of 100 to 400 and provides information about how the institution is performing compared to expected criteria.

Institution IEQ	334.16

Conclusion Narrative

The Engagement Review Team found that the Ben Hill County School System has several attributes in place that will enable them to see the results they desire. Most stakeholders evinced a willingness to change. As one teacher observed, staff members have demonstrated their "resilience" given all of the changes they have experienced this year. The district has also made clear its focus is on students ("It's about what's good for kids.") with everything centered on improving student learning. The leadership has developed a sense of urgency as a result of reviewing the data and discovering how many students are performing one to three grade levels below where they should be. Stakeholders interviews expressed appreciation for this honesty regarding data, and parents and community members stated that they trust the district leadership to do what is best for students. As previously mentioned,

the district did an exemplary job in engaging in an internal review, and the district overview revealed that the district has a sound sense of what needs to be done.

Changing the name of the district office to the Support Center signaled a shift in emphasis that supports the "students first" focus. The system does an excellent job of identifying and addressing the specialized needs of learners. In addition, paraprofessionals were involved in professional learning opportunities, which is a best practice. Creating a position to increase parental involvement has been reported to be producing some results. Despite challenges, the district is attracting and retaining qualified personnel and has allocated its resources in alignment with the system 's identified needs and priority to improve student performance.

In support of improving student learning, the district has enhanced its RtI/POI efforts through the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) structure. While there is some variance in what the PLCs look like at different grade levels, the Instruction Coach and/or RtI Coordinator usually lead the PLCs, which meet in grade level and subject matter teams. Para professionals and interventionists are also included in the PLCs. PLCs review data, share strategies, develop flexible groupings, etc. Various stakeholders have attended Solution Tree training on PLCs, and more will be attending upcoming training.

In interviews with parents, especially at the PreK, primary and elementary levels, they cited caring, supporting teachers as a chief asset in the district. This was further substantiated in the parent surveys.

While the current high school presents some safety concerns because of the number of doors, students, teachers and parents at the other schools feel that their schools are safe and provide environments that are conducive to learning.

District and school personnel spoke of the very supportive Fitzgerald community and the considerable contributions their Partners in Education make to the district's vision for students. Ben Hill CSS enjoys a great relationship with Wiregrass Georgia Technical College, which helps to enable 280 students to benefit from dual credit enrollment. In addition, the district works with the Fitzgerald/Ben Hill Development Authority, Monitor Enrichment Program, Communities in Schools and various businesses, law firms, and banks. The upcoming Community Education Summit will feature the Ben Hill County School System.

The Engagement Review Team found that much of the work that the district needs to do revolves around operating more systemically across the district so that there is more consistency between all levels and departments. For instance, at the primary level, standards-based report cards are relatively rooted in what a child knows. After that, there appears to be inconsistencies in the grading process, so that some teachers deduct points for late assignments, other give extra credit, and the Team was not certain that grades were based solely on what a learner knows and is able to do and that those grades are consistent across grades and content levels. Another example is that career exploration and planning does not appear to be systemically implemented across the grade levels. The district might consider a scaffolded PreK – 12 approach to career education. The Team encourages the district to consider all program and initiatives in light of a PreK –12 perspective.

Currently, the curriculum documents the Team reviewed in the PLC folders were the Georgia Standards of Excellence rather than a curriculum. While standards describe what should be taught, the curriculum guides should describe how they are taught, including strategies for differentiation. The collaborative lesson plans contain descriptions of some teaching strategies and resources, but not how the content and/or assessments can be differentiated to meet the individual needs of learners. While the Team understood the concept of leveling at the elementary school, it was not clear why a lesson at the fifth grade was nearly identical to one at the second grade, with the second grade experience being more rigorous. The Team also heard that there was a disconnect between the Pre-K and primary school's curriculum, which may need to be investigated.

The district has identified communication as one of its issues, and this appears to be the case with two-way communication. For instance, teachers, students and parents reported that they had not seen the results of the AdvancED surveys they had taken earlier this year. Some teachers reported that being on the Super Team was a

great experience and allowed them to have a voice.

While the district is evidently more data-driven than in the past, the Team did not find data profiles or documents at the district or school levels that contain all relevant student performance data and data about professional practice. While teachers are focused on individual student data to create flexible groups to provide effective RtI programs, at the school-wide and district-wide levels, the Team did not find data that had been thoroughly disaggregated or analyzed. The Team did not find evidence of causal analysis having been done at the district or school levels either. Interviews with school stakeholders revealed that they were not aware of any achievement gaps based on disaggregated data although they were aware of their own student data. The most recent MAP scores disclose uneven results across the district from the fall to winter tests. MAP scores increased at three grade levels but not in the others. Determining why this is happening is critical to growth. Achievement gap data can lead to finding strategies that address the specific needs of these groups (i.e. poverty). The Team reviewed survey and inventory data that indicated contradictory perceptions/experiences with students' being adequately challenged. Parents also expressed concerns about this during interviews. At the high school level, specifically, there were also concerns about the no homework policy and whether that was preparing college bound students for what they would face. Since 8% of the 14% that do go onto college are not continuing, it would be wise to determine what is behind this statistic. Cohort data is important, but trend data can reveal issues with curriculum or instruction and comparison data is also helpful in determining how the district is doing compared to other districts with similar demographics. The student portfolios are an excellent practice, and students are aware of their strengths and areas in need of improvement, and this practice might include having the students set short- and long-term goals as well as monitor and analyze their own performance.

Tied to more in-depth data analysis is program evaluation. In the schools who administered the AdvancED Improvement Monitoring and Processes Survey, respondents gave low ratings to items about evaluating programs, curriculum and other initiatives. This was corroborated in interviews with district and school stakeholders. Creating and implementing a process to determine whether programs and initiatives are effective would increase organizational effectiveness.

Ben Hill County School System has brought in many changes within the last two years, and many of these show promise. Tackling all of these initiatives with a systemic approach so that there is consistency and excellence throughout the system will enable the district to see the student learning gains they are working toward.

Next Steps

The results of the Engagement Review provide the next step to guide the improvement journey of the institution in their efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all learners. The findings are aligned to research-based criteria designed to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness. The feedback provided in the Accreditation Engagement Review Report will assist the institution in reflecting on their current improvement efforts and to adapt and adjust their plans to continuously strive for improvement.

Upon receiving the Accreditation Engagement Review Report the institution is encouraged to implement the following steps:
- Review and share the findings with stakeholders.
- Develop plans to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the Engagement Review Team.
- Use the findings and data from the report to guide and strengthen the institution's continuous improvement efforts.
- Celebrate the successes noted in the report
- Continue your Improvement Journey

Team Roster

The Engagement Review Teams are comprised of professionals with varied backgrounds and professional experiences. All Lead Evaluators and Engagement Review Team members complete AdvancED training and eleot®® certification to provide knowledge and understanding of the AdvancED tools and processes. The following professionals served on the Engagement Review Team:

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Leslie Ballard	Leslie Ballard recently retired after serving in the AdvancED Indiana Office for 16 years as Associate Director and then Director. In addition to providing accreditation and school improvement services for Indiana schools, she served as an External Review team member and/or Lead Evaluator in hundreds of schools in Indiana and other states as well as in Germany, Belgium, Italy, Japan and Egypt. She also serves as a trainer for AdvancED. Leslie taught English at the high school and college levels for 26 years and served as an interim assistant principal (curriculum and instruction). She became a National Board Certified Teacher in 2000 and has been recognized as a Hoosier Hero for services to education in Indiana. In addition to holding a Gifted and Talented endorsement, she is also a certified School Improvement Specialist and a certified trainer for Dr. Pat Wolfe. She has published articles on writing instruction and giftedness and has presented at conferences on a variety of topics related to language arts, brain compatible teaching strategies, and school improvement.
Larry Davis	Larry Davis, an educator for over 40 years, has been retired for 6 years. He has worked in various positions that included teaching, coordinator, and administrator. He was responsible for overseeing a district's magnet school, worked as an administrator in various areas that included magnet schools, vocational education, year-round schools, and also served as a Title I administrator. He also started an 1800 student K-12 school and worked with the governor's task force on school grades. He has served as an AdvancED reviewer for over 40 visits. Presently, he is serving as a principal for a foster care facility where he serves the educational needs of the children.
Michelle Landrum	Michelle Landrum, an award recipient of the National Outstanding LDC (Literacy Design Collaborative) Trainer designation, adjunct teaches Composition and Business Communication at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, serves as a Languages and Literacy Specialist working with secondary ELA, Foreign Languages, and Libraries, and trains as LDC District Coach with Jefferson County Schools, Alabama. Michelle holds teaching certification in secondary ELA and administrative certification K-12, with prior experience as a middle school teacher and a high school assistant principal. She has served Jefferson County Schools for ten years.

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Gregg Miles	Gregg Miles is an Instructional Technology Specialist for the Effingham County School District in Springfield, Georgia. His responsibilities are to enhance the use of technology in the instructional process by becoming familiar with new classroom technology that achieves district priorities, train teachers in the effective use of technology in their classroom, and research new technology and best practices in adopting and utilizing technology in instruction. Mr. Miles holds an ED.S. in Instructional Technology with an endorsement in Online Teaching and Learning, M.Ed. in Instructional Technology, and a B.S. in Technology Education from Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. Mr. Miles has experience as an elementary and middle school teacher, a high school Media Specialist and an adjunct professor at Georgia Southern University.
Dr. Brian Simon	Brian Simon majored in history and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1993 from Savannah State College. Brian began his career at A.E. Beach High school in Savannah, GA as a social studies teacher and coach before moving to the Corporate Academy of Savannah as the Social Studies Facilitator and Assistant Men's Basketball Coach at Savannah State University. After completion of his second year of Head coaching, he returned to A.E. Beach High School to become the Assistant Principal 2006-2007. In 2007 he became the principal of the new Ridgeland High School in Ridgeland, SC. where he served until 2010. He went on to serve as the principal of Jackson Heights Elementary School and the principal of the New Martha R. Smith Elementary School in Jesup, GA. While in these positions, he attended Cambridge College in Massachusetts to receive his Masters of Education in Education Administration, Advanced Graduate Studies degree in Leadership and Doctorate in Educational Leadership.
Dr. Sharon D. Streeter	Dr. Sharon D. Streeter has been an active educator for over 28 years. She currently serves as Director of Special Education Services in the Dallas County School District in Alabama. As a public educator, she has served in many roles: elementary teacher, assistant principal at the elementary and middle school levels, a principal at a 6-12 school (juvenile detention facility), and two elementary schools. Additionally, she serves as an Adjunct Instructor in the Education Department at Grand Canyon University. She received her Bachelors and Masters of Science in Education from Auburn University Montgomery. She furthered her education and earned an Educational Specialist degree from Alabama State University in Educational Leadership. In addition, she has an earned Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Alabama in Educational Leadership with minors in Quantitative Methods and Social Foundations. Dr. Streeter has presented at local, regional and state conferences. Her research interests are teacher quality, professional development, academic achievement, administrator quality, and instructional practices. Dr. Streeter desires to become a full-time college professor and expand her research studies and publications.

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Toll Free: 888.41EDNOW (888.413.3669)   Global: +1 678.392.2285, ext. 6963
9115 Westside Parkway, Alpharetta, GA 30009

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About AdvancED

AdvancED is a non-profit, non-partisan organization serving the largest community of education

professionals in the world. Founded on more than 100 years of work in continuous improvement,

AdvancED combines the knowledge and expertise of a research institute, the skills of a management

consulting firm and the passion of a grassroots movement for educational change to empower

Pre-K-12 schools and school systems to ensure that all learners realize their full potential.