



External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

Dr. Jeffery E Langham, Superintendent

100 H H Robinson Dr
Wetumpka, AL 36092-5701

Dr. George W Griffin, Lead Evaluator

Date: February 24, 2013 - February 27, 2013

NOTES

Scores/ratings recorded in red are those rated by Elmore County; they are preceded by the letters EC.

Opportunities for Improvement are suggestions provided by the External Review Team that Elmore County should consider addressing. Elmore County received 16 Opportunities for Improvement. (1 for Standard One, 1 for Standard Two, 7 for Standard Three, 3 for Standard Four, and 4 for Standard 5)

Elmore County received 1 Required Action listed on page 22 of this report. AdvancED guidelines mandate that our system completes an Accreditation Progress Report to address this Required Action by the spring of 2015. The contents of the report will outline steps taken to address the Required Action and will include methods for monitoring progress and evidence of improvements.

Statements underlined and written in red on pages 20-22 are items that are considered Powerful Practices (also called Notable Achievements). These statements were shared with Elmore County by the External Review Team at the External Oral Exit Report on February 27, 2013.

Copyright ©2013 by Advance Education, Inc. AdvancED grants to the Institution, which is the subject of the External Review Team Report, and its designees and stakeholders a non-exclusive, perpetual, irrevocable, royalty-free license and release to reproduce, reprint and distribute this report in accordance with and as protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States of America and all foreign countries. All other rights not expressly conveyed are reserved by AdvancED.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the External Review Process	1
Part I: Findings.....	2
Accreditation Standards and Indicators	2
Learning Environment	19
Part II: Conclusion.....	20
Summary of the <u>External Review</u>	20
Required Actions	22
Part III: Addenda	23
Next Steps.....	23
Celebrating <u>Accreditation</u>	23
About AdvancED.....	23

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
----------	----------------------------

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

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.			2.75 (EC-2.75)
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • District purpose statements - past and present • Observations • Minutes from meetings related to development of the district's purpose and direction • Copy of strategic plan referencing the district purpose and direction and its effectiveness • Superintendent presentation, standards overview, newspaper article 	3 (EC-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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey results • Observations • Interviews • Websites, standards overview 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations • Examples of schools' continuous improvement plans • The district strategic plan • Review of data notebooks, review of test score data, class/course offerings, superintendent presentation, newspaper article 	3 (EC-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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Survey results • Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs • Observations • The district strategic plan • Standards overview 	3 (EC-3)

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Construct a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a purpose for student success at each school site.

1.2

The district has a process for construction and review of the purpose statement. The standards overview presentation and interviews with the superintendent, teachers, and site administrators revealed that no systematic guidelines exist to inform the development or revision of purpose statements at individual school sites. It is important to ensure that the purpose statement of each school is aligned to that of the district so that similar expectations may be established across all schools. A regular review process also builds ownership among stakeholders and may serve as the basis for a review of performance expectations and programming.

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.	2.83 (EC-2.83)

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews• Staff handbooks• Board policies, newspaper clippings	3 (EC-3)
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governing authority minutes relating to training• Proof of legal counsel• Assurances, certifications• Interviews• Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest	3 (EC-3)
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communications regarding governing authority actions• District strategic plan• Examples of school improvement plans• Interviews	3 (EC-3)
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examples of decisions aligned with the district's strategic plan• Professional development offerings and plans• Interviews• Survey results• Examples of decisions	3 (EC-3)
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews• Survey responses• Committee member lists, school improvement plans	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement

2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation • Job specific criteria • Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice throughout the system and student success noted • Surveys 	3 (EC-3)
-----	---	---	----------

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Devise a systemic plan to engage stakeholders effectively in support of the system’s purpose and direction at all levels.

2.5

Through interviews with administrative leaders, teachers, parents, and other community leaders, the review team noted various efforts being used in the lower grades to include a wide range of stakeholders in support of the system’s purpose and direction. Some of these efforts are coming to fruition while others are emerging. The engagement of stakeholders tends to drop-off as students matriculate through the system and this was verified through multiple interviews. Research indicates the positive impact stakeholder support (especially parental) has on student achievement. With identified groups of students in mind, a systemic plan to continue stakeholder support as students move through the system, may benefit those who struggle academically and socially.

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,

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

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.			2.5 (EC-2.58)
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning expectations for different courses and programs • Interviews • Lesson plans • Observations • Accreditation Report • Descriptions of instructional techniques 	2 (EC-3) Two Opportunities for Improvement
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum guides • A description of the systematic review process for curriculum, instruction, and assessment • Accreditation Report • Common assessments • Observations • Interviews • Program descriptions • Products – scope and sequence, curriculum maps 	3 (EC-3)

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation • Findings from supervisor formal and informal observations • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Observations 	2 (EC-2) Required Action
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation Report • Supervision and evaluation procedures • Recognition of teachers with regard to these practices • Examples of improvements to instructional practices resulting from the evaluation process • Administrative classroom observation protocols and logs • Interviews • Observations • Professional development offerings and plans tied to the prescribed education program, instructional strategies, 	3 (EC-3)
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees • Interviews • Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration • Accreditation Report 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations • Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student 	2 (EC-2) Two Opportunities for Improvement

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation Report • Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to district and school beliefs and values about teaching and learning • Interviews 	3 (EC-3)
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance • Observations • Survey results • Accreditation Report • Interviews 	3 (EC-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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation Report • Description of formalized structures for adults to advocate on behalf of students • Interviews • Observations • Master schedule with time for formalized structure 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices • Survey results • Observations • Accreditation Report • Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting 	3 (EC-3)
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District professional development plan involving the district and all schools • Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs • Accreditation Report • Observations • Interviews 	3 (EC-3)

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews• Accreditation Report• Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
------	--	--	---

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Develop and implement strategies to ensure the curriculum and learning experiences in each course/class provide all students with challenging and equitable opportunities to develop learning skills, thinking skills, and life skills.

Interviews and observations indicated that challenging and equitable opportunities to develop learning skills vary from class to class and from school to school. These opportunities are directly related to the district's stated need to increase the use of differentiated instruction. Horizontal alignment of courses is a process that may be incorporated into team meetings, professional learning community meetings, or conducted through formal and structured curriculum review sessions. The differences in opportunities were observed to be more distinct at the secondary levels. The special needs and abilities of all students must be considered and addressed as teaching strategies are developed and implemented. Challenging and equitable opportunities lead to a greater self awareness and confidence. This encouragement and self confidence leads to increased desire for learning and greater success.

2. Implement in every school individualized learning activities for each student in a way that supports achievement of expectations.

Observation in the classrooms indicated that individualized instruction was not addressed in the daily lesson plan of many teachers in most schools. Lesson plans were often complete; however, targeted at the entire group. Formal classroom observations using the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT) supported the need to individualize instructional strategies as a part of daily lesson planning. Successful learning experiences include activities that address the individual needs to ensure sufficient opportunities for every student to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success. Individualized learning experiences lead to self awareness and a strong desire to succeed.

3. Establish collaborative learning communities in every school to ensure support for improved instruction and student learning at all schools.

Interviews with district staff and teachers indicated that all instructional staff are not involved in collaborative learning communities. The district's Self Assessment report and several presentations to the review team highlighted a plan to develop Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at every school in the 2013-14 year. Interviews also revealed some confusion as to what the PLCs would "look like" and how they would be implemented effectively. Collaborative learning communities provide an important opportunity for each professional staff member to participate in discussions, observations, study, and other means of learning and sharing that will support improved instruction and student learning at all levels. Participation in learning communities can increase professionalism and maintain the focus on student learning.

4. Incorporate the use of exemplars in the daily lesson plan in all classrooms to guide and inform students. 3.6

Observations indicated that instruction in many classrooms did not include concrete examples to enhance the teaching and learning process. This was confirmed in multiple teacher interviews. Hands-on and concrete examples provide an effective transition into the learning process for students at all levels. Exemplars can generate excitement and enthusiasm while guiding and enhancing the learning process. The use of exemplars is an example of the awareness of the importance of creating a strong desire to expand learning beyond the textbook and lecture.

5. Incorporate the use of multiple measures, including formative assessments, to and direct the ongoing modification of instruction and provide data for possible curriculum revision. 3.6 inform

Interviews and discussion with various professional staff indicated a need for additional measures, primarily the use of formative assessments, to further enhance the process for the revision of instruction and curriculum. The district has developed a data review process that focuses largely on summative results. The process has been helpful in targeting groups of students needing extra assistance. It has also helped teachers identify lesson objectives that require reteaching. Interviews and observations support that the "next step" for the district is to incorporate more formative instructional practices into routine instruction. Multiple measures, which include formative assessments, provide a thorough and in depth evaluation of student success. Use of formative assessment results leads to improved and targeted instructional practices.

6. Implement a student advocacy structure designed and evaluated by the system that promotes long-term staff interaction with individual students, 3.9

Some of the schools have a structured advisory program in place; however, this is not consistent across the district. This was stated in the Self Assessment report and noted in the central office presentations to the external review team. Interviews with principals, teachers, and students confirmed that some schools had strong student advocacy programs while others were in their infancy. Central office staff noted that they want each school to have the flexibility to develop this "in their own way" and at the same time they expect a formal program to be put in places where it is needed. The central office staff identified that they want the structure to afford employees the opportunity to gain insight into students' needs and also they expect that each student will have "their adult" serve as an advocate. The intent is to involve all students and all staff in this effort. The research literature supports the value of staff-student advocacy programs in terms of improved student achievement and increased graduation rates at the secondary level.

7. Develop a system to provide learning support services to students with unique learning needs. 3.12

The district staff identified a goal of expanding its understanding of the unique learning needs of students beyond those identified as needing special education services. It was stated in several presentations and confirmed in multiple interviews that district staff need to stay more current on research related to unique characteristics of learning (such as learning styles, multiple intelligences, personality type indicators) and develop new services to address these needs. Central office staff identified this as a professional development need related to individualizing instruction. District staff at all levels stated that they need to increase the use of data to identify unique learning needs of all students and at all levels of proficiency. Individualizing instruction through support services has been shown to be effective in terms of increasing student motivation to learn and also in terms of immediate increased achievement.

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.			2.63 (EC-2.62)
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accreditation Report• Survey results• Observations• School budgets or financial plans for last three years• Interviews• Documentation of highly qualified staff• Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for	3 (EC-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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observations• Accreditation Report• Interviews• Alignment of district budget with district purpose and direction• District strategic plan showing resources support for district	3 (EC-3)
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews• Observations• Accreditation Report• 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	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• District strategic plan showing the areas of budget, facilities, quality control, and other strategic systems• Interviews• Accreditation Report• Observations	3 (EC-3)

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Data on media and information resources available to students and staff 	3 (EC-3)
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model • Survey results • District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level • Accreditation Report • Interviews 	3 (EC-3)
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations • Interviews • Student assessment system for identifying student needs • Survey results • Accreditation Report 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation Report • Description of IEP process • Observations • Interviews • Description of referral process 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Develop a plan for maintaining facilities, services and equipment that includes measures that allow for continuous tracking of progress.

4.3

System and school leaders have developed clear expectations for maintaining safety, cleanliness, and a healthy environment as evidenced through school visits. District staff noted in interviews and presentations that they need to put measures in place that allow for tracking of these conditions. They also highlighted the need to systematically evaluate the results of these efforts. Tracking of maintenance and evaluation of the results will assist district leaders in developing preventive

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

2. Delineate and evaluate the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the students throughout the district. 4.7

District staff identified that more effective programs/services are needed in the area of support services. Presentations and interviews confirmed the need and also established the need for valid and reliable measures of program effectiveness related to the non-academic needs of its students. The use of data to regularly evaluate these programs was not a common practice observed in the district. Current educational research clearly supports the effectiveness of addressing students' basic needs in terms of engagement and achievement in school.

3. Design and implement a process to determine the counseling, assessment, educational, and career planning needs of all students and implement more programs to meet the identified needs of each student in the system. 4.8 referral,

District staff highlighted the need to make its programs systemic. Observations and interviews confirmed that there is great variability in services from school to school. The district staff also noted the need to develop valid and reliable measures of effectiveness through using data-driven evaluation practices. They indicated that most services are the result of legal or administrative procedures that are primarily budget-driven. Support services boost student performance. They also are an integral part of transitions from level to level and are necessary for effective post-secondary planning.

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.

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

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.			2.2 (EC-2.2)
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local or school assessments on student learning and school performance Observations Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness Accreditation Report 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observations Accreditation Report District quality control procedures that monitor schools in effectively using data to improve instruction and student learning List of data sources related to district effectiveness Interviews 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accreditation Report Observations Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data Interviews Policies and written procedures specific to data training 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning • Observations • Evidence of student readiness for the next level • Evidence of student growth 	2 (EC-2) Opportunity for Improvement
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation Report • Survey results • District quality control procedures for monitoring information about student learning, systems that support learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals • Observations • Interviews 	3 (EC-3)

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Develop a comprehensive assessment system and process that produces data from multiple assessment measures.

5.1

District staff identified in presentations and interviews the need to expand its use of data sources. One district staff member commented that "data is more than academic performance data." Data collection and use procedures were noted to be inconsistent from school to school. There are few locally developed measures. Standardized assessments about student learning are the norm for the district. In presentations from the central office staff there was a repeated theme of the need for consistent measurement across classrooms, courses, educational programs, and even within various system divisions. It was also noted that the district does little in terms of regular evaluation of reliability and effectiveness in improving instruction, student learning, and the conditions that support learning. Multiple assessment measures are necessary in order to accurately target instruction to meet the identified learning needs of all students.

2. Develop systematic processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and information from multiple data sources that are documented and used consistently by professional and support staff throughout the district. 5.2 applying

Processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning from data sources are documented and used by professional and support staff throughout the district. However, district staff identified the need to use additional data sources that include comparison and trend data to provide a more complete picture of student learning, instruction, and the effectiveness of programs. District staff also stated the need to better use data to implement and evaluate continuous improvement plans to improve student learning and to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and the conditions that support learning. This is directly related to the Opportunity for Improvement in Indicator 5.1 as it is important to identify multiple processes for the effective use of data measures.

3. Increase support staff training in the interpretation and use of data. 5.3

District staff noted that they have implemented professional development in the area of data use and at the same time need to make the training more explicit and rigorous. They identified that the compelling need is related to helping staff identify concrete ways to use data for instruction. This ranges from installing new instructional practices to reviewing the effectiveness of curriculum. It also involves the need to evaluate the effectiveness of the many programs and initiatives underway in the district. It supports the previously identified need to not add any new programs without first evaluating the effectiveness of those in place.

4. Develop written policies and procedures that describe a process for analyzing data that determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level. 5.4

Interviews and presentations noted that the district does not consistently use these results to design, implement, and evaluate the results of continuous improvement action plans related to student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level. Written procedures will help to establish consistency of use and effectiveness of targeted interventions. Building level staff consistently expressed a need (as one staff member noted) for more training on "what to do with the data once we have it." Developing written strategies and procedures strategies for improvement tied to data analysis will allow for improved progress monitoring and for timely reteaching and regrouping of students in order to bolster achievement.

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

<i>Environments</i>	<i>Level</i>
A. Equitable Learning Environment	2.5
B. High Expectations Environment	2.8
C. Supportive Learning Environment	2.9
D. Active Learning Environment	3.1
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.8
F. Well-Managed Learning Environment	3.2
G. Digital Learning Environment	2.1

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 external review was conducted February 24-27, 2013. The district was well prepared in terms of their pre-review self assessment and reflection. The district established standards review committees and put in many hours of hard work assessing and reflecting on their performance on each of the indicators. Their self-appraisal was open and honest and very thoughtful in terms of focusing on continuous improvement issues. The district ranks relatively high in student achievement and related measures when compared to other districts in Alabama; however, district staff were very candid in identifying areas needed for continuous improvement.

The external review team visited six schools and the Technical Center and formally observed in 34 classrooms. The review team interviewed 137 teachers and professional support staff, 41 administrators, 7 board members, 53 students, and 51 parents and community members for a total of 293 stakeholder interviews. Everyone interviewed was knowledgeable of the process and all were clearly involved in the process and preparation of the district self-assessment efforts.

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.

There are many strong and positive aspects of the district's programs and services. The leadership and staff at all levels of the system are committed to a targeted focus on teaching and learning that provides challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students, and that emphasize achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills. Leadership at all levels of the system is committed to a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning. Building administrators expressed a sense of empowerment in the autonomy of their decisions on the day-to-day management of their specific buildings and also a collaborative spirit with the central office on district-wide issues. Leadership and staff at all levels expressed their enthusiasm for collaboration and support at their schools and also within the district on vertical and horizontal integration of the curriculum.

The district had previously developed a purpose statement that guides all decisions at the school level that was first implemented in 2007 with the help of multiple stakeholders. This statement has regularly been updated with the continued help of many stakeholders in the community. All continuous improvement plans, pedagogical decisions, and school plans are rooted in the clearly stated purpose; however, individual schools (while they have a written purpose statement) lack systematic guidelines to drive the revision of their primary purpose and mission at their respective sites. From a systems perspective, it is important to ensure that the purpose statement of each school is aligned to that of the district.

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically based upon an examination of professional practice. Many staff stated they have changed their teaching styles over the past three to five years as a result of significant data analysis that is ongoing in the individual school sites. This in-depth data analysis has supported the development of a collaborative spirit that is evident from teacher interviews as teachers seek alternative delivery methods from colleagues. In the spirit of continuous improvement, the district staff identified the need to move more assertively from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction. They also identified the need to make better use of classroom "walk-throughs" and to refine and increase their use of data to better inform instructional practices. The district is planning to implement Professional Learning Communities formally beginning next year in an effort to address some of these identified needs. The district staff also cited the need to increase the use of differentiated instructional practices throughout the district. They also recognize that there are many initiatives in the district and that they may need to "step-back" and evaluate the practical effectiveness of the various programs currently in place.

The district also identified as an area of improvement the need to increase the active involvement and engagement of parents and other community stakeholders. The external review team determined the processes to engage stakeholders are strongest in the lower grades where teachers are using innovative ways to include parental input such as regularly posted blogs, newsletters, and social media. This engagement of parental support tends to decrease as students move through the system.

In summary, this is a district that has stable and effective leadership at all levels of the system. Its primary focus is on student achievement. The district is committed to a process of continuous improvement and it identified its strengths and needs very accurately as part of the onsite review preparation.

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.

Classroom observations support that the district's schools and classrooms are well managed. Students were observed to be very respectful with their peers and with adults. Classroom rules and routines were well known and transitions from activity to activity were noted to be smooth and effortless. Students exhibited a relatively high degree of engagement in their classroom activities and seemed comfortable in interacting with their teachers.

Most students seemed to be positively engaged in classroom activities and were able to freely ask questions as needed. Teachers offered support and were responsive and alert to student requests for assistance. Achievement expectations appear to be challenging and attainable and the coursework observed was of generally high quality and reasonably rigorous. The need to increase the use (frequency) of differentiated instructional practices was noted consistently and is in accord with the district's self assessment.

The team noted technology was available in all schools and most classrooms. Its use varied by teacher. Students regularly noted the positive learning experiences they are having and have had throughout their academic careers. Relationships and "building of community" emerged as important factors for academic success.

This is a well managed school district with a primary focus on student performance. The leadership at all levels is focused on student achievement and success. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their work and their students. The schools are clean, well-maintained, and safe. The district is committed to continuous improvement as evidenced by its thorough and candid Self Assessment report. They were very well prepared for the review visit and were very welcoming of feedback from the review team. The external review team recommends that Elmore County Schools be accredited, pending further review and final action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. Develop, implement, and monitor an array of instructional strategies that are student-centered, and that are content and age-appropriate.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.3

One of the major curriculum goals identified by the district is to move instruction from primarily teacher-centered to a predominately student-centered focus. This was identified in the Self Assessment report and was highlighted in presentations by the superintendent and central office staff. Interviews with building level administrators and teachers confirmed that this is a significant goal. Classroom observations revealed much variation from school to school and even within schools. The secondary level schools had the most variability. The ELEOT data supports the need for increased use of differentiated learning opportunities to support student-centered instructional practices. Authentic student engagement is enhanced through the use of student-centered instruction. This increases student ownership of learning and results in increased student motivation for learning, and ultimately increased academic achievement.

Part III: Addenda

Next Steps

The institution should:

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

About AdvancED

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

External Review

Elmore County Board of Education

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.