

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Oxford City Board of Education**

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North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI	3
Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review	4
Summary of Findings	5
Commendations	6
Recommendations	8
Next Steps	9
Standards for Accreditation	11
Standard 1. Vision & Purpose	11
Standard 2. Governance & Leadership	12
Standard 3. Teaching & Learning	14
Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results	15
Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems	16
Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships	17
Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement	18
Quality Assurance Findings	20
Conclusion	21
Appendix	22
Quality Assurance Review Team Members	22
AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems	22

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

In April 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), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form one strong unified organization dedicated to education quality. That unified organization, known as AdvancED, creates the world's largest education community, representing 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 65 countries worldwide and educating 15 million students.

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

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

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

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

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited Oxford City Board of Education on 11/15/2009 - 11/18/2009.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 19 administrators, 92 teachers, 17 support staff, 30 parents and business partners, 34 students, and 4 Board of Education members for a total of 196 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 6 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

- Vision and Purpose
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Documenting and Using Results
- Resource and Support Systems
- Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

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

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

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

Commendations

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

- **The collaborative support of the Oxford city governmental leadership and community.**

All groups interviewed, the school administration and board, teachers, students, and stakeholders shared how much the city of Oxford has contributed to the school district financially as well as in many other areas. The city of Oxford appoints five of the six members of the school board. Those who are interested in serving must apply and be interviewed by the City Council. The Council has appointed only those most qualified and genuinely interested in the education of students.

The city has levied a one cent sales tax exclusively for the school district which has made possible the expansion of the curriculum, the addition of the arts, teacher supplies, and other financial needs of the district that cannot be provided through state funding. The twenty six million dollar bond referendum is providing a new high school which is under construction. The quality of the school district would be greatly diminished without the additional financial support of the city of Oxford.

- **The establishment of the Oxford City Schools Education Foundation.**

All in the district shared their enthusiasm and appreciation for the establishment of the Oxford City Schools Education Foundation. Although the Foundation has been established only two years it has made a significant difference in financial support and encouragement to the schools and to the district. The Foundation is providing instructional funds which would not otherwise be available because of the present economy at the state and federal levels.

The present economic conditions have limited funds for classroom supplies and faculty development. If it were not for the additional funds provided by the Foundation the quality of instruction would be affected.

- **Making teaching and learning the central focus of the school district.**

Interviews with administrators, teachers, and stakeholders, along with the examination of data and the artifacts, support the fact that the vision of the school district is translated through the commitment to teaching and learning for all students. All schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) along with the 93% graduation rate further underscore the central focus of the school district.

It is necessary to make teaching and learning the central focus of the school district if the district is to be successful in reaching all students and accomplishing its goals and mission.

- **The highly qualified and enthusiastic teachers and school based administrators and the committed and dedicated support personnel.**

Interviews with teachers, school visits, and teacher observations revealed the quality of the teachers and support personnel. The students' attitudes and interviews further underscored their appreciation for the teachers and support staff. All with whom the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Team came in contact expressed appreciation for the quality of the teachers and their commitment to the students.

The quality of the teachers and support staff determine the quality of instruction the students receive and ultimately their educational development and success.

- **The comprehensive and effective system of communication with all stakeholders.**

The school district and the individual schools utilize extensive communications with stakeholders. The superintendent publishes an annual report and parents receive the individual test results of their children in August of each year. Parent orientations are offered prior to the beginning of each new school year. Parent surveys are also provided. The administration present various programs at local school Parent Teacher Organization meetings. Special topic meetings are scheduled when needed. Communication is provided stakeholders through faculty meetings, the state report card, individual parent reports, progress reports, and website postings. The superintendent is a popular presenter at civic clubs. The local newspaper publishes school information and two radio stations have made time available for use by the school district. Every effort is made to involve and to inform the stakeholders in the school district.

The comprehensive stakeholder involvement contributes to the understanding, commitment and support of stakeholders in the district.

- **The sense of pride that is prevalent in the school district and reflected by all stakeholders.**

All with whom the QAR Team came in contact with expressed pride and ownership in the district. The teachers are proud to be a part of the district which supports their efforts and encourages them. The students are happy in the schools and believe the teachers and administrators are there to assist them in their efforts to gain a quality education. One student responded when asked what happens when a student fails, “the teachers won't let you fail!” The parents are happy with the district and expressed a sense of pride to be included in the efforts to educate their children. Parents reported their children want to come to school. Pride in the warm caring learning environment has resulted in a family atmosphere within the district.

When there is a sense of pride in the district there are fewer discipline problems and, as was stated by some students and parents, the children want to learn and enjoy school.

- **The supportive and dedicated central office staff.**

The team found that all central office staff were highly qualified for their respective roles of responsibility, were supportive of the superintendent, and dedicated to the vision, mission, and goals of the school district.

A supportive central office staff helps to contribute to the quality of the instructional program as well as to the success of the teachers and administrators in the respective schools in the district and ensures that the district goals and objectives are accomplished.

- **The leadership, enthusiasm, and guidance of the superintendent is reflected throughout the school district and the community.**

School level administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders expressed confidence in and support of the superintendent. The superintendent's boundless energy and positive attitude are respected and appreciated by the school district and the community. The interviews revealed a respect for the superintendent along with the belief that he has set the tone for academic excellence, which is exhibited in many creative and productive ways.

The superintendent's openness and cooperative nature have contributed to a similar attitude among all in the system including the students and the teachers. His leadership style is credited with the progress made in the district during his tenure.

- **The development of a positive supportive relationship between the board of education and the superintendent. The board and the superintendent understand that they are the leadership team for the district.**

The interviews with the board and superintendent as well as with the stakeholders reveal a cooperative working relationship between the board and the superintendent which helps to determine the quality of the school district and the quality of education received by the students.. The board understands that its role is to develop policies and the superintendent understands that his role is to implement the policies and to administer the school system.

The board and the superintendent respect each other in their respective roles which contributes to a good relationship focused on the education of the students and is void of political interference or micro management.

- **The building of understanding and commitment of stakeholders within and outside the district to the vision and mission.**

It was evident through interviews, reviewing the documentation, and observations that all in the district and the community understand and appreciate the district's vision and mission. The students, the custodial staff, the support staff, administrators, teachers, stakeholders, and business leaders not only understand the vision and mission but invest themselves to translate it into a reality.

When the mission, vision, and purpose drive decisions made by the school district from driving the buses, to serving the lunches, the standard of measure is the individual success of each child in the district. The results are reflected in the fact that one hundred percent of the schools made AYP in 2009 and there is a ninety three percent graduation rate.

Recommendations

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

- **Evaluate the pre-K program to determine the extent to which it contributes to the district's vision and mission.**

The district has a pre-K program in one of its three elementary schools which serves a limited group of students. In the interviews with stakeholders it was pointed out that the pre-K program should be expanded to provide the readiness activities and programs to assist in the early development of all students, especially those with special needs and the increased diversity of the student population including the 7.30 % Hispanic

population.

The district has a successful system in place to provide for the total education spectrum for a child entering kindergarten through high school graduation. Since the vision of the Oxford City School District is to be the leader in all aspects of education and research supports the developmental contributions the pre-K programs make to the students, the pre-K area should be examined to determine the feasibility of expanding the program to provide for an effective pre-K through graduation for all students.

- **Review and evaluate the current five year plan which is in its fourth year of implementation.**

The district's five year strategic plan was developed by the previous administration but implemented by the current superintendent. Much has been accomplished in implementing the plan which has laid the foundation upon which the district can continue to build strategically.

In reviewing the five year strategic plan, it is evident that it drives the activities in the district. Since the plan is in its fourth year and it is necessary to begin planning for the next five year strategic plan, the district should carefully review the current plan in light of the growth within the district along with the increase in community and student diversity.

- **Implement policies and procedures that provide for the annual self evaluation of the Oxford City School Board which relate to its roles and responsibilities within the school district.**

In examining the policies of the board, it was noted there is not a policy related to their annual evaluation. It is nationally recognized by The National School Boards Association (NSBA) that board self-evaluation serves as a useful accountability tool. The self-evaluation would encourage continuous improvement of the board and provide a mechanism for reflection and assessment.

By conducting the evaluation, the board could establish its goals and objectives for the year. The board's evaluation will also serve as a role model and would help to reinforce the level of evaluation it requires throughout the district toward continuous improvement.

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

Next Steps

The school district should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.
3. Develop action plans to address the recommendations made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the recommendations.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.
5. Following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the team's recommendations. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the recommendations. Lack of progress can

result in a change in accreditation status.

6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

Summary

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

Standards for Accreditation

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

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

Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

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

Description:

The district's mission statement was developed in 2004 by a strategic planning committee of stakeholders representing all areas of the school community. The district and all six schools have one mission and one vision. The accreditation committee, composed of representative stakeholders, reviewed and updated the mission statement, vision, and beliefs of the district. The mission is reviewed periodically to ensure that it continues to guide and support the district's educational programs. The district continuously reviews data and plans for the improvement of the schools in a systematic manner. Each May, the previous year's data is reviewed and is studied and the five year action plan is revisited. The district is committed to the success of all students. As one fourth grader told the visiting team; "The teachers won't let us fail." This same feeling was stated by a high school senior, a parent, a community member, and all of teachers with whom the team talked. "We want to provide the best education possible for all students to become positive, contributing members of society." This quote came from the heart of an employee when he described the mission.

The stakeholders of the community are aware of the vision, mission, purpose, and the goals through the active web site for some and paper copies for others. Continuous analysis of personnel, resources, and material distribution is a natural part of the general operating procedures of this district. Instructional audits focus on the tools to help students do their best. The Freshman Academy was designed, developed, and implemented to foster the success in the 9th grade population. Walk throughs are done three times per year jointly by central office personnel and school based teams to observe the extent that the district's vision, purpose, and goals have been implemented in the instructional genres. The faculty and staff are well versed in the common language and belief system of the district. Ninety-three percent of the students graduate on time. Programs such as SAFE, actions by teachers such as tutoring and/or differentiated instruction and the curriculum cabinet are all honed in on creating an atmosphere of SUCCESS for all. If a student is not successful, the district's mission is not fulfilled. This is taken seriously by stakeholders.

The mission, vision, and purpose drive all decisions made by the district. The standard of measure is the individual success of each child.. One hundred percent of the schools made AYP in 2009. Each student's achievement is monitored so that no one student falls between the cracks. Human resources have been allocated to enhance the mission. Materials and fiscal resources have been secured to facilitate the purpose and direction of the district. The district is data driven and data informed. The aggressive and progressive leadership is shared among those individuals who work in this system.

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

- Stakeholders interviewed were aware of the vision and purpose of the district. The stakeholder groups readily and easily explained the vision and mission of the district in authentic, real-life terms.
- The vision and purpose is internalized and believed by stakeholders.
- The instructional program, strategies, and resources are clearly aligned and support the vision, mission, and belief statements of the district.
- The mission, vision, and purpose drive decisions made by the school district - from driving the buses, to serving the lunches, the standard of measure is the individual success of each child of the Oxford City School district.
- A strategic planning process provides a framework for regular review of the district's vision, mission, and belief statements, through annual surveys of community stakeholders including faculty, students, and parents assuring comprehensive stakeholder involvement.
- The pride in the Oxford City Schools is evident with all stakeholder groups.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Review and evaluate the mission, vision, and purpose of the district as a basis for the next five year strategic plan to ensure the continuation of ownership and success felt by all stakeholder groups.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Oxford City Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

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

Description:

The district and school board are legally incorporated through the state of Alabama. The composition of the board consists of six board members who serve on rotating five year terms. Five of the members are appointed by the Oxford City Council and one is appointed by the town of Hobson City Council. The board employs a superintendent of schools who is responsible for educational leadership for the schools and serves as chief executive officer of the district. Through the interview process with stakeholders, members of the school board, and the superintendent it is apparent the board has set high standards for the district.

The school board adopts written policies that articulate the district vision, mission, beliefs, and goals and provides direction and support for the responsible, effective operation of the district. However, there is

not a policy for the self-evaluation of the board. While informal discussions concerning the board are held among its membership, if the board instituted a formal evaluation of its role and effectiveness, the district would have in place a total evaluation system that provides for all areas of the district. The administration is responsible for implementing district policy through the adoption of rules, regulations, and procedures.

The school board has provided sound leadership in maintaining the fiscal health of the district. The board has successfully responded to the changes and growth in student population prompting the need for additional school facilities; and has simultaneously maintained a healthy fund balance to support the day-to-day operations of the district.

The superintendent of schools, in collaboration with central office staff and school principals, has designed interactive systems to successfully allocate and align the human, instructional, financial and physical resources in support of the vision, mission, and beliefs of the district. Outreach to the greater community has been extraordinary. Success in this initiative has created strong collaborative networks of community stakeholders to support student learning.

The challenges facing the superintendent and the school board consist primarily in the area of continuing to maintain the high level of student performance and service to district stakeholders with increasing governmental regulation and financial cut-backs at the state level.

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

- The city government recognizes the importance of a quality school district and its role in providing additional financial resources to help ensure a quality education for the students.
- The dedicated and committed central office staff provides valuable assistance to the superintendent and to the school.
- Leadership, enthusiasm, and guidance is provided by the superintendent.
- The student-centered focused leadership extends from the board room to the classroom.
- The board recognizes the authority of the superintendent as the primary administrative and instructional leader of the district.
- Fiscal responsibility is evidenced throughout the system as sufficient materials are available in buildings and the system budget has an adequate available fund balance.
- Policies and procedures are made available to all stakeholders and updated on a frequent basis.
- There is a collaborative professional and community environment throughout the school district which is evident in the impact on student achievement .

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Adopt a policy and implement an annual board self-evaluation policy which serves as a useful accountability tool. The self-evaluation would encourage continuous improvement of the board and provide a mechanism for reflection. and accountability. By conducting this evaluation, the board would serve as a role model and help to reinforce the level of evaluation it requires throughout the district toward continuous improvement.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Oxford City Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

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

Description:

The district aggressively works to be the best and to do the best on behalf of its students in all areas of education, but particularly in curriculum and learning. Their organizational plan of the three K-4 schools with different grade levels at the remainder of the six schools define their practice of not overlooking any student. While the district prides itself on the quality of the K-12 instructional programs and activities, there is only one pre-K program in one elementary school. A Curriculum Cabinet, pacing guide committee, reading and math leadership team, grade level meetings and vertical team meetings are held throughout the school year to ensure that learning is taking place. System wide data meetings are held three times a year. These teams study instructional weaknesses and discuss what strategies and practices are needed to make improvements. Any major changes are submitted to the Curriculum Cabinet for further discussion.

The district supports effective instructional practices through each school's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP), Professional Learning Communities (PLC), data meetings, offering professional development opportunities, and providing instructional materials. The CIP team decides which research based strategies and practices are needed to address identified weaknesses. The district is committed to offering the most progressive learning opportunities in order to help students to achieve. The schools participate in state initiatives that support this. These initiatives use research based strategies. Some of the state initiatives used are: Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), Alabama Reading Initiative Project for Adolescent Literacy, Alabama Math Science and Technology (ARMT) Initiative, English Language Learner Professional Development Academy, and Seamless Instructional Model.

Multiple data sources are used to determine specific school and district needs. Adequate professional development is scheduled for all programs purchased. Training in state initiatives is provided prior to program implementation. Further assessments of staff preparation needs are made through departmental meetings, program walk throughs, CIP leadership team meetings, and student data results. Ongoing professional development is provided through coaching, mentoring and leadership support. Professional development is provided for child nutrition employees, transportation personnel, school office personnel, instructional aides, and custodians. Professional Learning Communities further ensure that teachers are well-prepared for implementing the curriculum.

Students, staff, and parents have access to comprehensive information provided through handbooks for students and faculty members, orientation meetings, Software Technology Information (STI), school and system websites, board policies, calendars of events, instructional websites, newsletters, and media. The schools have closed-circuit presentations to provided daily programs for students' information and participation. Technology is used in classrooms across the system for student engagement. Professional development workshops have been held to train teachers in the use of available equipment and programs.

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

- Pacing guides have been developed aligning the curriculum both vertically and horizontally using the Alabama State Course of Study as the foundation.
- Teacher effectiveness has been maximized by well developed professional development including

professional learning communities, embedded professional development and connective planning periods.

- The district promotes a climate of continuous improvement by making data driven decisions to prioritize its goals to identify research-based interventions and to allocate sufficient resources.
- The district leadership has created a collaborative culture of teaching and learning that promotes innovation in addressing the specific needs of its students.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Investigate how the development of common assessments for all grades and subjects would further enhance teaching and learning.
- Examine the Pre-Kindergarten area for its alignment with the mission and vision of the district for providing educational opportunities for all students. Since the district's vision and mission projects the district to be the leader in all aspects of education, the district should evaluate the pre-K program in light of the vision and mission.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Oxford City Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

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

Description:

Oxford City Schools has established a plan for K-12 with formative and summative assessments aligning to state defined standards. District and school personnel monitor student progress through various methods which measure progress toward predetermined benchmarks. District data meetings are held three times a year. The six school leadership teams participate with central office administrators to determine system level steps and to discuss vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment. The district Curriculum Cabinet, mathematics, and reading leadership teams meet to analyze data and make curriculum adjustments to locally develop pacing guides. School board members review data to insure alignment of resources to support instructional needs that address the mission of the district. Progress monitoring and reviews are conducted at the local school level during monthly data meetings and three times per year at the district level.

Parents and stakeholders receive assessment results through home reports in weekly take home folders, STI Home, conferences, mid nine progress reports, and report cards. School newspapers convey assessment results. Assessment results are communicated to teachers during monthly data meetings and weekly grade level/department meetings. System level data meetings are held three times a year with individual school representatives and central office administrators.

The district effectively uses data to guide its school improvement efforts. The district uses the CIP template to analyze individual school and system effectiveness. Disaggregated data provided through the state testing program is used for identification for specific school needs. System patterns are examined

using the six school plans that are developed.

Every certified staff member participates in monthly data meetings . All staff members are trained on program implementation and evaluation. Literacy coaches and resource teachers assist in guiding the staff with student achievement being the focus. Professional resources from regional and state initiatives support data analysis.

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

- The concept of being “data driven” and highly accountable for performance is evident at the district, school, and classroom level.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Provide assistance to administrators and teachers to further disaggregate data based on the district’s growing populations in at-risk subgroups. Included in these subgroups are: limited English proficient, ethnicity, students with disabilities, and low socioeconomic students.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Oxford City Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

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

Description:

The human resources of the district are excellent, and the district has done a commendable job of using local resources to supplement State of Alabama funding to provide additional personnel and instructional programs. The city of Oxford has levied a one cent annual sales tax to support the school and in addition passed a twenty six million dollar bond issue to construct a new high school. The district’s staff development programs grow out of the instructional needs of each of the schools and are effective in providing personnel with the time, knowledge, and skills needed to meet the learning needs of students.

The financial resources of the district are good, and management of those resources allows maximum impact on the teaching/learning programs implemented at each school. The central office staff engages in a process of continuous planning, using input and data from numerous sources, to allocate financial resources in a manner that will provide maximum learning programs in each of the schools. This planning process is implemented at each of the schools and there appears to be good communication and cooperation between each school and the central office in the allocation of resources.

The physical resources are extensive and well maintained. The school buildings and grounds are modern and well suited to the district’s instructional programs. An aggressive building program, made possible by generous financial support from the government of the city of Oxford, will result in physical facilities that are exemplary. Other elements of the physical resources of the district are equally impressive.

The district's support services are to be commended. All of these services are of high quality and support the district's excellent academic programs. Support services are built upon the needs of the schools and their clients. Efforts are made to secure a level of support that meets the needs of the students, the parents, and the community.

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

- The culture of planning and assessment in place within the central office administrative team contributes to the high level of functioning within the district.
- The spirit of cooperation and communication that exists within and among the administrators and teachers of each school is commendable.
- The QAR Team heard a consistent message that professional personnel within the district maintain a highly communicative and friendly working relationship. This level of "ownership" of the district's programs extends to all levels of the support staff.
- The vision of the district to "be the leader in all aspects of education" appears to be in place among employees.
- The city of Oxford is supportive of the Oxford City School District which is underscored by its significant financial contributions and support.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Include the dramatic growth expected in the district's population in future planning and resource allocations.
- Factor into all levels of planning for resource allocation for educational challenges created by demographic changes in the racial and cultural groups with the city of Oxford.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Oxford City Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

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

Description:

Surveys of the community stakeholders are completed on a periodic basis to understand their wants and the needs of the stakeholders. These surveys are studied by the administration and the needs expressed by these surveys are addressed. Community members serve on appointed boards to study issues such as the dress code and the cell phone policy committees. The board works closely with the city government to ensure that the schools are used as a marketing tool for new businesses entering the Oxford, AL area and that the school district is meeting the needs of the community and its students.

The district permeates the community of Oxford, AL. From the front page stories in the newspaper to service learning projects, the district is the heart of this community. Radio shows highlight the news of the school district. Academic success is celebrated in the schools.

Class orientation, family fun nights, parent organizations, academic pep rallies, and honor rolls are used to

celebrate learning and student success. Accolades of the students, teachers, and the system are extolled in the district annual report. Students are rewarded for attendance and academic performance. Tickets to high school basketball games are given to elementary students for quality class work and the students are orally recognized to the fans during the game. This is just one example of how the entire community celebrates the academic success of the students.

The district web pages are just one way that the schools communicate to their constituents. The annual report of the school system is sent to every home and is available to the community. The vision statement is posted throughout the schools. Minutes of meetings of leadership and stakeholder groups communicate the mission and purpose of the district. The Oxford Education Foundation assists the school district in monetary and emotional support. Newsletters containing information about the vision and the purpose of the district are distributed to the stakeholders. "We believe that we are a 1 A school in a 6 A body," stated one principal. The students are known and loved as individuals by their parents, their teachers, their administrators, their support staff, and their community.

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

- There is a transparency in the operation of the school district that is refreshing and inviting. The superintendent is assessable and available to tell the story of the district. The central office personnel and school principals are available and assessable,
- The Oxford Educational Foundation is a support mechanism for the Oxford City School District .

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Plan to effectively provide for the changing demographics of the community and its stakeholders.

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

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description:

The Oxford City Schools display excellent commitment to the concept of continuous improvement of both the district as a whole and the individual schools. The vision and purpose of the district and each school are articulated and result from appropriate involvement of district stakeholders. The district collects and disseminates an excellent array of data about all facets of its operations. Student learning and performance are at the heart of all aspects of the operation of the district. The excellent performance of the district central office in the areas of vision, profile, and planning demonstrate the commitment of the district to the process of continuous school improvement.

The QAR Team heard consistent information and opinions from district personnel and from stakeholders that success in student learning is at the heart of all aspects of the operation of the district. Planning is continuous at all levels, communication is superior, and cooperation and collaboration are the cornerstones

of the functioning of the district office and in each school. Stakeholders express positive feelings regarding the operation of the district. Similarly, stakeholders are high in their praise for the local city government which provides funds for many significant components of the district's operation. In addition stakeholders were consistent in their praise of the members of the board of education for their dedication and work in keeping the district well funded and staffed.

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

- The employees of the district are engaged in a continuous process to achieve the maximum learning possible for students. To this end, they have created a school-level and a district-level culture of communication, cooperation, and collaboration.
- The commitment to improvement and student learning displayed by professional and staff personnel within the district is extraordinary.
- The board and the superintendent are to be commended for their roles in the development of the positive culture and family atmosphere of the district.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Plan for the challenges of the expected increase in the city's population and the diversity of future students that population growth will bring.
- Place high priority on data driven planning, along with the implementation of the district's vision.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Oxford City Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

Quality Assurance Findings

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

Description

The district is committed to a systemic process of continuous improvement. The district leadership team is responsible for aligning the functions of the district with the expectations for student learning and articulating this vision and purpose to stakeholders. Academic testing data and stakeholder surveys are examined to determine a district profile. Stakeholder input from parents students, teachers, support staff administrators, and the community indicate the district stakeholder perception of how well the district responds to the needs of students and how effective it is in designing an educational plan to promote student achievement. The data is analyzed to determine strengths and weaknesses and analyzes underlying causes for the strengths and weaknesses. Parents, teachers, students, and community members input and participation are sought to assess the educational system and the progress it is making toward improving. Interviews with the administrators, teachers, students, and stakeholders underscored the fact that every effort was made by the district to ensure a quality education for all students.

The district takes pride in its quality and accomplishments at the district level and in each individual school. The school leadership believes that district accreditation will reflect its commitment to ensure the quality of the district along with its determination to do everything possible to be the leader in all aspects of education. The district is in the fourth year of its successful implementation of the five year strategic plan which was developed by the stakeholders in 2004.

Strengths

- The district has a comprehensive assessment system and communicates data openly and regularly to stakeholders. Open dialogue occurs throughout the system through a variety of planning and information meetings at the school and district level which spans all stakeholder groups through community meetings, local radio and newspapers, district website, school board meetings, school level faculty meetings, professional development days, and district staff meetings.
- The district strives to provide opportunities for students to experience success within and outside the classroom by providing clubs and other extra curricular activities.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

- Analyze levels of success from the previous five year strategic plan for the district and use these data in the development of the next five year strategic plan.

Conclusion

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

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

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

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Harold Fisher, Chair (SACS CASI)
- Ms. Judy Manning, Vice Chair
- Mrs. Ellen Martin, Team Member (Alexander City Board of Education)
- Dr. Erin Weaver, Team Member (Central High School)
- Dr. Ronnie Stanford, Team Member (The University of Alabama)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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