

March 11, 2009

The Marshall County Board of Education met in special called session on Wednesday, March 11, 2009, at 3:00 p.m. in the Board Conference Room at Jones School for the purpose of hearing the SACS CASI (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement) committee's recommendation of district accreditation.

Member Kristen Gold was present. Members absent were Curt Denton, Mike Keny, Craig Michael, Delinda Owens, Randy Perryman, Ann Tears, Todd Tietgens, and Mark Wilkerson.

Ms. Gold called the meeting to order and then turned the session over to Director of Schools Dr. Stan Curtis. After welcoming those in attendance, Dr. Curtis turned the meeting over to Dr. Denny Jennings, chair of the SACS CASI District Accreditation Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Team.

Dr. Jennings began by asking the members of the QAR team to introduce themselves: Dr. Kim Fisher (QAR Team vice chair), Principal of Black Fox Elementary School in Bradley County; Dr. Dolores Byrne, Assistant Principal at Dublin High School in Dublin, Georgia; Jill Davis, Reading Intervention Specialist at Black Fox Elementary School in Bradley County; Laura Harper, Field Consultant from Williamson County; and Debbie Wiles, Supervisor of Elementary Instruction in Maury County. Dr. Jennings resides in Meadows of Dan, Virginia.

Dr. Jennings stated that District Accreditation "says that you, as a district, are becoming not just a system of *schools* of excellence, but you are becoming a school *district* of excellence."

SACS, an accreditation division of AdvancED, serves 30 states and the Navajo Nation, and 65 countries, which, if accredited, will make Marshall County a part of an international accreditation. Dr. Jennings mentioned that SACS CASI not only focuses on accreditation, but it provides an avenue for technical assistance and resources for teachers through the AdvancED Web site; any of Marshall County's teachers can click on resources and have access to thousands of peer practices and research.

Dr. Jennings stated that in order to be accredited, the district must do three things, including meeting the seven AdvancED standards (#1, Vision and Purpose; #2, Governance and Leadership; #3, Teaching and Learning; #4, Documenting and Using Results; #5, Resources and Support Systems; #6, Stakeholder Communications and Relationships; #7, Commitment to Continuous Improvement). "Based on extensive research, these are seven things, that when

they are in place at operational or highly functional levels, these are the things that have the greatest impact on student achievement, and that's what we're all about." Secondly, the district must focus on continuous improvement (every day focus on how to help students improve, how the schools can improve, and how the schools can work together to make the district improve). Finally, quality assurance through internal and external review.

Dr. Jennings stated that to see if Marshall County was meeting the standards, the team did a variety of things while here, such as interviewing people, visiting schools, reviewing information and looking at artifacts, reading documentation, doing research, and working late, late hours "to make sure we have a very clear picture and a clear perspective of your district and its work." Team members conducted 59 administrator interviews (talking to some more than once), interviewed 88 teachers, 28 support personnel, 64 stakeholders (parents, community members, business partners), 74 students, and three board members for a total of 317 interviews.

"Our task from here is to complete a report...that will support some of the very basic preliminary information we've reviewed today. And when you receive that report within 30 business days, you will see for each of the seven standards you will have a description of the evidence that we found that supported how you met that standard *or* evidence that we did not find, what we would like to have seen for that particular standard. Also, for each individual standard you will see a list of strengths, things we saw that were very powerful in the way that you addressed that particular standard. Likewise, we will offer some suggestions and opportunities that we think would have a very positive impact on that particular standard."

Before presenting the commendations and recommendations, Dr. Jennings mentioned that the district faces many challenges that are beyond its control: federal and state mandates, changes in standards, and economic realities.

Dr. Jennings went on to share the **commendations** for our district.

"Commendations are those practices we see that are *truly* exemplary." The commendations determined by the QAR team are: 1) "Your Director's commitment to your district's unity, for pulling everybody together, getting everybody in the same direction and that building capacity for it to help every single student. We heard that through interviews, we saw it in documents. It was very clear that stakeholders, while they may not have been able to state specifically what the district's statement was, they knew the purpose was to have success for every student. That's a clear direction that your Director has set." 2) Community and stakeholder support that provides physical, financial, and *human* resources to meet the needs of the school. "Everywhere we went, people would

say to us ‘All we have to do is pick up the phone and call if we need something.’ Very, very supportive communities.” 3) The district’s commitment to professional development. “So many of the teachers were so positive about the conferences they’ve attended, the workshops they’ve attended, and how many come back with plans to share that information in various formats with others.” The teachers told the team they felt as if they are being treated as professionals and the district is helping them to grow to become “reflective practitioners.” 4) A strong tradition of community and school pride. “In the individual communities where we visited, the people were so supportive.” 5) Establishing the focus and clarity of purpose that all decisions are based on what’s right for children. “We heard it through budgetary conversations...in deciding about technology...in deciding about materials for classrooms and teaching strategies and building buildings. In every aspect people asked themselves, ‘Is it right for children?’ And that’s the guiding principle, the clear focus of doing everything for the children, of what’s right for kids in Marshall County schools.”

The **recommendations** given are things that “we feel will have the greatest impact on student achievement.” 1) Guide all stakeholders in supporting a culture of collegiality, collaboration, respect and trust. “Because there are a large number of new folks in leadership positions or in different roles, or new people at the schools and new board members, as well, that leadership is pulled together and has begun the process of building that relationship, of building that community spirit, building that ‘We are Marshall’ concept where everyone is working together, where everyone trusts each other and builds relationships.” 2) In referring to the organizational chart, the next recommendation is: Clarify leadership roles and authority at the district and school levels. “Our recommendation is that you not only fully communicate that organization, but you clarify the roles and responsibilities and the authority that those positions carry with them, so that [for] everyone in the district and in the community, it’s very clear...if you have a problem this is who you go to first, or they can guide you to someone else. And *they* have the role and responsibility to deal with it or to help find a solution to the question.” 3) Identify research-based instructional practices to be consistently implemented, monitored and evaluated throughout the district. “As we toured and visited classrooms, we saw some excellence in instruction, but we also saw some areas that were not such research-based practices. We saw some inconsistencies in instructional practices across the district. It’s not that they were bad teaching practices, it’s just that we did not see a consistent expectation of the types of instruction that were to be taking place in the classroom.” 4) Develop unified instructional curriculum resources through collaborative curriculum mapping and vertical teaming to ensure appropriate pacing and instruction of standards (referencing the upcoming new standards). “You have a very firm start through a lot of hard work and leadership.” The

recommendation is to continue and expand the process. 5) Expand the development and use of formative and summative data to inform instructional practices and continuous improvement planning. The recommendation is that the district uses that data to “truly *inform* instruction rather than *drive* instruction...not just at the school level but at the classroom level and at the individual student level.”

Once the district receives the report, the next step is to review and communicate the findings, then begin planning for implementing the recommendations. In two years, the district will receive a request for an Accreditation Progress Report which will indicate the progress made on meeting the recommendations.

“We make a recommendation. We do not provide accreditation, but we make a recommendation to the AdvancEd National Accreditation Commission. Our recommendation will be that Marshall County Schools be awarded district accreditation. And that is truly an accomplishment for you, and we make it without reservations of any kind. Finally, our heartfelt congratulations for achieving district accreditation. It is truly, truly an honor, and not every district gets it. So you are among the few.”

The AdvancED National Accreditation Commission will meet in December, at which time they will act on the SACS CASI District Accreditation QAR Team recommendation. If they accept the recommendation, the Marshall County School District will be accredited for five years.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Kristen Gold, Co-Chairman

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Dr. Stan Curtis, Director