Report of the
External Review Team
for
Douglas County School System

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AdvancED®

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Introduction

The External Review is an integral component of AdvancED Performance Accreditation and provides the institution with a comprehensive evaluation guided by the results of diagnostic instruments, in-depth review of data and documentation, and the professional judgment of a team of qualified and highly trained evaluators. A series of diagnostic instruments examines the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the capacity of leadership to effect continuous improvement, and the degree to which the institution optimizes its use of available resources to facilitate and support student success. The results of this evaluation are represented in the Index of Education Quality (IEQ™) and through critical observations, namely, Powerful Practices, Opportunities for Improvement, and Improvement Priorities.

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 specific to their institution type, demonstrate acceptable levels of student performance and the continuous improvement of student performance, and provide evidence of stakeholder engagement and satisfaction. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the conditions, processes, and practices within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness.

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 Standards were developed by a committee comprised of talented 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 define institutional quality and guide continuous improvement. Prior to implementation, an internationally recognized panel of experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research reviewed the standards and provided feedback, guidance and endorsement.

The AdvancED External Review Team uses AdvancED Standards, associated indicators and criteria related to student performance and stakeholder engagement to guide its evaluation. The Team examines adherence to standards as well as how the institution functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics expected of an accredited institution. The Standards, indicators and related criteria are evaluated using indicator-specific performance levels. The Team rates each indicator and criterion on a scale of 1 to 4. The final scores assigned to the indicators and criteria represent the average of the External Review Team members' individual ratings.

The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation. It energizes and equips the institution's leadership and stakeholders 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 the in-depth examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with all stakeholder groups, and extensive observations of learning, instruction, and operations.

Use of Diagnostic Tools

A key to examining the institution is the design and use of diagnostic tools that reveal the effectiveness with which an institution creates conditions and implements processes and practices that impact student performance and success. In preparation for the External Review the institution conducted a Self Assessment that applied the standards and criteria for accreditation. The institution provided evidence to support its conclusions vis a vis organizational effectiveness in ensuring acceptable and improving levels of student performance.

- an indicator-based tool that connects the specific elements of the criteria to evidence gathered by the team;
- a student performance analytic that examines the quality of assessment instruments used by the institution, the integrity of the administration of the assessment to students, the quality of the learning results including the impact of instruction on student learning at all levels of performance, and the equity of learning that examines the results of student learning across all demographics;
- a stakeholder engagement instrument that examines the fidelity of administration and results of perception surveys seeking the perspective of students, parents, and teachers;
- a state-of-the-art, learner-centric observation instrument, the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™) that quantifies students' engagement, attitudes and dispositions organized in 7 environments: Equitable Learning, High Expectations, Supportive Learning, Active Learning, Progress Monitoring and Feedback, Well-Managed Learning, and Digital Learning. All evaluators must be trained, reach acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability, and certified to use this research-based and validated instrument.

The External Review Team's findings and critical observations are shared in this report through the IEQ™ results as well as through the identification of Powerful Practices, Opportunities for Improvement, and Improvement Priorities.

Index of Education Quality

In the past, accreditation reviews resulted in an accreditation recommendation on status. Labels such as advised, warned, probation, or all clear were used to describe the status of a school relative to the AdvancED Standards and other evaluative criteria. Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, AdvancED introduced a new framework to describe the results of an accreditation review. Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduced an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ™). The IEQ™ comprises three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the capacity of leadership to guide the institution toward the achievement of its

vision and strategic priorities; and 3) use of resources to support and optimize learning. Therefore, your institution will no longer receive an accreditation status. Instead, your institution will be accredited with an IEQ™ score. In the case where an institution is failing to meet established criteria, the accreditation will be under review thereby requiring frequent monitoring and demonstrated improvement.

The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and associated indicators, the analysis of student performance, and the engagement and feedback of stakeholders. Within each domain institutions can connect to the individual performance levels that are applied in support of the AdvancED Standards and evaluative criteria. Within the performance levels are detailed descriptors that serve as a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report and building on their Powerful Practices, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Opportunity for Improvement and Improvement Priority as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected indicator(s).

The IEQ™ provides a new framework that recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement. An institution's IEQ™ is the starting point for continuous improvement. Subsequent actions for improvement and evidence that these have had a positive impact will raise the institution's IEQ™ score.

Benchmark Data

Throughout this report, AdvancED provides benchmark data for each indicator and for each component of the evaluative criteria. These benchmark data represent the overall averages across the entire AdvancED Network for your institution type. Thus, the AdvancED Network average provides an extraordinary opportunity for institutions to understand their context on a global scale rather than simply compared to a state, region, or country.

It is important to understand that the AdvancED Network averages are provided primarily to serve as a tool for continuous improvement and not as a measure of quality in and of itself. Benchmark data, when wisely employed, have a unique capacity to help institutions identify and leverage their strengths and areas of improvement to significantly impact student learning.

Powerful Practices

A key to continuous improvement is the institution's ability to learn from and build upon its most effective and impactful practices. Such practices serve as critical leverage points necessary to guide, support and ensure continuous improvement. A hallmark of the accreditation process is its commitment to identifying with evidence, the conditions, processes and practices that are having the most significant impact on student performance and institutional effectiveness. Throughout this report, the External Review Team has captured and defined Powerful Practices. These noteworthy practices are essential to the institution's effort to continue its journey of improvement.

Opportunities for Improvement

Every institution can and must improve no matter what levels of performance it has achieved in its past. During the process of the review, the External Review Team identified areas of improvement where the institution is meeting the expectations for accreditation but in the professional judgment of the Team these are Opportunities for Improvement that should be considered by the institution. Using the criteria described in the corresponding rubric(s) to the Opportunity for Improvement, the institution can identify what elements of practice must be addressed to guide the improvement.

Improvement Priorities

The expectations for accreditation are clearly defined in a series of the rubric-based AdvancED Standards, indicators and evaluative criteria focused on the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the capacity of the institution to be guided by effective leadership, and the allocation and use of resources to support student learning. As such, the External Review Team reviewed, analyzed and deliberated over significant bodies of evidence provided by the institution and gathered by the Team during the process. In the professional judgment of the Team as well as the results of the diagnostic process, the Team defined, with rationale, Improvement Priorities. The priorities must be addressed in a timely manner by the institution to retain and improve their accreditation performance as represented by the IEQ™. Improvement Priorities serve as the basis for the follow-up and monitoring process that will begin upon conclusion of the External Review. The institution must complete and submit an Accreditation Progress Report within two years of the External Review. The report must include actions taken by the institution to address the Improvement Priorities along with the corresponding evidence and results. The IEQ™ will be recalculated by AdvancED upon review of the evidence and results associated with the Improvement Priorities.

The Review

The Douglas County School System External Review was conducted over a four day period beginning on Sunday, January 22, 2017 and culminating with an oral Exit Report on Wednesday, January 25, 2017. The External Review began on Sunday afternoon when the eight-member External Review Team (Team) met in its first work session. The Team's initial work session included a general discussion by all team members as to what was discovered through available evidence and the system's Accreditation Report while addressing the "homework" requirement that was assigned during the team conference call, as well as a review of the system's rating of Standard Indicators and Diagnostics.

Prior to Sunday's arrival, the Team was given access to an evidence link which provided assistance in the initial rating of Standard and Diagnostic Indicators. Using the AdvancED Standard Workbook, each team member thoroughly reviewed all known evidence associated with his/her Standard assignment. During the process, team members identified key questions, as well as additional artifacts needed for further Indicator verification. Team members also identified potential Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement based on the initial ratings and available system information. In preparing for the External Review, the Lead Evaluator and the system contact agreed on many vital details including lodging and meal arrangements, team schedule decisions and which schools would receive an observation visit from team members. The first

evening work session also focused on team preparation for the next day's activities before adjourning.

The Team spent Monday at the Douglas County School System central office complex receiving information from overviews and interviews from the Superintendent and other administrators regarding system performance and adherence to the AdvancED Standard and Diagnostic Indicators. The Team also interviewed all five school board members, all of the system's principals and 26 of the system's parents/community/business stakeholders. Before returning to the hotel, team members had the opportunity to gather additional information from personnel and artifacts regarding several Indicator requirements.

Monday evening work session activities began with a review and recording of additional evidence and further discussion regarding the Stakeholder and Student Performance Diagnostics, potential Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement, as well as which Indicators were emerging as possible Improvement Priorities. Following the review and discussion, the Team conducted the second rating of Standard Indicators and Diagnostics using the External Review Team Workbook. The External Review Team prepared for the next day by reviewing the team schedule, identifying interview questions for School Leadership Teams, determining which classrooms would be visited and discussing expectations for classroom observations using the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™).

On Tuesday, the Team divided into four two-member sub teams and visited eight of the system's 35 schools. Interviews were conducted in each school with the School Leadership Team, and 103 classroom observations were completed using the eleot™. Tuesday evening work session activities began with a discussion regarding the results from classroom observations followed by a review of additional evidence learned in regard to Indicator performance level ratings. Using the Team Member Ratings Excel Worksheet, team members individually rated all Standard Indicators and Diagnostics. The Lead Evaluator recorded all individual ratings on the AdvancED Network (AEN) Master Excel Worksheet and shared the results with team members. Using this information, the Team determined which Standard Indicators would receive actions in the form of a Powerful Practice, Opportunity for Improvement or Improvement Priority. The Team reviewed the schedule for Wednesday before adjourning.

The Team deliberated on Wednesday morning in the hotel meeting room re-affirming its earlier decisions and completing final Standard Indicator, Stakeholder Feedback and Student Performance ratings in the AdvancED Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tool (ASSIST™). Other activities included providing feedback to the Lead Evaluator regarding overall system themes/findings, crafting actions, completing the AdvancED Team Survey and team evaluation and finalizing the Exit Report. The Douglas County School System External Review concluded with the presentation of an oral Exit Report at a scheduled school board meeting to school board members and system administrators on Wednesday afternoon.

The Team offers its sincere appreciation for the opportunity to conduct this External Review for the Douglas County School System. The leadership and staff at all levels were extremely helpful in providing vital information through surveys, overviews and interviews, as well as providing artifacts critical to the External Review process. Their enthusiasm, professionalism and commitment to the process contributed greatly to the success of the Douglas County External Review. Additionally, classroom teachers and students were most

welcoming and polite during the on-site interviews and observations.

Overall, the External Review Team agreed that the institution was well-prepared for the External Review and those interviewed were candid and forthcoming in their responses. The Team also agreed that system personnel conducted an honest assessment of how they perceived the system and schools were meeting the required AdvancED Standards and Indicators. Finally, the External Review Team extends a very special "thank you" to the Superintendent, the system contact and other system staff for their detailed preparation and their gracious hospitality and attention to the needs of the Team during the External Review process.

Stakeholders were interviewed by members of the External Review Team to gain their perspectives on topics relevant to the institution's effectiveness and student performance. The feedback gained through the stakeholder interviews was considered with other evidences and data to support the findings of the External Review. The following chart depicts the numbers of persons interviewed representative of various stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Interviewed	Number
Superintendents	1
Board Members	5
Administrators	43
Instructional Staff	88
Support Staff	6
Students	102
Parents/Community/Business Leaders	26
Total	**271**

Results

Teaching and Learning Impact

The impact of teaching and learning on student achievement is the primary expectation of every institution. The relationship between teacher and learner must be productive and effective for student success. The impact of teaching and learning includes an analysis of student performance results, instructional quality, learner and family engagement, support services for student learning, curriculum quality and efficacy, and college and career readiness data. These are all key indicators of an institution's impact on teaching and learning.

A high-quality and effective educational 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 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 that include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The institution'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, J., Kunter, M., Blum, W., Brunner, M., Voxx, T., Jordan, A., Klusmann, U., Krauss, S., Nuebrand, M., & Tsai, Y., 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, J., Brown, R., Choi, S., & Thomas, S., 2008). According to Marks, Louis, and Printy (2002), staff members who engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective institutions "supports teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

AdvancED has found that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning. The curriculum 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.

Institutions with strong improvement processes move beyond anxiety about the current reality and focus on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, i.e., data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, and 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, J., Pane, J., Barney, H., & Christina, R., 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 institutional 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).

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

Standard 3 - Teaching and Assessing for Learning

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
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.	3.75	2.69
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.	3.00	2.49
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	3.00	2.59
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	3.12	2.71
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	3.00	2.58
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	3.00	2.48
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	3.00	2.60

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
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.	3.75	2.97
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.	2.88	2.50
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.	3.12	2.47
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	3.00	2.65
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	3.00	2.64

Standard 5 - Using Results for Continuous Improvement

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.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	3.00	2.66
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.	3.00	2.49
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	2.00	2.15
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.	3.00	2.50
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.	3.00	2.75

Student Performance Diagnostic

The quality of assessments used to measure student learning, assurance that assessments are administered with procedural fidelity and appropriate accommodations, assessment results that reflect the quality of
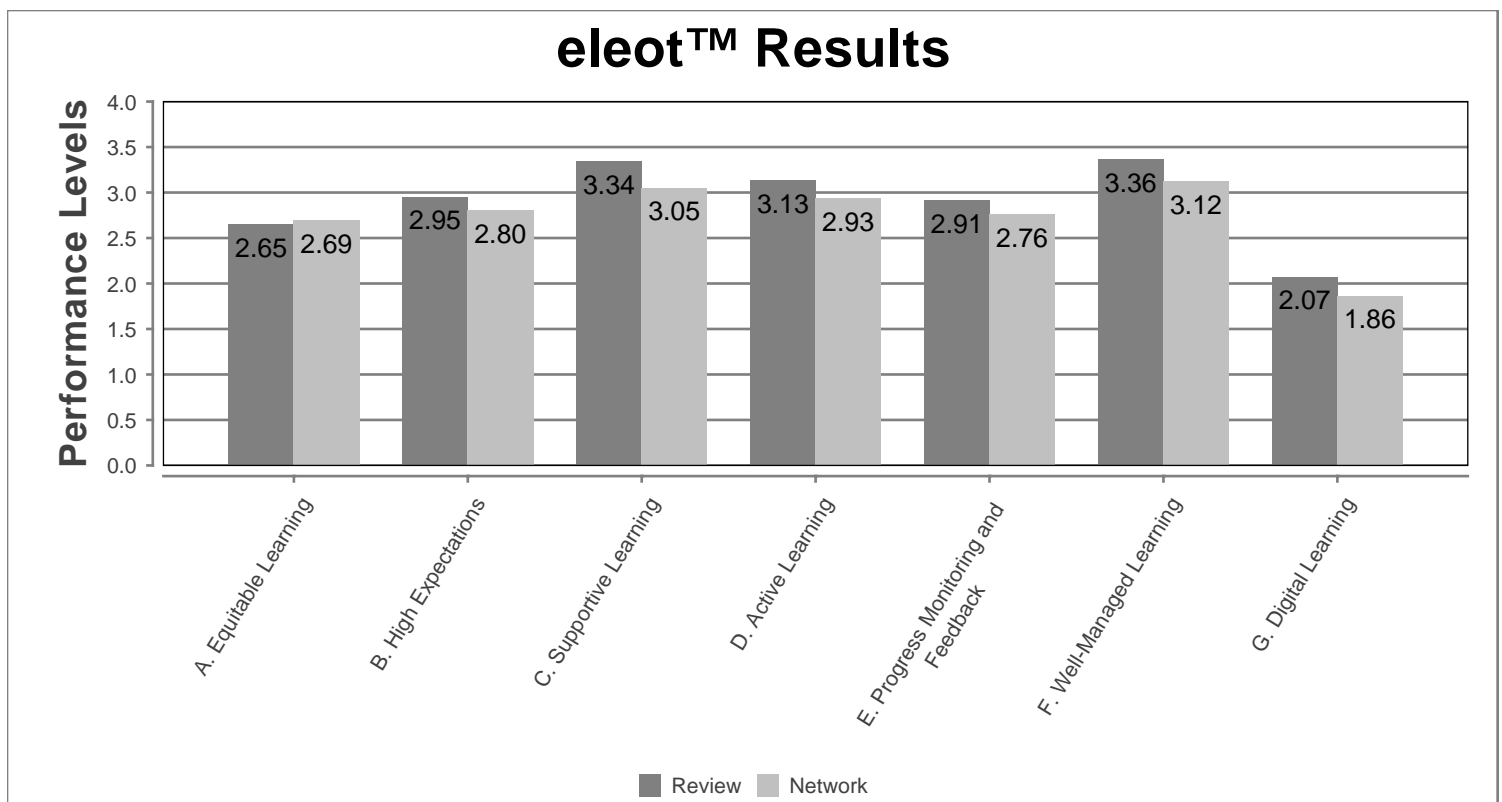
learning, and closing gaps in achievement among subpopulations of students are all important indicators for evaluating overall student performance.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Assessment Quality	2.00	3.33
Test Administration	3.00	3.52
Equity of Learning	2.00	2.54
Quality of Learning	3.00	2.96

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™)

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. Every member of the External Review Team is required to be trained and pass a certification exam that establishes inter-rater reliability. Team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a four-point scale (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 seven learning environments included in eleot™ as well as benchmark results across the AdvancED Network.

eleot™ Results

	Review	Network
A. Equitable Learning	2.65	2.69
B. High Expectations	2.95	2.80
C. Supportive Learning	3.34	3.05
D. Active Learning	3.13	2.93
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback	2.91	2.76
F. Well-Managed Learning	3.36	3.12
G. Digital Learning	2.07	1.86

Performance Levels (y-axis: 0.0 to 4.0)

During the Douglas County School System External Review, the External Review Team conducted 103 classroom observations, using AdvancED's eleot™, in eight of the systems 35 schools. The three environments receiving the highest averages were Well-Managed Learning (3.36), Supportive Learning (3.34) and Active Learning (3.13). The environment receiving the lowest average was Digital Learning (2.07). The Equitable Learning (2.65), Progress Monitoring and Feedback (2.91) and High Expectations (2.95)

environments scored in the mid-range of system averages. In comparison to the AdvancED Network (AEN) results for Effective Learning Environments, the Douglas County School System scored above the AEN averages in all environments except for Equitable Learning Environment which was just below the AEN average (2.69) at 2.65.

From observations which focused on the Well-Managed Learning Environment, the External Review Team noted clear classroom routines and positive, respectful relationships among students and between students and teachers as well as smooth transitions to learning activities. Student collaboration received the lowest score within this Domain. While observing the Supportive Learning Environment, the Team noted that students at all levels were very positive toward their learning experiences and were often provided assistance in order to better understand lesson content and learning tasks. The Team did observe teachers providing feedback when appropriate, but observed limited instances of providing additional/alternative instruction to accomplish tasks.

The Active Learning Environment provided evidence of a high degree of student engagement with learning activities, as well as with the teacher and other students in most classrooms visited. While observing the Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment, the Team noted that students seemed to understand lesson/content, had opportunities to revise/improve work and responded well to teacher feedback when given.

The Equitable Learning Environment provided evidence that students had equal access to classroom discussions, activities and resources, but also provided evidence of few instances of formalized differentiated learning opportunities which relates to a team finding within the Supportive Learning Environment. Within the High Expectations Environment, the Team witnessed students striving to meet teacher expectations relative to somewhat challenging activities, but also observed fewer examples of any questioning that required higher order thinking. Tasks/discussions that could be categorized as rigorous were observed in many classrooms. Additionally, the use of exemplars of high quality work was very limited. From observations which focused on the Digital Learning Environment, the Team observed that when students were using digital tools, it was mainly to gather information or solve problems rather than to conduct research or work collaboratively.

All of the findings from the eleot™ Results Summary greatly supported final team discussions related to Indicator performance, especially with regard to Standard 3, Teaching and Assessing for Learning.

From the evidence gathered by the External Review Team during classroom observations, Douglas County's students were found to be respectful and engaged while addressing the prescribed learning activities. Within the eleot™ Domains, effective classroom management, student engagement and a supportive learning environment are obvious system strengths. Team observations also highlighted a need for teachers to more intentionally incorporate differentiated learning activities, as well as higher order thinking skill activities, into instructional planning and delivery, and students to be more involved with digital tools which support learning.

eleot™ Data Summary

A. Equitable Learning			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	2.25	Has differentiated learning opportunities and activities that meet her/his needs	24.27%	18.45%	15.53%	41.75%
2.	3.61	Has equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	69.90%	23.30%	4.85%	1.94%
3.	3.29	Knows that rules and consequences are fair, clear, and consistently applied	55.34%	29.13%	4.85%	10.68%
4.	1.46	Has ongoing opportunities to learn about their own and other's backgrounds/cultures/differences	7.77%	7.77%	6.80%	77.67%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.65						

B. High Expectations			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	3.29	Knows and strives to meet the high expectations established by the teacher	47.57%	38.83%	8.74%	4.85%
2.	3.21	Is tasked with activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	43.69%	40.78%	8.74%	6.80%
3.	2.14	Is provided exemplars of high quality work	18.45%	24.27%	9.71%	47.57%
4.	3.10	Is engaged in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks	38.83%	40.78%	11.65%	8.74%
5.	2.99	Is asked and responds to questions that require higher order thinking (e.g., applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	40.78%	30.10%	16.50%	12.62%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.95						

C. Supportive Learning			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	3.54	Demonstrates or expresses that learning experiences are positive	66.99%	22.33%	8.74%	1.94%
2.	3.58	Demonstrates positive attitude about the classroom and learning	67.96%	24.27%	5.83%	1.94%
3.	3.19	Takes risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	51.46%	24.27%	16.50%	7.77%
4.	3.49	Is provided support and assistance to understand content and accomplish tasks	59.22%	31.07%	8.74%	0.97%
5.	2.88	Is provided additional/alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge for her/his needs	41.75%	25.24%	12.62%	20.39%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.34						

D. Active Learning			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	3.26	Has several opportunities to engage in discussions with teacher and other students	47.57%	33.98%	15.53%	2.91%
2.	2.50	Makes connections from content to real-life experiences	29.13%	24.27%	14.56%	32.04%
3.	3.61	Is actively engaged in the learning activities	72.82%	18.45%	5.83%	2.91%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.13						

E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	2.96	Is asked and/or quizzed about individual progress/learning	33.98%	38.83%	16.50%	10.68%
2.	3.23	Responds to teacher feedback to improve understanding	44.66%	36.89%	15.53%	2.91%
3.	3.30	Demonstrates or verbalizes understanding of the lesson/content	47.57%	37.86%	11.65%	2.91%
4.	2.27	Understands how her/his work is assessed	23.30%	24.27%	8.74%	43.69%
5.	2.78	Has opportunities to revise/improve work based on feedback	32.04%	34.95%	11.65%	21.36%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.91						

F. Well-Managed Learning			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	3.72	Speaks and interacts respectfully with teacher(s) and peers	77.67%	18.45%	1.94%	1.94%
2.	3.63	Follows classroom rules and works well with others	73.79%	17.48%	6.80%	1.94%
3.	3.14	Transitions smoothly and efficiently to activities	60.19%	11.65%	9.71%	18.45%
4.	2.71	Collaborates with other students during student-centered activities	45.63%	12.62%	8.74%	33.01%
5.	3.61	Knows classroom routines, behavioral expectations and consequences	72.82%	18.45%	5.83%	2.91%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.36						

G. Digital Learning			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	2.31	Uses digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	30.10%	15.53%	9.71%	44.66%
2.	2.02	Uses digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	25.24%	10.68%	4.85%	59.22%
3.	1.87	Uses digital tools/technology to communicate and work collaboratively for learning	21.36%	10.68%	1.94%	66.02%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.07						

Findings

Improvement Priority

Implement and monitor a systemic protocol which requires all professional and appropriate support staff to be trained in collecting, analyzing and applying all available student performance data in order to better inform and monitor instructional practices that support student learning.

(Indicator 3.2, Indicator 5.2, Indicator 5.3, SP4. Equity of Learning)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 5.3

Evidence and Rationale

The system Accreditation Report as well as interviews with administrators and staff provided evidence to the Team that not all professional and appropriate support staff were adequately trained in the utilization of data to guide student learning, instruction, program evaluation and organizational conditions that support student learning. Additionally, it was acknowledged within the system's Accreditation Report that there was a need "to provide more opportunities for our successful schools to incorporate more data utilization into their academic programs for the purpose of continuous improvement." The Team found that the system utilizes a broad range of assessment instruments which provide multiple data sources on student achievement and standards mastery. Interviews with school leadership and teachers also indicated to the Team that the system could benefit from aligning common district assessments (CDAs) to Georgia Standards of Excellence as well as the Georgia Milestones Assessment System. A concerted effort toward alignment and an ongoing deeper analysis of both formative and summative student assessment data in all schools will drive systemic and systematic decision making.

Continual analysis allows for real-time interventions and adjustments to learning outcomes, as well as

discussion of instructional practices which would best support identified need, resulting in higher academic achievement. Appropriate and ongoing data training for all staff who work directly with students provides a better team approach to instructional planning which targets the strategies necessary for realizing gains in student performance.

Opportunity For Improvement
Communicate the need for teachers to incorporate the use of exemplars into their instructional practices in order to assist students in understanding and successfully accomplishing learning expectations and monitor for inclusion at the school level.
(Indicator 3.6)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 3.6

Evidence and Rationale
From an analysis of the summary of 103 classroom observations, the Team recognized limited instances of teachers "providing exemplars of high quality work" to support student learning. Team interviews with system administrators gave further evidence to supporting the need to make the inclusion of exemplars a part of the regular instructional planning process. In order for students to be successful with learning goals, they must be able to interpret the standard as well as the expectation for success. The incorporation of exemplars, such as rubrics and quality work products, into the teaching and learning process will help to provide students with the guidance needed to more successfully accomplish learning tasks.

Students who are secure in their understanding of learning expectations are more successful with attaining learning goals.

Opportunity For Improvement
Develop, implement and evaluate a structure for the system's schools which focuses on providing all students with long-term adult mentors.
(Indicator 3.9)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 3.9

Evidence and Rationale
From interviews with administrators and staff, as well as team observations at system schools, the Team found little consistency in expectation, frequency or purpose with a school level approach which would enable all students to build long-term relationships with a school-based mentor. Although the Team noted various processes being implemented which focus on providing a student/mentor relationship, it became obvious that no consistent structure is in place which would provide all students in all schools with the opportunity to have a long-term, supportive relationship with an adult advocate. Providing a sustainable process for meaningful long-term relationships between every student and an adult advocate at each school supports meeting the

academic, physical, social and emotional needs necessary for student success.

Positive, caring and supportive long-term relationships with adult mentors greatly enhance the ability of students to achieve performance excellence and add value to system culture.

Powerful Practice
The Douglas County School System implements strategies and practices which serve to engage families and keep them informed by communicating student progress through a robust information infrastructure.
(Indicator 3.8)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 3.8

Evidence and Rationale
Through interviews with administrators, staff, and parents, surveys and a review of artifacts, the Team recognized strong evidence that leadership at all levels of the organization regularly communicates with parents, as well as the community, and provides them with opportunities for involvement such as volunteering, tutoring and participation with board meetings and continuous improvement efforts. Parents are kept informed through the parent portal, NotifyMe, newsletters, email, social media, Let's Talk, system and school websites, Blackboard messaging, local media reports as well as through school activities and special issue meetings. The system's Community Relations Department creates and supports communication strategies as well as the monitoring of all vehicles for effectiveness. Additionally, interviews revealed that the system has a need to increase involvement of representatives from all external stakeholder groups with continuous improvement efforts.

Engaging external stakeholders builds a larger sense of community, collaboration and ownership that contributes toward an increase in overall systemic performance excellence.

Powerful Practice
The system's curriculum and associated instructional framework provide equitable learning experiences which serve to prepare Douglas County students for success at the next level.
(Indicator 3.1)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 3.1

Evidence and Rationale
Through a review of artifacts, the Standards Overview, the system Accreditation Report, interviews with administrators and staff and 103 classroom observations, the Team recognized that the system's curriculum, instructional framework and highly qualified teaching staff provide students with the learning experiences necessary for success. The Douglas County instructional framework includes curriculum mapping, instructional techniques, engagement strategies and assessment processes through a "common instructional

language" approach. The curriculum and framework are supported by ongoing professional development through collaborative learning communities and are aligned to system purpose as well as with the Georgia Performance Standards and the Georgia Standards for Excellence. The effectiveness of the framework approach was evident to the Team through a documented steady increase in student performance over the past three years. Innovative initiatives such as theme-focused magnet programs at all five high schools, an elementary dual immersion program, the College and Career Ready Institute and related Academy, the Performance Learning Center and the Virtual Academy also contribute greatly to the success of Douglas County students.

A systemic, standards-based curriculum, complete with a supportive instructional framework, will help to ensure that challenging and equitable learning experiences are clearly defined and provided to all of the system's students as they successfully progress from elementary through high school.

Leadership Capacity

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress towards its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its institutional purpose and direction, the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives, the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways, and the capacity to enact strategies to improve results of student learning.

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 evaluation of best practices in more than 32,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution commits to a shared purpose and direction and establishes expectations for student learning that are aligned with the institutions' vision and supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

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 educational institution leadership research, Leithwood and 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 their 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 communities to attain continuous 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 institutional 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's experience, gained through evaluation of best practices, has indicated 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 1 - Purpose and Direction

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.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	3.00	2.68
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.	3.00	2.68
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.	3.12	2.90
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.	3.00	2.65

Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership

The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	3.00	2.97
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	3.00	2.96
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.	3.88	3.17
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	4.00	3.03
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	3.00	2.74

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	3.00	2.70

Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic

Stakeholder Feedback is the third of three primary areas of evaluation in AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. The AdvancED surveys (student, parent, and teacher) are directly correlated to the AdvancED Standards and indicators. They provide not only direct information about stakeholder satisfaction but also become a source of data for triangulation by the External Review Team as it evaluates indicators.

Institutions are asked to collect and analyze stakeholder feedback data, then submit the data and the analyses to the External Review Team for review. The External Review Team evaluates the quality of the administration of the surveys by institution, survey results, and the degree to which the institution analyzed and acted on the results.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Questionnaire Administration	4.00	3.42
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	3.00	3.03

Findings

Opportunity For Improvement

Integrate a review of system and individual school purpose for student success into annual continuous improvement efforts and ensure that the process includes representative participation by all internal and external stakeholder groups.

(Indicator 1.1)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 1.1

Evidence and Rationale

The system Accreditation Report, as well as interviews with administrators, revealed that although the system had recently deployed a strategic plan and individual schools revise their improvement plans on an annual basis, the provision for an annual, formalized review and possible update of purpose (vision, mission and shared beliefs) was not a required part of the continuous improvement process. Artifacts and interviews affirmed that system and school purpose statements had been either reviewed or revised during the recent strategic planning process and in preparation for the AdvancED External Review, but a documented,

formalized expectation for an annual review of purpose was not a consistent requirement of the ongoing continuous improvement process. Additionally, interviews with parents and community representatives, as well as parent surveys, revealed that external stakeholders had limited input into either the revision of improvement plans or the review of purpose.

A periodic review of purpose with participation by representative internal and external stakeholder groups reinforces direction, provides for an updated alignment with goals and strategies and fosters critical support for system priorities.

Powerful Practice
The Douglas County School System Board of Education (Board) is a cohesive governing unit that carries out its role as the policy-making body for the school system, aligns its decisions with system purpose and values, gives direction to and supports a system culture focused on performance excellence and ensures that leadership at all levels of the organization has the autonomy necessary to implement programs and practices that directly impact student success and achieve the goals of the system and its schools.
(Indicator 2.1, Indicator 2.2, Indicator 2.3)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 2.3

Evidence and Rationale
Through interviews with staff, administrators, parents and community members, the system Accreditation Report, a review of board protocols and survey results from staff and parents, the Team realized that the current governing body of the Douglas County School System operates responsibly, ethically, and cohesively with a clear focus on system purpose and student success. The Team recognized an excellent relationship of trust and respect between the Board of Education and the Superintendent, as well as between the Superintendent and system administrators. The Team noted that the board not only creates and approves policies and practices that support performance excellence, but also provides the autonomy necessary for administrators to plan and deploy actions to achieve the goals of the system's Strategic Plan as well as the goals of the individual School Improvement Plans.

The staff relies on the guidance of the board to set policy and direction and provide the necessary resources for the improvement of system performance. The Board actively seeks stakeholder input on issues pertaining to student success and approaches all decisions with a focus on improving learning opportunities across the system. Through policy and procedures, the governing body consistently participates in available training opportunities, having recently earned the status of a Georgia "Board of Distinction," and continuously works to create and sustain a culture that provides opportunities for all students to achieve their maximum potential academically, physically and emotionally. Additionally, the Board maintains an active website page which includes current information regarding important dates, minutes, agendas and responsibilities as well as other board-related public information. It was evident to the Team that the Board of Education and the Superintendent are focused on providing effective leadership at all levels of the organization and are committed to comprehensive systemic reform.

A board of education which is ethical, operates within clearly defined roles and responsibilities and is focused on student success provides the direction necessary for continual performance improvement.

Powerful Practice

The culture of the Douglas County Schools, fostered by leadership and staff at all levels of the organization, supports a strong sense of community, the system's purpose through shared values and beliefs, high expectations for student success and equitable educational programs for all students that emphasize learning, thinking and life skills.

(Indicator 1.3, Indicator 2.4)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 2.4

Evidence and Rationale

The system Accreditation Report, interviews with leadership, staff, students, parents and community leaders, surveys by students, staff and parents, as well as team observations at both the district office and school level, all affirmed the presence of a strong sense of caring, community and academic focus within the Douglas County School System. The Team found that the system's "One Douglas" culture is directly supported by a well-documented purpose which includes vision, mission, goals and shared beliefs about teaching and learning and is embraced and supported by all stakeholder groups. The actions of the Board of Education, as documented in interviews and minutes, consistently support system purpose and add value to a culture characterized by high expectations for classroom instruction and student achievement.

A caring, collaborative culture that strongly embraces a focus on system mission and beliefs, as well as and a consistently supportive environment, contributes greatly to a unity of purpose as well as performance excellence of both students and staff.

Resource Utilization

The use and distribution of resources must be aligned and supportive of the needs of an institution and the students served. Institutions must ensure that resources are aligned with the stated mission and are distributed equitably so that the needs of students are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes an examination of the allocation and use of resources, the equity of resource distribution to need, the ability of the institution to ensure appropriate levels of funding and sustainability of resources, as well as evidence of long-range capital and resource planning effectiveness.

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, D., Rudo, Z., Schneider, C., & Smith-Hansen, L., 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 the more than 32,000 institutions in the AdvancED Network that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, meets special needs, and complies with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staff members 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 members to improve their effectiveness and ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard 4 - Resources and Support Systems

The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
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.	4.00	2.87
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.	3.00	2.87
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	3.62	3.06
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	3.12	2.76

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	3.00	2.73
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	3.25	2.72
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.	2.75	2.58
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.	2.88	2.60

Findings

Improvement Priority

Develop, implement and monitor a systemic, systematic process (protocol) for the scheduled monitoring and review of strategic system programs, practices and services to determine their effectiveness in supporting the counseling, physical, social and emotional needs of all students.
(Indicator 3.12, Indicator 4.7, Indicator 4.8)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 4.7

Evidence and Rationale

Through interviews with system administrators and staff members, as well as through a review of available evidence, the Team recognized that while programs/processes were in place, there was not a documented, systemic protocol to systematically monitor ongoing conditions or review existing resource management programs/processes for overall effectiveness, improvement or continuing viability. This evaluative deficiency includes the areas of student counseling/career planning as well as programs supporting the physical, social and emotional needs of the system's students. Also, the Team found no evidence of any improvement plans associated with each of these program areas. The Douglas County School System should develop and implement a documented systemic protocol to regularly evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of current resource management support programs that are in place to meet the counseling/career planning, physical, social and emotional needs of all of the system's students.

A documented, systemic, systematic protocol for the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and improvement of programs and practices impacting student success will greatly assist in guaranteeing that such programs and practices are providing students with the very best targeted support services and that system resources are being expended in an efficient and effective manner.

Powerful Practice

The Douglas County School System engages in a comprehensive, systematic process to recruit, employ and retain qualified professional and support staff necessary for the attainment of the system's mission. (Indicator 4.1)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 4.1

Evidence and Rationale

Through a review of artifacts and information gathered from overviews and interviews, the Team recognized that the Douglas County School System engages in a comprehensive human capital process to recruit, employ and retain qualified professional and support staff necessary for the accomplishment of system purpose. The district uses effective recruiting strategies such as job fairs and marketing tools, provides for new teacher induction as well as ongoing support structures such as teacher coaching, peer observations, teacher leader training and mentoring procedures, including a Lead Mentor at every school for classroom support. The structure provides for all professional staff being "highly qualified" and its support has contributed to the attainment of advanced degrees by 68% of classroom teachers. Additionally, the system is continuing to enhance the local salary schedule, aligns resources with prioritized need, coordinates with local colleges for teacher placement and is aware of the need to continually pursue diversity with respect to instructional and leadership personnel in order to reflect changing community demographics.

A well-defined, systematic and well-executed process for the recruitment, retention and support of a highly qualified staff greatly contributes to a systemic focus on stability and performance excellence.

Conclusion

The Douglas County School System (DCSS), located in the Appalachian Piedmont of Georgia, is a public school system which is clearly focused on student success through providing a curriculum and a supporting instructional framework directly aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards as well as the Georgia Standards for Excellence. The system is the 17th largest in the state of Georgia and includes a majority non-white (67%) student population. Douglas County's vision, mission and beliefs provide direction and demonstrate a commitment to a continuous improvement process focused on excellence for both students and staff. The DCSS Board of Education (Board) and the Georgia State Board of Education have recently entered into a Strategic Waiver School System Partnership contract which grants the system flexibility to implement innovative practices that otherwise may have been prevented due to limiting state laws or rules.

The Board carries out its role as the policy-making body for the school system, supporting the system's culture and enabling school leadership at all levels to make decisions and carry out their responsibilities in a manner which ensures a strong commitment to purpose and direction. The Board continually reviews and revises policy as needed and operates responsibly, ethically and cohesively with a clear focus on student success. There is an extremely positive relationship between the Superintendent and school board members, as well as between the Superintendent and principals which provided evidence of strong leadership, mutual trust and respect as well as a unity of purpose. Additionally, the Board ensures that expenditures are aligned with system purpose, demonstrates proven fiscal excellence and integrity and is active in training and continuous improvement efforts.

The system's schools provide evidence of committed leadership, dedicated and caring staffs, positive relationships, a nurturing learning environment for all students and clear behavioral expectations. Douglas County students are extremely polite, well-behaved, positive and actively engaged in the teaching and learning process. Additionally, school staffs are adequately supported by the system through human and material resources and all campuses are visually appealing, well-maintained and focused on providing a safe learning and working environment for all students and staff.

DCSS has designed and deployed a technology infrastructure that meets the teaching, learning and operational needs of the system. A variety of digital tools, as well as a "bring your own device" initiative, support the learning process and current bandwidth is sufficient for reliable connectivity in all buildings within the system.

The system has recently created a comprehensive Strategic Plan which addresses all areas vital to achieving performance excellence. The development process included representative participation by internal and external stakeholder groups. The plan includes strategic themes, performance objectives, measurable outcomes, strategic approaches and action steps as well as persons responsible and an associated timeline for implementation. The plan is scheduled for an annual review which will provide a timely opportunity for updating performance objectives and measurable outcomes based on the most recent performance data.

The curriculum of the Douglas County Schools and its supportive instructional framework, complete with

curriculum maps, instructional techniques, engagement strategies and assessment processes, ensure that challenging and equitable learning experiences are provided to all of the system's students as they successfully progress from elementary through high school. Innovative initiatives such as an elementary dual immersion program, the College and Career Institute, the Performance Learning Center, the Virtual Academy and unique magnet programs at all high schools also contribute greatly to the success of Douglas County students. Each of the five high schools have developed a successful magnet program with a specific focus which includes International Baccalaureate, Fine Arts, Science/Technology/Engineering/Math (STEM), Advanced Placement (AP) and Liberal Arts College Preparatory. Eighth grade students may apply to any of the magnet programs regardless of school zone, with transportation provided upon acceptance.

DCSS has developed an effective protocol to recruit, develop and retain highly qualified instructional staff and leadership for the accomplishment of system purpose. Additionally, the system uses many effective communication strategies such as the parent portal, NotifyMe, newsletters, email, social media, Let's Talk, system and school websites, Blackboard messaging, local media reports and school-based activities to engage families and keep them informed.

The culture of the Douglas County Schools supports a strong sense of community, the system's purpose through shared values and beliefs, high expectations for student success and equitable educational programs for all students which emphasize learning, thinking and life skills. The system's collaborative "One Douglas" culture, characterized by high expectations for classroom instruction and student achievement, is embraced and strongly supported by all stakeholder groups.

The system's internal review process and the Team's external review process both revealed and confirmed the presence of several significant challenges. Although leadership regularly communicates with internal and external stakeholders, there is a need for parents as well as other community stakeholders to participate more often in ongoing system-wide continuous improvement activities, such as the regular review of purpose, revision of system and school improvement plans and future strategic planning efforts. Additionally, the process for the periodic review of the system's mission and purpose for student success needs to be formalized. A systematic protocol for the regular monitoring of the implementation of the system's instructional initiatives should be developed and deployed. Additionally, a systematic review of strategic programs, practices and services in support of student learning and well-being to determine their effectiveness and viability for continued deployment needs to be developed and implemented.

There are noted achievement gaps regarding the performance of several subgroups within the student population. The system has demonstrated some gains in subgroup performance; however, a review of present strategies and the creation of a very specific action plan within the strategic planning process would serve to systematically improve these results over time and ultimately eradicate subgroup achievement gaps. The system's process (protocol) for the collection, analysis and application of data from all available sources at every school needs to become more comprehensive and provide a deeper, broader examination of both formative and summative student assessment data. Continual analysis allows for real-time interventions and adjustments to learning outcomes, as well as discussion of instructional practices which would best support identified needs. Training for this priority should include both professional personnel and appropriate support

staff.

Currently, the system does not provide a systemic expectation for long-term student mentoring. Although there are randomly organized practices for longitudinal student-adult relationships in some schools, there is a need to support a sustainable process which makes the opportunity available to all students in all schools. The provision of exemplars is not yet a system priority. A systemic protocol for the inclusion of exemplars, such as rubrics and high quality work products, into the teaching and learning process would guide students toward better understanding learning expectations and accomplishing learning tasks at a higher level of proficiency. Douglas County teachers consistently provide support and assistance with learning tasks; however, classroom observations revealed a need to more often provide differentiated instruction as well as varying strategies to meet individual learning requirements.

Other system challenges include a continual upgrade of the technology infrastructure and accompanying professional development, refining the Professional Learning Community (PLC) structure in all schools, aligning school improvement plans with the recently published system Strategic Plan, providing relevant and job-embedded professional development for all staff, poverty and transiency, continuing to build upon the positive graduation rate gains, providing additional salary increases, improving the acquisition of Progress Points and Student Achievement Points at each school, expanding the Leader in Me Program to other elementary schools, strengthening the teacher induction and mentoring program and growing leadership capacity.

Major activities which the system and its schools are currently addressing include identifying the process and timeline for a superintendent search, effectively addressing state funding cuts, building upon strong community partnerships and communication structures, increasing Professional Learning Days, fully implementing the system Strategic Plan and implementing formalized processes at every level of the organization as needed.

The Douglas County School System is continuously designing and deploying systemic processes which directly support performance excellence, and is focused on aligning all decisions and actions, both school and system-based, with continuous improvement in order to achieve system/school purpose and success for all students. The system's Index of Educational Quality (IEQ™) results, generated through team ratings of all Standard and Diagnostic Indicators during the External Review process, documents that the system outperformed the AdvancED Network (AEN) average, not only in its overall score (307.93), but also in the Domains of Teaching and Learning Impact (293.45), Leadership Capacity (325.00) and Resource Utilization (320.31). By earnestly addressing the Improvement Priorities, Opportunities for Improvement, challenges and major ongoing activities contained within this report, the system will continue to evolve as an educational leader in the state of Georgia. Through continued systematic, strategic, collaborative continuous improvement efforts, involving all stakeholder groups, the system can more successfully realize its commitment to its purpose and ensure that it is truly an organization "committed to rigor and extending the bar."

Improvement Priorities

The institution should use the findings from this review to guide the continuous improvement process. The institution must address the Improvement Priorities listed below:

- Develop, implement and monitor a systemic, systematic process (protocol) for the scheduled monitoring and review of strategic system programs, practices and services to determine their effectiveness in supporting the counseling, physical, social and emotional needs of all students.
- Implement and monitor a systemic protocol which requires all professional and appropriate support staff to be trained in collecting, analyzing and applying all available student performance data in order to better inform and monitor instructional practices that support student learning.

Accreditation Recommendation

Index of Education Quality

The Index of Education Quality (IEQ™) provides a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of indicators and evaluative criteria. A formative tool for improvement, it identifies areas of success as well as areas in need of focus.

The IEQ™ comprises three domains: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) the use of resources and data to support and optimize learning.

The overall and domain scores can range from 100-400. The domain scores are derived from: the AdvancED Standards and indicators ratings; results of the Analysis of Student Performance; and data from Stakeholder Feedback Surveys (students, parents, and staff).

	External Review IEQ Score	AdvancED Network Average
Overall Score	307.93	278.94
Teaching and Learning Impact	293.45	268.48
Leadership Capacity	325.00	293.71
Resource Utilization	320.31	286.27

The IEQ™ results include information about how the institution is performing compared to expected criteria as well as to other institutions in the AdvancED Network. The institution should use the information in this report, including the corresponding performance rubrics, to identify specific areas of improvement.

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

Addenda

Individual Institution Results (Self-reported)

Institution Name	Teaching and Learning Impact	Leadership Capacity	Resource Utilization	Overall IEQ Score
Annette Winn Elementary School	285.71	281.82	285.71	284.62
Arbor Station Elementary School	304.76	327.27	300.00	310.26
Beulah Elementary School	261.90	263.64	242.86	258.97
Bill Arp Elementary School	280.95	336.36	300.00	300.00
Bright Star Elementary School	295.24	363.64	314.29	317.95
Chapel Hill Elementary School	338.10	327.27	314.29	330.77
Chapel Hill High School	323.81	336.36	314.29	325.64
Chapel Hill Middle School	333.33	381.82	328.57	346.15
Chestnut Log Middle School	309.52	336.36	328.57	320.51
Dorsett Shoals Elementary School	309.52	381.82	357.14	338.46
Douglas County High School	304.76	281.82	300.00	297.44
Eastside Elementary School	276.19	272.73	285.71	276.92
Factory Shoals Elementary School	300.00	372.73	300.00	320.51
Factory Shoals Middle School	347.62	327.27	342.86	341.03
Fairplay Middle School	295.24	290.91	357.14	305.13
Holly Springs Elementary School	333.33	345.45	314.29	333.33
John W. Stewart Middle School	319.05	300.00	314.29	312.82
L. W. Burnett Elementary School	309.52	327.27	300.00	312.82
Lithia Springs Elementary School	333.33	309.09	271.43	315.38
Lithia Springs High School	357.14	327.27	314.29	341.03
Mason Creek Elementary School	357.14	400.00	371.43	371.79
Mason Creek Middle School	228.57	272.73	271.43	248.72

Institution Name	Teaching and Learning Impact	Leadership Capacity	Resource Utilization	Overall IEQ Score
Mirror Lake Elementary School	304.76	336.36	214.29	297.44
Mount Carmel Elementary School	309.52	327.27	300.00	312.82
New Manchester Elementary School	271.43	290.91	285.71	279.49
New Manchester High School	295.24	300.00	271.43	292.31
North Douglas Elementary School	280.95	354.55	271.43	300.00
Robert S. Alexander Comprehensive High School	295.24	300.00	300.00	297.44
South Douglas Elementary School	304.76	318.18	300.00	307.69
Sweetwater Elementary School	333.33	336.36	385.71	343.59
Turner Middle School	257.14	281.82	285.71	269.23
Winston Elementary School	290.48	336.36	314.29	307.69
Yeager Middle School	133.33	145.45	100.00	130.77

Team Roster

Member	Brief Biography
Mr. William B Rivenbark	William B. (Bill) Rivenbark is a retired North Carolina public school educator. He worked his entire career of 40 years with the Craven County (NC) School District, having served as teacher, assistant principal, principal, elementary supervisor, assistant superintendent, associate superintendent and superintendent. Earned credentials include B.S., M.A.Ed., and Ed.S. degrees from East Carolina University. After retiring, Mr. Rivenbark was appointed to a nine month term as interim superintendent for a neighboring North Carolina school district. He has served two terms on the SACS CASI North Carolina Council and currently is an AdvancED Lead Evaluator as well as a North Carolina Field Consultant for AdvancED. In the spring of 2008, Mr. Rivenbark published an article in The AdvancED Source entitled "Craven County Schools' Approach to Systems Thinking (A Natural Fit with the AdvancED Accreditation Process)."
Dr. Greg Benton	Dr. Benton currently serves as an Area Superintendent in Henry County Schools, currently ranked the seventh largest public school system in Georgia. Dr. Benton has served in a P-12 public school system for 20 years, including experiences as a classroom teacher, assistant principal at the middle school level, building principal at the elementary level and at the Georgia Department of Education as a School Improvement Specialist and Director of Teacher and Leader Quality. Dr. Benton holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Georgia State University, a Master's and Ed. Specialist degree in School Administration from The University of West Georgia, and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Mercer University.
Dr. Steve Oborn	Dr. Steve Oborn is a retired superintendent and college professor. He currently owns and operates his own consulting firm in Georgetown, Ohio. His educational career has spanned over 45 years, and he served as a public school superintendent for 23 years. Dr. Oborn earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Capital University, his Master of Arts Degree from The Ohio State University, and his Doctor of Philosophy Degree from The University of Dayton with a concentration in educational leadership and organizational dynamics. Dr. Oborn has published numerous articles and presented at numerous conferences with a focus on teacher as researcher and organizational design. He is completing a book titled, " Build a new school: The education of the whole child," and a school board training platform, "Changing complex to simple: Governing dynamics for boards of education-The power of the Starr Initiative©." Dr. Oborn has served as a Lead Evaluator for AdvancED for over five years and has led over 50 teams both nationally and internationally. He has led teams in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt, UAE, Kosovo, China and the Philippines to name a few. Dr. Oborn has also served school systems across the United States. He has been associated with North Central Association for over 43 years, serving Ohio as an Ambassador and Lead Evaluator.

Member	Brief Biography
Mrs. Kim R Erwin	Currently, Mrs. Erwin is serving in her eighth year as principal of Ringgold Elementary School, grades 3-5. Prior to this position, she was an assistant principal for one year at Lakeview Middle School and two years at Tiger Creek Elementary. As a teacher, she taught grades 1-8 including both regular and gifted education classes. All of her experience has been in Catoosa County Public Schools in Catoosa County, Georgia. While working at Ringgold Middle School, Mrs. Erwin had the opportunity to write and earn for our school a Comprehensive School Improvement grant. The school was awarded $644,000 to provide a wealth of professional learning and to improve parent involvement. They chose SREB's Making Middle Grades Work as the model to guide our work. The faculty, staff, and administration attended many of Solution Tree's PLC conferences, Seminars, Workshops, and Institutes. Education is Mrs. Erwin's passion as are people. She truly believes building relationships is the first step in improving schools. Her hope is that the people with whom she builds relationships will recognize the passion she has for education and the commitment she has for helping others improve their lives.
Mr. Jeff Garthwaite	Jeff Garthwaite began teaching middle school American History and Civics in 1971. He served as a middle school assistant principal and principal. He was the District Coordinator for Department of Juvenile Justice schools and Title I funded Private Schools. He was assigned as turn-around principal for a rural Pre K – 8 school, charged with raising the failing school grade. Mr. Garthwaite has presented a variety of educational workshops and informational sessions at national, state, and local education conferences. Upon retirement, he joined an educational corporate partnership, providing professional development services and resources for high school principals across six states. He has also provided educational consulting and professional development services to several Florida charter schools. Mr. Garthwaite served as a Regional Director on the Florida League of Middle Schools, Executive Board. He received his Bachelor's degree from the University of West Florida and Master's degree in Educational Administration and Supervision from Troy State University. He has served on many School and District AdvancED External Review Teams.
Mr. Oliver J Lewis	Oliver is a 22-year DeKalb Schools veteran educator that has served as an elementary and middle grades teacher, assistant principal and principal at the local school level. Oliver served as principal for 8 years at Hightower Elementary STEM School, where the school achieved many academic milestones and state accolades. In October of 2013, Oliver began serving the DeKalb County School District as its Director of Professional Learning. Currently, Oliver serves the District as the Executive Director for Teacher and Leader Development (Professional Learning), STEM and Educational Media.
Mrs. Brita Mann	Brita Mann has taught in Union County Public Schools as a middle school media coordinator since moving to NC from MI in 2007. Prior to that, she taught in the United States and overseas for several years as an elementary teacher and as middle and high school art teacher. She recently completed a Masters add-on program in School Administration at Wingate University earning additional licensure in School Administration. She assisted in leading her school through the AdvancED accreditation process in 2013 and has previously served on three AdvancED external review teams.

Member	Brief Biography
Mrs. Mary F Minich	Mary Minich is the Accountability Analyst in the Department of Evaluation and Accountability with the Lake County, Florida, Schools. Her responsibilities include reconciling state and local data utilized in determining school grades, graduation rates, dropout rates, and student enrollment and performance. Her experiences include serving as a member of County-wide and School-level Advisory Committees, the District Professional Development Council, and District School Improvement Plan review committees. Prior school district positions include high school test coordinator, Student Services Program Specialist, ESOL trainer-of-teachers, and elementary and middle school teacher. She received an AA degree in Restaurant, Hotel, and Institutional Management from Purdue University, a BA degree in Elementary Education from Stetson University, and her MA in Educational Leadership from National-Louis University.
Ms. sara carlson	I have been in education for 19 years. I have taught 1st grade, 3rd grade, and pre-K. I have held the positions of an Early Intervention teacher, Instructional lead teacher, Assistant Principal, and this is my 3rd year as principal. I had the my first 4 years of experience in Florida. The rest of my experience has been with the Bibb County School system in Macon, Georgia.

Next Steps

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with 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. Consider the Opportunities for Improvement identified throughout the report that are provided by the team in the spirit of continuous improvement and the institution's commitment to improving its capacity to improve student learning.
4. Develop action plans to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward addressing the Improvement Priorities.
5. Use the report to guide and strengthen the institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
6. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Improvement Priorities. Institutions are required to respond to all Improvement Priorities. The report will be reviewed at the appropriate state, national, and/or international levels to monitor and ensure that the system has implemented the necessary actions to address the Improvement Priorities. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the responses to the Improvement Priorities and the resulting improvement.
7. Continue to meet the AdvancED Standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

About AdvancED

AdvancED is the world leader in providing improvement and accreditation services to education providers of all types in their pursuit of excellence in serving students. AdvancED serves as a trusted partner to more than 32,000 public and private schools and school systems – enrolling more than 20 million students - across the United States and 70 countries.

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, and 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 (NWAC) that was founded in 1917 became part of AdvancED.

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. The Accreditation Divisions of AdvancED share research-based quality standards that cross school system, state, regional, national, and international boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified and consistent process designed to engage educational institutions in continuous improvement.

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