

Report of the External Review Team for Chatham County School System

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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 External Review visit to Chatham County Schools (CCS) located in Pittsboro, NC, began on Sunday, April 23 and continued through the afternoon of Wednesday, April 26, 2017. The External Review Team (Team) was made up of six trained and experienced educators, three from within North Carolina, and one each from states of Alabama, Florida, and Virginia.

Preparation for the visit to CCS started in September 2016, when initial contact was made with the district staff and preliminary logistics were discussed. A schedule for the visit was soon drafted and revised as plans were refined. Emails and telephone calls quickly established an effective working framework between the Lead Evaluator and the district and later among team members. The Team Workspace was developed and continually updated with pertinent documents and served as a support for team members. Training for eProve™ Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool™ (eleot™) certification was completed prior to the visit. A conference call with team members was held approximately a month before the visit to review all aspects of the review and address logistics and questions. Following the conference call, weekly emails from the Lead Evaluator kept team members focused, updated, and reminded. Team members reviewed numerous documents reflecting practices in the district and the schools through the use of folders on Google Drive which provided easy access to specific information about the school district and each of the schools selected for

visits. Each team member was asked to focus initially on one of the five AdvancED Accreditation Standards but was also advised of the responsibility of rating the district on all Standards by the final day of the review. That off-site preparation enabled team members to begin their work in CCS with a basic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the district.

The Team arrived in Pittsboro on Sunday in time for a work session at 3:30 pm. The Team stayed at the Fearrington House Inn which provided excellent overnight accommodations and a spacious workroom for evening work sessions. Later that afternoon, the superintendent welcomed the Team and provided an overview of the school district. Several key leaders of the district joined the Team for dinner offering an opportunity to chat informally about the district. Following dinner, the Team continued its work session agenda.

Throughout the External Review, team members were transported by key members of the district staff, providing an ongoing opportunity for additional informal discussion and clarification of earlier statements. On Monday morning, a presentation was made to the Team which highlighted the progress of the district relative to each of the Accreditation Standards. Interviews with the superintendent, staff members, parents, and members of the Chatham County Board of education (board) afforded the Team opportunities to probe into statements made during earlier presentations and verify district-wide progress. Following dinner at the hotel that evening, the Team held another collaborative work session to review findings, discuss concerns, review the elect form and protocols, and prepare for the visits to schools.

On Tuesday, members of the Team visited eight of the 17 schools in the district. During the school visits, Team members interviewed the principal and members of the leadership team at each site and observed students in 65 classrooms. That evening, the Team held another work session to discuss the interviews and observations, build consensus about the district's areas of strength and concern, and arrive individually at final ratings of all accreditation indicators.

On Wednesday, the Team concluded its work by finalizing statements of Powerful Practice, Opportunity for Improvement and Improvement Priority, and delivering an Exit Report to the board.

The staff members of Chatham County Schools displayed true professionalism and warm hospitality throughout the External Review. A sense of transparency was evident among staff members during both informal conversations and formal interviews. Responses to team inquiries were immediate, open, and thoughtful. Teachers and students were a pleasure to speak with during the visit. Logistics for the visit were carefully planned to ensure that the members of the Team were transported to interview or presentation sites as scheduled.

CCS and each of the schools were well prepared for the Team's visit. Formal interviews with 189 parents, teachers, principals, members of the district staff, and four members of the board provided clear indications of opinions and concerns about the school district. Also, during visits to the schools, Team members engaged in brief but enlightening conversations with another 167 students. Additionally, surveys of approximately 7,200 staff members, students, and parents provided important documentation of stakeholder opinions. Staff

members in the schools were aware of the work of the External Review Team, spoke with pride about their school, and were interested in feedback about the Team's perception of their school.

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	4
Administrators	37
Instructional Staff	89
Support Staff	16
Students	167
Parents/Community/Business Leaders	42
Total	356

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.	3.00	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.	3.83	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.	3.17	2.71
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	3.50	2.58
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	2.83	2.48
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	3.50	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.	3.33	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.	2.50	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.	2.00	2.47
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	3.17	2.65
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	3.67	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.	3.17	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.	3.17	2.49
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	3.00	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.	3.17	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.	3.17	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

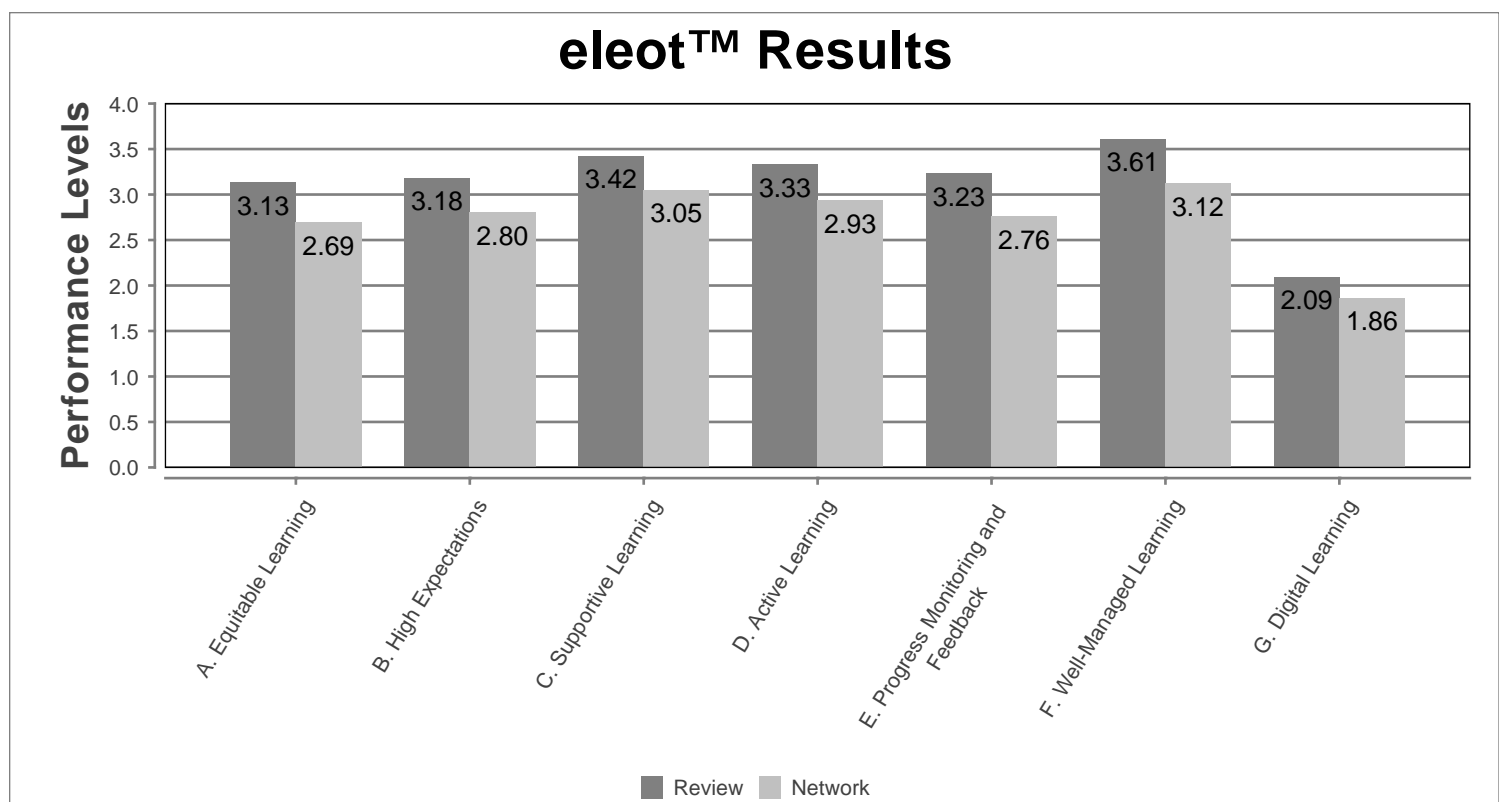
learning, and closing gaps in achievement among subpopulations of students are all important indicators for evaluating overall student performance.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Assessment Quality	3.00	3.33
Test Administration	4.00	3.52
Equity of Learning	3.00	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.



The External Review Team visited classrooms in eight of the 17 schools in Chatham County Schools. The eight schools were strategically selected by the Team to ensure a representative cross-section of all schools in the district. A total of 65 classrooms were randomly selected to be observed using eleot which focuses on student behaviors and actions rather than monitoring teacher performance.

The Team found the school facilities in CCS to be well maintained and clean and providing excellent teaching and learning environments for staff and students. Staff members expressed confidence in their school's ability to provide a safe and secure learning environment for students, a sentiment which was supported by parents during interviews. One parent stated, "I have full confidence; I don't drop off my kid and think anything is going to happen." Classroom observations revealed that the instructional priorities of the district are implemented throughout all schools. The priority that "each student should read, write, and speak in every class every day" was infused and apparent within classroom structures. Additionally, an instructional priority of using essential questions to guide classroom instruction was evident by posted questions and discussions. Teachers offered direction, correction, and feedback as necessary to connect classroom instruction to real world applications, character development, and ethical responsibility. Staff members and parents spoke proudly about 'their school' and the services they provide for the students. "Teachers love and want to be here" was a comment heard in several settings.

The learning environment rated the highest (most effective) was that of a "Well-Managed Learning Environment." Its rating was a 3.61/4.00 (3.61 on a scale which ranges from a low of 1.00 to a high of 4.00). This environment pertains to the interaction between teachers and students, collaboration among peers and cooperation, and adherence to classroom rules and procedures. The highest rated behavior in this environment was the manner in which students followed classroom rules and interacted with their classmates. Students in all settings were observed interacting respectfully throughout the schools, including hallways and the cafeterias. They were receptive to team member questions and offered candid responses. During brief exchanges with students during school visits, they were anxious to talk about the school administration and their teachers. The overall atmosphere was positive with an underlying love for their school and support for the faculty. A secondary student offered the only negative comment, that being the universal comment that "school should not begin so early in the morning!" The lowest rated behavior in this area relates to the collaboration with others during student-centered activities, caused in part by the reliance of many teachers on large group instruction.

Following closely was the "Supportive Learning Environment." Its rating was 3.42/4.00 on the same scale. This environment relates to the way students express a positive attitude about their classroom setting and learning experiences, if they appear willing to take risks in learning without fear of negative feedback, and if they receive support and assistance appropriate to their level of ability. The strongest rating within this environment was found in the students' expressions of a positive attitude about the classroom and their learning activities. A parent reported that "The staff adjusted for my child and put things in place" to address his learning needs. Students showed a willingness to ask for feedback and revise their work based on the suggestions of the teacher and other students. The lowest rated behavior in this area was the provision of alternative instruction or feedback for students appropriate to their level of ability.

An "Active Learning Environment" was rated third highest. Its rating was 3.33/4.00 on the eleot scale. This environment relates to the engagement of students in the classroom activities, involvement in discussions with the teacher and/or classmates, and connections of the lesson activity to real-life experiences. The fact that students had opportunities to actively engage in discussions with the teacher and other students was rated as the highest value in this environment. Engagement in discussions in every classroom was observed with

students anxious to contribute and have their voices heard. One high school student told a team member that his teacher "makes it real world!" Another high school student explained, "I like how we are building a house for Habitat for Humanity. Working on a service project; this is actually pretty fun." The lowest rated behavior in this area was the lack of noticeable connections of their classroom work to real-life applications.

The learning environment rated fourth highest was that of a "Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment." Its rating was 3.23/4.00 on the elect scale. This environment addresses the level of teacher feedback to help students understand the lesson, if students are able to revise their work based on that feedback, how the students demonstrate understanding, and if students generally understand how their work will be graded. The area rated as a relative strength in this environment was the practice commonly observed where the students were quizzed about their understanding of the classwork. In the words of one elementary principal, "We use evaluation to improve student success." One team member observed that teachers provided feedback to students to either prompt better or more informative response. The area rated the lowest in this environment deals with the student's understanding of how their work will be graded by the teacher. The lack of posted grading rubrics and exemplars led to this lower rating for many classrooms.

The learning environment which was rated fifth highest was that of a "High Expectations Learning Environment." Its rating was 3.18/4.00 on the same scale. This environment relates to the degree of challenge or rigor of assignments, the use of higher order thinking skills, and the availability of examples of excellent student work or grading rubrics to guide students. The highest rated behavior in this area was the fact that students were tasked with activities that were challenging and yet attainable. One team member observed in a middle school science classroom where students were being asked to apply concepts learned in their English class to the lesson of the day. The lowest rated behavior in this area pertains to the availability of exemplars or samples of student work provided by a teacher to guide and inform students during their learning process.

The "Equitable Learning Environment" was rated 3.13/4.00 on the same scale. This environment pertains to the level of differentiated learning opportunities in which students are engaged, their access to discussions, resources and other activities, fair and consistent application of classroom rules, and opportunities to learn about the background and cultural differences among classmates. During his interview, the superintendent stated that "We must embrace that children learn differently and it's our job to do what works." It was clear to the Team that most classrooms had established cultures which invite and expect students to become fully engaged in their learning. The strongest rating within this environment was the clear indication that students knew the classroom rules and perceived the consequences of misbehavior to be fair and consistently applied. The lowest rating in this environment was the lack of planned opportunities for youngsters to learn about the background and cultural differences among their peers although such opportunities may be addressed outside of the classroom.

The lowest learning environment (least effective) was "Digital Learning Environment" with a rating of 2.09/4.00. This standard relates to the use of instructional technology by students to gather and use data for learning, conduct research or solve problems, and communicate with and work collaboratively with others. It is important to point out that even though this was the lowest rated environment for CCS, the rating of 2.09 was

still significantly higher than the average of all other institutions using the eleot observation tool. That average rating is 1.86 on the scale. The Team looked closely for student use of technology tools during observations. There were numerous examples of teachers using technology in their lessons but student use was less often observed. Also, when student use of technology was noted, it was often seen in centers for reinforcement rather than for learning new content. One team member noted that time limitations for classroom observations might have been a contributing factor of some desirable activities not being observed.

The focus of the eleot classroom observation tool is closely aligned with the AdvancED Accreditation Standards in many instances. One area in which the focus of eleot and the Accreditation Standards are closely aligned is in the area of the student's full membership and involvement in the classroom. During classroom observations, team members looked for evidence that students have ongoing opportunities (eleot A.4) to learn about their own and other's culture and background. This issue is closely related to Standard 3 (3.9) which addresses the need for the schools to establish structures whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school. Both areas were rated low by the Team and identified as areas in need of focus. Standard 3 (3.9) was rated on the district's Self Assessment as areas in need of emphasis.

The Accreditation Standards and eleot indicators are also closely aligned when it comes to monitoring student progress in the classroom. Standard 3 (3.2) addresses the need to monitor and adjust the curriculum to ensure that the instructional techniques used are appropriate to the level of the student while eleot (E.1) looks at the frequency with which a teacher assesses the students' progress. During classroom observations, the Team noted a strong practice of teachers quizzing students about their work as a check of their comprehension and readiness to move forward.

Another area of alignment pertains to the availability of differentiated learning opportunities and alternative assignments for students who have to struggle with the lessons and for others who easily master the content. Environments A (A.1) and C (C.5) in eleot relate to the provision of differentiated learning activities to meet a student's needs and the use of appropriate feedback. At the same time, Standard 3 (3.1) calls for teachers to individualize learning activities. Likewise, Standard 3 (3.12) depicts the use of student performance data to identify unique learning needs and to provide appropriate support services. The Team did not observe a significant level of differentiation of instructional activities for students.

Grading and reporting of student progress is another area of alignment. Both the Accreditation Standards (3.10) and eleot (E.4) address the issue of grading. Both indicators were rated relatively low by team members indicating an area of concern for the district. The need to establish common grading guidelines and protocols is a matter of fairness and equity for students and is the subject of the Improvement Priority to be found elsewhere in the report of the External Review Team.

Close alignment between the Accreditation Standards and the focus of eleot can also be seen in the area of equity in the classroom. Accreditation Standard 3 (3.1) establishes the expectation for teachers to provide equitable and challenging learning experiences for all students. Like that expectation, eleot observations (A.2) monitor the equity afforded each student when it comes to engagement in classroom discussions, activities, and resources.

Finally, the power of student achievement data, if properly interpreted and used by a trained staff member, cannot be overstated. Accreditation Standard 5 (5.3) requires ongoing training for staff members in the analysis of data while C.5 reinforces the need for teachers to provide additional or alternative instruction and feedback at the student's level. The best way to identify and address a student's achievement level is through the wise interpretation and use of data.

In conclusion, members of the External Review Team were favorably impressed by the student behavior observed throughout the schools. The visits to the schools provided insights into each school showing evidence of actively engaged students who appear to be regularly challenged and motivated. It is evident that instructional technology is being used as a resource to enhance instruction, not as a subject unto itself. Students were comfortable in their surroundings and in their daily routines and appear to genuinely like school. Teachers voiced pride in their school and also expressed a sense of satisfaction with their level of performance. One teacher commented, "I have worked in several counties, and I feel honored to work here, but I am more pleased that my children attend school here because I think the attention they receive at all levels is outstanding." A principal explained, "The key to this district is relationship building; we are all relationship building experts." The Team encourages the leaders and staff of Chatham County Schools to review the results of these classroom observations and use that information to help inform future decisions about classroom activities, instructional strategies, and curriculum design. Attention to these findings will likely add to the positive components of the district's learning culture and increase student academic success.

eleot™ Data Summary

A. Equitable Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.02	Has differentiated learning opportunities and activities that meet her/his needs	29.23%	46.15%	21.54%	3.08%
2.	3.42	Has equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	49.23%	44.62%	4.62%	1.54%
3.	3.52	Knows that rules and consequences are fair, clear, and consistently applied	53.85%	44.62%	1.54%	0.00%
4.	2.55	Has ongoing opportunities to learn about their own and other's backgrounds/cultures/differences	23.08%	26.15%	33.85%	16.92%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.13						

B. High Expectations			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.40	Knows and strives to meet the high expectations established by the teacher	49.23%	41.54%	9.23%	0.00%
2.	3.46	Is tasked with activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	60.00%	26.15%	13.85%	0.00%
3.	2.66	Is provided exemplars of high quality work	23.08%	35.38%	26.15%	15.38%
4.	3.31	Is engaged in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks	41.54%	47.69%	10.77%	0.00%
5.	3.05	Is asked and responds to questions that require higher order thinking (e.g., applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	35.38%	35.38%	27.69%	1.54%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.18						

C. Supportive Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.65	Demonstrates or expresses that learning experiences are positive	67.69%	29.23%	3.08%	0.00%
2.	3.65	Demonstrates positive attitude about the classroom and learning	66.15%	32.31%	1.54%	0.00%
3.	3.31	Takes risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	43.08%	44.62%	12.31%	0.00%
4.	3.58	Is provided support and assistance to understand content and accomplish tasks	61.54%	35.38%	3.08%	0.00%
5.	2.91	Is provided additional/alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge for her/his needs	32.31%	32.31%	29.23%	6.15%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.42						

D. Active Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.55	Has several opportunities to engage in discussions with teacher and other students	60.00%	35.38%	4.62%	0.00%
2.	2.91	Makes connections from content to real-life experiences	32.31%	32.31%	29.23%	6.15%
3.	3.52	Is actively engaged in the learning activities	58.46%	35.38%	6.15%	0.00%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.33						

E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.40	Is asked and/or quizzed about individual progress/learning	58.46%	23.08%	18.46%	0.00%
2.	3.38	Responds to teacher feedback to improve understanding	50.77%	36.92%	12.31%	0.00%
3.	3.37	Demonstrates or verbalizes understanding of the lesson/content	47.69%	41.54%	10.77%	0.00%
4.	2.78	Understands how her/his work is assessed	20.00%	47.69%	23.08%	9.23%
5.	3.20	Has opportunities to revise/improve work based on feedback	47.69%	29.23%	18.46%	4.62%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.23						

F. Well-Managed Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.78	Speaks and interacts respectfully with teacher(s) and peers	81.54%	15.38%	3.08%	0.00%
2.	3.82	Follows classroom rules and works well with others	83.08%	15.38%	1.54%	0.00%
3.	3.49	Transitions smoothly and efficiently to activities	58.46%	36.92%	0.00%	4.62%
4.	3.28	Collaborates with other students during student-centered activities	53.85%	29.23%	7.69%	9.23%
5.	3.68	Knows classroom routines, behavioral expectations and consequences	72.31%	23.08%	4.62%	0.00%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.61						

G. Digital Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.29	Uses digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	20.00%	29.23%	10.77%	40.00%
2.	2.06	Uses digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	15.38%	23.08%	13.85%	47.69%
3.	1.92	Uses digital tools/technology to communicate and work collaboratively for learning	10.77%	20.00%	20.00%	49.23%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.09						

Findings

Improvement Priority

Create and implement a procedure to regularly evaluate programs to ensure effectiveness.
(Indicator 5.2, SF2. Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis, SP2. Test Administration)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 5.2

Evidence and Rationale

A review of the district's Self Assessment and multiple interviews with teachers and administrators provided clear evidence that Chatham County Schools has many local and state initiatives in place. The External Review Team noted no irregularities or problems with any of these programs and learned that staff members believed in and supported them. However, a close review of those artifacts also revealed the lack of a formal protocol designed to systematically evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of such programs. There are data in the district to help measure programs' impact on student performance and organizational effectiveness, but the documentation of an established processes for that evaluation on an on-going basis was not found.

Using data to evaluate program and organizational effectiveness will have a positive impact on student learning. Every school district has finite fiscal and human capital resources to dedicate to programs and therefore must make judgments about how best to utilize those assets. Students and teachers depend district and school administrators to make wise decisions about instructional and operational programs that impact their work. A goal of every dynamic organization is to continually improve its effectiveness. Having systematic procedures in place for evaluating the conditions that support learning and operational effectiveness will ensure continuous improvement and adjustment over time.

Opportunity For Improvement

Create and implement a district-wide grading system based on clearly defined criteria that represent attainment of knowledge and skills.

(Indicator 3.10)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.10

Evidence and Rationale

The district's Self Assessment stated, "Most teachers across the system use common grading and reporting policies, processes and procedures based on criteria that represent each student's attainment of content knowledge and skills." The choice of the word "Most" alerted the members of the Team that actual practice might be different from expectations. A review of district policies revealed that grading scales have been established. However, through interviews with teachers and building administrators, it was learned that there is variation in how accurately the grades represent attainment of content knowledge and skills. It was reported to the Team that currently those grades are based more on individual school and teacher determination rather than on clearly defined criteria that are consistent throughout the district.

Common grading practices will ensure a district-wide approach to reporting and will also provide consistency in understanding and expectations for parents and students who may transfer to other schools within the county. A unified system will also yield a sense of fairness and equity rather than allowing some teachers or schools to be perceived as harder than others.

Opportunity For Improvement

Design and implement a structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate over multiple years to safeguard a positive educational experience.

(Indicator 3.9)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.9

Evidence and Rationale

The External Review Team observed close and effective engagement between members of the schools' instructional staff and their students. Support structures are in place to ensure that student needs are identified and addressed. Teachers stated that they knew and supported their students well after they leave their individual class or grade level but that continual monitoring may be overlooked for students not identified for additional services. Also, family members of many students are supported through outreach efforts of the schools and/or referral to external services. However, after inspection of documents and interviews with teachers and school administrators, it became clear that a formal structure to ensure support for all students in all schools throughout the district was not in place. The needs of many children are evolving as explained by the superintendent, saying "Our demographics have changed and suddenly teachers have to change

strategies.” There were examples of highly effective initiatives that connect some students with adults, including the AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination) program but it is not available in all schools and does not involve all students. Some schools stated that they attempt to accomplish this goal through counselor assignments, homeroom assignments, or classroom teachers. None however provided an ongoing, multi-year, meaningful connection between every student and an adult.

Students often have needs, which if not met by family, community, or school support structures, can hinder achievement in the classroom. Research indicates that the likelihood of students being successful in their school endeavors is maximized through building strong relationships with school or community personnel. Programs that cause ongoing interactions throughout a child’s school years provide the greatest results. Those caring relationships create a path to notice, meet, and address individual student needs in a timely manner. By developing structures so that all students benefit from a long-term interaction with an adult on the school campus, districts can ensure that students have an advocate who will serve as friend, mentor and coach throughout the school years and who will intervene when unproductive or anti-social behaviors are noted. When a student encounters a barrier to success, it is important to know who to turn to for help. Being proactive in meeting those needs through early intervention is much more effective than trying to recover later. Even when a student is making satisfactory academic strides, student advocacy is often helpful to support social and emotional growth. In the words of one parent, “In Chatham, the child comes first and they will be loved and they will get what they need.” This belief should be valued and extended to every single child, without exception.

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.	3.17	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.	4.00	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.	3.33	2.97
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	4.00	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.	4.00	3.17
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	3.33	3.03
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	3.17	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.	2.83	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	1.00	3.42
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	3.17	3.03

Findings

Powerful Practice

A highly effective culture of support and servant leadership exists within the Central Services team of Chatham County Schools.

(Indicator 2.1, Indicator 2.3, Indicator 3.4)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 2.1

Evidence and Rationale

The testimony of principals, teachers, and parents indicates that the CCS Central Services team provides unparalleled levels of support and immediate help is available to prevent minor problems from becoming major issues. The Central Services team reacts promptly to concerns and needs throughout the school district. One principal explained, "It's like a help desk; we can call anyone in the (central services) building and get help. We don't need to have all the answers, but we know where to go for help. This is a very supportive place." "The team views no problem as too small to deliver assistance", stated another principal. In numerous interviews, the current superintendent was given total credit for the creation of this exemplary style of

leadership and support by the team. That focus on support was found among the building administrators as well. Parents also reported that a helpful response is only a phone call away and usually receives immediate attention. In the words of one parent, “I have walked in, called, and emailed; every staff member’s email address is on the website. I get a call back within 15 minutes.”

District leaders articulate the organization’s mission, vision, and beliefs that sends a clear message of purpose throughout the county. District actions of aligning policies, allocating resources, and creating a collaborative and supporting working relationship, provide excellent conditions for school staff to conduct their challenging work. Additionally, collaborative and supportive working relationships between district offices and schools provides a context for educational advancement and growth.

Powerful Practice

Chatham County School district exemplifies a culture of “family”, pride, and support for students, staff, and the community.

(Indicator 1.3, Indicator 2.4)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 2.4

Evidence and Rationale

Teachers, staff, school leaders, and community stakeholders design and implement supports to assure that all needs of each student are met. District leaders provide teachers and staff with the resources and professional development to be confident and proud of the work they do. The district utilizes the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) process to identify needs and designates staff and other resources to target interventions. Interviews with staff members and classroom observations yielded evidence of a shared culture wherein all adults welcome and nurture students and hold each other to that standard. A classroom “specialist” explained that she worked real hard in her school because “I feel like it is mine.” Skilled teachers engage students in interactive and focused instruction. Behavioral expectations are explicitly taught and practiced, resulting in few disciplinary interruptions. One teacher noted that “kids look after each other” due to the prevailing positive culture in the schools. Teachers and support staff purposefully connect with students through “Morning Meetings”, home visits, implementation of behavioral supports, and/or adherence to positive Guiding Principles. Teachers and staff celebrate student success through numerous awards recognitions. In the words of one teacher, “We are given the autonomy to take it where we can with students.” The district fosters partnerships with the community which includes the operation of three volunteer-led thrift stores with all profits applied to fund student or school needs. The Nature Trail Project, a community-based center for family support, began with volunteers promoting educational opportunities has grown to include tutoring, translation, legal support, computer access, and language instruction.

The National School Climate Council defines school climate as “norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe” (2007.) A growing body of research attests to the impact of a positive school climate on youth development. In many ways, school climate and culture are synonymous. A positive environment in which adults collaborate, learn, and support each other and students

are engaged in challenging and equitable educational learning experiences results in a school climate or culture that nurtures and supports students and empowers staff members.

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.	3.17	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.	3.17	2.87
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	3.17	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.	3.00	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.	4.00	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.	3.17	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.	3.00	2.60

Conclusion

The External Review process enabled the Team to identify several general themes related to student success and organizational effectiveness in Chatham County Schools. A major strength of the district is the highly effective Board of Education. The completion of Master Board Level IV training through the North Carolina School Boards Association demonstrates board members' commitment to a highly functional and effective approach to policy development and school governance. Effective communication and collaboration between the Board of Education and Chatham County Board of Commissioners enhances achievement of desired results by elimination of conflicting priorities. The board directs and supports leaders in the district, sets the tone, and provides professional educational autonomy. One board member, commenting on the board's relationship with the superintendent, explained, "I see him as clearly following policy and seeking input. I feel we don't want to meddle when they are the experts; it is important to have that balance." Another commented, "He prepares the board for issues coming down the pike; he is really good at keeping us informed." The board is focused on improving student achievement by providing support structures aligned with student success. In the words of one board member, "We speak the truth to each other. We are honest and upfront." Another stated, "When a threat comes down to our district, we think as one and get on one page."

Another notable theme in CCS is the effective, focused, and supportive leadership of the superintendent. Members of the Board of Education spoke highly of the superintendent, providing comments such as, "We have a great deal of trust in him and if we ever have a question, he is responsive to us." Another supportive comment from a board member was, "Our superintendent believes in making people better and in giving second chances. He finds talented people and leads them well." Teachers and principals respect the superintendent's style of leadership as evidenced by a statement, "One of the biggest things is his visibility. When he visits a school, teachers miss it if he didn't stop by their classroom!" Parents respect and appreciate the responsiveness of the district which has been stressed by the superintendent. In the words of one principal, "Some parents are shocked that they can even have a conversation with someone at the district level." In this light, he was credited with the change of the name of the district's office building from "Central Office" to "Central Services."

The members of the External Review Team visited nine schools (eight for classroom observations and another for parent interviews.) In all instances, team members found the school facilities to be attractive, clean, and well-maintained. While the age, capacity, and location of the schools varied greatly, all were perceived to provide a highly effective environment to support creative teaching and engaged learning. Also, all appeared to provide a safe and secure environment for both students and staff members, a sentiment agreed with by parents during separate interviews. One parent, commenting about the age of her child's school building stated, "We all want our buildings to be optimum, but it is what goes on inside that counts; what is most critical is the climate, the learning, and the tone."

A strong commitment to the use of instructional technology was also recognized throughout CCS. A recently improved infrastructure is in place to support district operations and to support the many needs of the instructional programs in all schools. Band-width has recently been improved to accommodate greater use of digital tools by both students and teachers as well as to access the state's online testing programs. Wi-Fi

connectivity throughout the district was noted by team members to be commendable. The availability of appropriate digital tools for classroom use was noted as strong as seen in the classrooms in the form of individual (1:1) assignment of devices to secondary students and the availability of laptop carts, classroom devices, and labs at other levels. Most importantly, there appear to be a focus on using the technology as an instructional tool for individual learning beyond the substitution level such as using it only as a reference document or to complete worksheets.

Another prevalent theme found in the district is the high quality of teachers found in the schools. A substantial portion (47%) of licensed staff members have advanced degrees and eight-six teachers have achieved National Board Certification, both indicators of the training and dedication of the faculty. One teacher commented, "We are data rich and we can delve into it. We know how to analyze the data." The focus of the teachers on their students and the care they provided were also evident to the Team. Another stated her philosophy of dealing with parents, saying "We will know your child, we will know where you live, we will know where you work, and we will call you."

Team members discovered another prevalent theme in the strong belief in the value of and support for Community Partnerships. Numerous effective partnerships provide support for the district's schools and their students. Among the many partnerships is the Chatham Education Foundation which has supported 32 grants reaching over 1,700 students and 119 teachers during the 2016-17 school year. Also, the PTSA Thrift Shop, a school/community endeavor in existence for 32 years, raised over \$621,000 for schools and programs during the same time period. Central Carolina Works is a partnership with Central Carolina Community College which provides Career and College Advisors for the schools to encourage students to consider higher education and further training through the avenue of the Dual Enrollment program. Communities in Schools of Chatham, which has the goal of "surrounding students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school, and achieve in life," provides two student support specialists in the schools. Also, Chatham Reads provides summer reading books for students and other grant programs to support literacy across the county.

CCS also displayed a noticeable strength in the culture found in the schools which can best be described as sharing and caring. A positive environment was perceived in which adults collaborate, learn, and support each other. Students were engaged in challenging and equitable educational learning experiences. In the words of one secondary student, "Teachers make learning fun." The schools have become nurturing places because they are led by effective and proactive principals and are supported by district leaders provide the resources and professional development needed for faculty members to be confident and proud of the work they do.

Lastly, but equally important, the district has displayed strong fiscal management, a very important characteristic of any public institution. Evidence was reviewed by team members which substantiated that Chatham County Schools has received no audit findings for five consecutive years, an accomplishment to be envied by most school districts. That accomplishment has been earned in part due to the purposeful training of all staff members who handle funds in the schools and at the district level as well as the clear policies and procedures in place to control those practices. CCS has been recognized for its financial accountability and reporting practices. This strength of the district is of particular importance because it provides clear evidence that it is serving as good stewards of the taxpayers' dollars.

The Chatham County Schools Vision and Mission statements and Core Beliefs serve as guiding principles to ensure a proper focus on student outcomes. To that end, the district currently offers a variety of effective instructional programs and support services to meet the needs of students. There are however, several challenges face CCS that should be addressed to realize continuous improvement in the educational programs for all students.

One issue facing the district in the significant growth in new residential housing facing Chatham County. One major housing development is already under construction which has the potential of requiring the addition of several new schools to accommodate its projected number of students. Another area has been planned as a major manufacturing site which would also attract new families with children to enroll in the schools. The challenge for the district will be to plan accordingly and in a timely manner for the influx of new students and the new teachers needed to accommodate those students. Along with those new schools will be the need to change attendance lines as needed, but in a manner understood and accepted by the citizens impacted by those changes.

Grading of student work and effectively communicating those grades to the child and the family is a critical task for any school district. The need for a unified grading system throughout Chatham County Schools was noted by the district in its Self Assessment and verified through comments during presentations and interviews. Teachers and building administrators acknowledged that while there is a county grading scale, there is little guidance or agreement on how those grades are to be determined in the classroom. To be sure that the value of an "A" in Algebra I or in 4th grade social studies (cited as examples for clarification, not areas of noted concern) is the same from teacher to teacher and from school to school, common grading practices should be discussed and adopted. Parents and/or students should not be distracted by comparisons such as some teachers having the reputation as being harder than others or school being more difficult to succeed in than others.

Lastly, there is an identified need to establish a program of student advocacy to help ensure that every student successfully navigates around the obstacles they encounter. Most students can succeed in school with the support structures afforded them through family and peer structures. However, some need additional support and guidance to be successful. A program of student advocacy in which every student develops a long-term, healthy relationship with an adult in the school has the potential to help students make good choices and to alert school officials when intervention is needed to address negative behaviors.

The External Review Team did not find evidence to support the presence of a process to systematically evaluate those programs to assess their impact on student learning or operational effectiveness. Many times, programs are initiated to address specific needs and show immediate benefits. Over time however, conditions or needs of the organization change and the benefits of those programs begin to wane or even conflict with other priorities. To ensure continued optimal performance, a systematic program evaluation would involve the regular review of all initiatives to ascertain their appropriateness, effectiveness, and impact on school or district goals. As a result of those evaluations, initiatives would be reaffirmed, modified, or replaced as needed to ensure the best use of district resources.

Chatham County Schools is by any measure already a highly effective learning organization. Students are successful, leadership is intentional and service-oriented, teachers are effective, and stakeholders believe in and support the schools. The recommendations of the External Review Team are intended to encourage professional dialogue and to support continued improvement and greater success for every student by building on current strengths and identifying areas of needed improvement.

Combining the district's current plans and goals with the recommendation of the External Review Team will hopefully empower Chatham County Schools to become even more effective as a learning organization and more fully achieve its mission of "graduating globally competitive and confident students by providing a rigorous and relevant curriculum in as supportive, safe, and nurturing learning environment."

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:

- Create and implement a procedure to regularly evaluate programs to ensure effectiveness.

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	316.67	278.94
Teaching and Learning Impact	315.08	268.48
Leadership Capacity	316.67	293.71
Resource Utilization	320.83	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
Bennett Elementary School	247.62	309.09	300.00	274.36
Bonlee Elementary School	304.76	327.27	300.00	310.26
Chatham Central High School	314.29	318.18	328.57	317.95
Chatham Middle School	266.67	272.73	300.00	274.36
Horton Middle School	233.33	300.00	214.29	248.72
J. S. Waters Elementary School	309.52	290.91	314.29	305.13
Jordan-Matthews High School	304.76	354.55	357.14	328.21
Margaret B. Pollard Middle School	314.29	327.27	357.14	325.64
Moncure Elementary School	247.62	263.64	300.00	261.54
North Chatham Elementary School	266.67	272.73	228.57	261.54
Northwood High School	247.62	254.55	314.29	261.54
Perry W. Harrison School	300.00	263.64	271.43	284.62
Pittsboro Elementary School	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00
SAGE Academy	266.67	254.55	271.43	264.10
Siler City Elementary School	261.90	254.55	257.14	258.97
Silk Hope Elementary School	271.43	281.82	271.43	274.36
Virginia Cross Elementary School	280.95	281.82	242.86	274.36

Team Roster

Member	Brief Biography
Dr. Edlow Barker	<p>Edlow Barker lives in Richmond, Virginia, with his wife Carolyn. Together, they have three children and five grandchildren. His professional work includes extensive experience as assistant superintendent for instruction, director of instruction, principal (elementary, middle, and high), assistant principal, teacher, and coach. His experience is primarily in Virginia, but includes two years as director in a multi-national private school in Cali, Colombia, South America. He earned his Bachelor's Degree from Wake Forest University, the Master's Degree from the University of Virginia, and the Doctoral Degree from Virginia Tech. Additional coursework was taken at Norfolk State University and the University of Alabama. He has taught numerous graduate courses for the University of Virginia and Radford University. Related leadership activities include development of educational foundations in two public school districts, development of a regional academic competition league for high schools, Chairman of the Virginia High School League, and development of a regional Governor's School program for gifted students. He has served on and chaired numerous accreditation committees for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Virginia Department of Education, and AdvancED.</p>
Mr. John David Jenkins	<p>John known as David lives in Robersonville, North Caroling, with his wife. They have two boys and one granddaughter. He is now completing 33 years of education experience as an agriculture teacher, assistant principal, principal and Director of CTE, Accountability and High Schools. He recently returned to Martin County Schools from Pitt County Schools. David is also an adjunct instructor for Martin Community College. He earned his Bachelor's, Master's and Six Year Degree from NC State University and Ed.S from East Carolina University. He has been active in the community as assistant fire chief, town council member, chair of the Martin County Chamber of Commerce and many civic organizations. He has served on numerous accreditation teams since 1995.</p>
Kathy Sergeant	<p>Ms. Kathryn Sergeant is an Educational Consultant, who previously served as the AdvancED Michigan State Director, a position she held for seven and a half years following six years as the Michigan Associate Director. In those positions, she coordinated the accreditation activities and provided professional learning for schools and school systems throughout Michigan. In addition to doctoral coursework in the areas of Leadership and Educational Technology, Ms. Sergeant holds a Master of Science in Educational Administration, a Master of Arts in Counselor Education and a Bachelor of Science in Education.</p> <p>Ms. Sergeant has experience as a teacher, counselor, and administrator in K-12 education with most of this at the high school level, and has also taught at the university level. She has published articles and has made numerous state, regional and national presentations. Most recently, in her position with AdvancED, she was engaged in the Training Development and Deployment Team, and served as a Lead Evaluator for Schools and Systems throughout the country, as well as multiple DoDEA institutions around the world.</p>

Member	Brief Biography
Mrs. Angela Guffey Dills	<p>Angela Dills is an accomplished educator with twenty years experience in-field. She possesses a Bachelor of Science in Education, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration as well as a Master's Degree in Business Administration and is a National Board Certified Teacher. She began her teaching career in 1997 as a middle school educator and has since held the positions of Career Development Coordinator, Instructional Management Coordinator, Career and Technical Education Director, and most currently serves as Director of Middle and Secondary Education for Jackson County Schools in Sylva, North Carolina. In this role her responsibilities include Title II, School Improvement, Career and Technical Education, Beginning Teacher Program, Indian Education, and Impact Aid. Angela specializes in curriculum rigor, depths of knowledge, technology integration, and coordination, planning and delivery of professional development. Angela has participated in district accreditation in Jackson County, but this will be her first time serving on a district accrediting team.</p>
Mr. Robert Filter	<p>Robert Filter earned his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting from the University of Central Florida. Following approximately twenty years of industry experience including computer programming, accounting, financial management, general management, and health care he began his career in education. Robert has ten years of business and information technology teaching experience with Charlotte Mecklenburg and Union County Public Schools. He then received his Masters in Educational Leadership from Wingate University. He has served as a curriculum specialist for Union County Public Schools and now serves as the Career and Technical Education Director for Union County Public Schools and has held this position since March 2012.</p>
Dr. Charlene Copeland Hill	<p>I am married to Rodney Hill and have two sons, Weston Hill and Grant Hill. We live in Northeast Alabama. I taught special education for 15 years, I was assistant principal of Weaver High School for two years. I received my doctorate in Educational Administration from the University of Alabama in 2006. I worked in the central office as a special education specialist/504 coordinator/programs supervisor until 2013. Since that time I have served the Calhoun County School district as Executive Director of Student Support Services.</p>
Dr. Peggy B. Johnson	<p>Peggy Johnson has worked in the field of education for 35 years from a preschool to a college teaching experience and is now retired. Working toward contributing to the improvement of education is of the utmost goal. Having taught English, AP Language, and AP Literature in public and private schools in Texas and Florida, experience was gained in a multiple of classroom situations where certifications in teaching and as a principal enhance personal skill levels. As a National Board Certified teacher, Dr. Johnson has served as a supervising teacher for the University of Central Florida, NBCT mentor for new teachers, and Coordinator for Gifted Education. Dr. Johnson has served on many school and district committees to improve education. Having the privilege of attending Oxford for classes gave a new insight into learning. Working with AdvancEd has provided experiences in many types of educational facilities and has shown that effective education can fit the needs of any student.</p>

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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