



External Review

Pascagoula School District

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Introduction to the External Review Process

Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools, and designed primarily to distinguish schools adhering to a set of educational standards. Today the accreditation process is used at all levels of education, and is recognized for its ability to effectively drive student performance and continuous improvement in education.

Institutions seeking to gain or retain accreditation must meet AdvancED standards specified for their institution, demonstrate high levels of or improvement of student performance if applicable, and provide evidence of stakeholder satisfaction with the operation of the institution. The accreditation standards focus on conditions and processes within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards, student performance, and stakeholder feedback.

Institutions participate in an External Review by a team of highly qualified evaluators who examine the institution's adherence and commitment to the accreditation criteria. The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation as it energizes and equips the leadership and stakeholders of an institution to achieve higher levels of performance and address those areas that may be hindering efforts to reach desired performance levels. External Review is a rigorous process that includes examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of instruction, learning, and operations.

The AdvancED External Review Team used the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators and related criteria to guide its evaluation, looking not only for adherence to standards, but also for how the institution functioned as a whole and embodied the practices and characteristics of quality.

Using the evidence at their disposal, the AdvancED External Review Team arrived at a set of findings contained in this report. The report is presented in three sections: Findings, Conclusion, and Addenda.

Part I: Findings

The Findings section presents the External Review Team's evaluation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators. It also includes Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement identified by the External Review Team, observations of the Learning Environment, as well as Required Actions.

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

Standards help to delineate what matters. They provide a common language through which an education community can engage in conversations about educational improvement, system effectiveness, and achievement. They serve as a foundation for planning and implementing improvement strategies and activities and for measuring success. AdvancED's Standards for Quality were developed by a committee comprised of effective educators and leaders from the fields of practice, research, and policy who applied professional wisdom, deep knowledge of effective practice, and the best available research to craft a set of robust standards that ensure excellence and continuous improvement. The standards were reviewed by internationally recognized experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research.

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, conclusions concerning Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards, and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team. Indicators are evaluated and rated individually by the External Review Team using a four-level performance rubric. The Standard Performance Level is the average of indicator scores for the standard.

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction

Purpose and direction are critical to successful institutions. A study conducted in 2010 by the London-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that "in addition to improving performance, the research indicates that having a sense of shared purpose also improves employee engagement" and that "...lack of understanding around purpose can lead to demotivation and emotional detachment, which in turn lead to a disengaged and dissatisfied workforce."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution commits to a shared purpose and direction and establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the institutions' vision that is supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

Standard	Standard Performance Level
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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.			3.0
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Survey results•Examples of communications to stakeholders about the district's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook)•Accreditation Report	3
1.2	The system ensures that each school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Survey results•Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the schools' purpose statements•Examples of written stakeholder communications or marketing materials that portray the school purpose and direction•Accreditation Report•Interviews	3
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders about educational programs and equitable learning experiences•Interviews•District Quality Assurance Review plans that document two-way communication on district and school effectiveness and learning, thinking, and life skills•Survey results•Accreditation Report•The district strategic plan	3

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1.4	Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Accreditation Report•District Quality Assurance Review plans that document two-way communication on district and school effectiveness and learning, thinking, and life skills•Survey results•The district strategic plan	3
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Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The Pascagoula School District involves key stakeholders (administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, students, and community members) in formalizing and implementing a vision and mission that is focused on increasing student achievement district-wide.
System personnel monitor and maintain data about each school and provide feedback to improve the implementation of the process. Teachers use district assessment results to gauge teacher effectiveness and student learning on a regular basis. Based on interviews from administrators and teachers, common assessments and benchmark assessments are given each nine weeks to determine strengths and gaps in the curriculum. Interviews further indicated that teachers use state performance data and multiple district assessments within the content to obtain information about students' achievement, and use this information to design and deliver appropriate instruction to achieve the district's mission of "Destination Graduation".

1.1

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

Governance and leadership are key factors in raising institutional quality. Leaders, both local administrators and governing boards/authorities, are responsible for ensuring all learners achieve while also managing many other facets of an institution. Institutions that function effectively do so without tension between the governing board/authority, administrators, and educators and have established relationships of mutual respect and a shared vision (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998). In a meta-analysis of school leadership research, Leithwood & Sun (2012) found that leaders (school and governing boards/authority) can significantly "influence school conditions through their achievement of a shared vision and agreed-on goals for the organization, their high expectations and support of organizational members, and practices that strengthen school culture and foster collaboration within the organization." With the increasing demands of accountability placed on institutional leaders, leaders who empower others need considerable autonomy and involve their school communities to attain school improvement goals. Leaders who engage in such practices experience a greater level of success (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Similarly, governing boards/authorities that focus on policy-making are more likely to allow school leaders the autonomy to make decisions that impact teachers and students and are less responsive to politicization than boards/authorities that respond to vocal citizens (Greene, 1992).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has leaders who are advocates for the institution's vision and improvement

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efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders. The institution's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.			3.0
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •Accreditation Report •District operations manuals •Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions 	3
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assurances, certifications •Accreditation Report •Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies •Historical compliance data •Interviews •Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest •Governing code of ethics 	3
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •District strategic plan •Examples of school improvement plans •Roles and responsibilities of district leadership •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Survey results regarding functions of the governing authority and operations of the district 	3

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2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of decisions aligned with the district's strategic plan•Examples of collaboration and shared leadership•Examples of decisions aligned with the school's purpose statement•Interviews•Survey results•Accreditation Report	3
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Examples of stakeholder input or feedback resulting in district action•Interviews•Involvement of stakeholders in district strategic plan	3
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation•Job specific criteria•Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice throughout the system and student success noted	3

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The Pascagoula School District ensures that school leaders have the skills, autonomy, knowledge, and vision to manage the day-to-day operations of the school in a highly effective manner.
The Pascagoula School District maintains a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of the school leadership teams and the central office staff. There is a high degree of respect and trust that impacts the successful flow of communication and support throughout the district. In the team's discussions with the school level administrators, it was obvious that these leaders enjoy a healthy culture in which the superintendent and school board entrusted them with the day to day operations of the schools. This culture of trust and mutual respect creates the foundation upon which leadership flourishes and ultimately students succeed.

2.3

2. The superintendent has effectively engaged the entire employee group and the community, using multiple school data, district information, and student achievement scores to inform and encourage improvement decisions, solicit feedback and respond to stakeholders. 2.5
- Interviews with the various administrators, teachers and parent groups pointed out that the superintendent is to be commended for his leadership as an advocate of children. Of particular note were the student and the parent focus groups who went out of their way to compliment the superintendent on his "voice" for children-centered issues both in the school district and in the community in general. Through these various focus group meetings, interviews with the superintendent and references in artifacts, it became obvious that the superintendent's driving force is paramount to the district's successful governance and leadership.

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

A high-quality and effective system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership" (Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of quantifiable and intangible characteristics, which include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The school's curriculum and instructional program should develop learners' skills that lead them to think about the world in complex ways (Conley, 2007) and prepare them to have knowledge that extends beyond the academic areas. In order to achieve these goals, teachers must have pedagogical skills as well as content knowledge (Baumert et al, 2010). The acquisition and refinement of teachers' pedagogical skills occur most effectively through collaboration and professional development. These are a "necessary approach to improving teacher quality" (Colbert et al, 2008). According to Marks, Louis, & Printy (2002), school staff that engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective schools, "supports teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations. Teachers give students feedback to improve their performance.

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.	2.75

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The system's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Observations•Posted learning objectives•Accreditation Report•School Failure Reports	2
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Curriculum guides•A description of the systematic review process for curriculum, instruction, and assessment•Accreditation Report•Common assessments•Interviews•Curriculum writing process•Products – scope and sequence, curriculum maps•Administrative Resource manual,	3
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation•Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Observations•Lesson Plans	2

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3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Supervision and evaluation procedures•Documentation of collection of lesson plans, grade books, or other data record systems•Peer or mentoring opportunities and interactions•Recognition of teachers with regard to these practices•Interviews•Observations•Professional development offerings and plans tied to the prescribed education program, instructional strategies, developmentally appropriate practices, and student success	3
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Common language, protocols and reporting tools•Evidence of informal conversations that reflect collaboration about student learning•Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration•Accreditation Report	3
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Observations•Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance•Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Lack of samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student learning; Data mining forms; Student learning plans.	3

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3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Interviews•Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff•Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices•Professional learning evidence; Administrative Resource Manual;	3
3.8	The system and all of its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of their children's learning progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance•List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days•Accreditation Report•Samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student learning•Family Interactive Resource Center/Super Saturdays;	3
3.9	The system designs and evaluates structures in all schools whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports that student's educational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Interviews	2
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Accreditation Report•District quality control procedures including the monitoring of grading practices across all schools•Sample report cards for each program or grade level and for all courses and programs•Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting•Grade Book Viewer; Student Handbooks	3

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3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•District quality control procedures showing implementation plan for professional development for district and school staff•District professional development plan involving the district and all schools•Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs•Crosswalk between professional learning and district purpose and direction•Accreditation Report•Observations•Interviews•Family Interactive Resource Center Workshops	3
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning•Data used to identify unique learning needs of students	3

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. System and school personnel use data from student assessments to monitor and adjust curriculum, instruction, and assessments to ensure alignment between goals, instruction, and the system's purpose. School and system leadership implement a process that is documented through meeting agendas, and sign in sheets to develop, implement, review, and revise Common Assessments, District Assessments, and Curriculum Guides. The district's Administrative Resource Manual provides guidelines for system-wide implementation and review of the curriculum and assessments. Review and revisions are completed collaboratively on an annual basis.

3.2

The utilization of data to continuously inform decisions pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and assessments provide the opportunity for continuous growth as it relates to meeting the learning needs of all students. Analysis of this data provides a reliable foundation for instructional development and enhancement throughout the system.

2. The system provides programs for all instructional staff to engage in a systemic mentoring and coaching program that set high expectations and is connected to the system's values and beliefs about teaching and the conditions that support learning. 3.7

The system implements a mandatory New Teacher Enhancement Academy that provides mentoring, coaching, and professional development support to all new teachers over a 2 year period. This program is also made available to veteran teachers on a volunteer basis. The Administrative Resource Manual sets clear guidelines for every teacher in the system concerning mandatory instructional improvement activities to be completed each year. Interviews with central office staff, principals, and teachers indicate high expectations for ongoing professional growth particularly among instructional staff, with beginning steps towards expansion throughout the system.

Having a system of support for new teachers is critical to teacher success and retention within a school system. Providing direct and relevant feedback will provide clear, specific, and measurable targets for teachers that will ultimately impact student achievement. Extending this effort beyond the instructional division is the next exciting step!

3. Professional learning opportunities for all instructional staff members are relevant, accessible, and aligned to the system's purpose. 3.11

Interviews with curriculum and instruction staff as well as an observation of teacher workshops at the Family Interactive Resource Center confirm that teachers are provided with continuous professional learning opportunities that are aligned with the system's purpose and direction. Through the use of needs assessments, the system is able to design individualized supports and training for teachers throughout the school year. The Administrative Resource Manual clearly communicates the guidelines and expectations that all teachers engage in this program.

The ongoing professional learning of all staff ensures that instructional practices are continuously aligned with the system's purpose. It provides the opportunity for teachers to engage in relevant and meaningful research in order to best meet the needs of all students. An assessment of the program's rigor and effectiveness would ensure that efforts are translated to improved student achievement.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Develop, implement, and monitor a structure that ensures challenging learning opportunities for all students in all courses. This structure should require students to utilize technology as an instructional resource as well as require students to engage in collaboration, self-reflection and the development of critical thinking skills. 3.1

Classroom observations and teacher lesson plans did not reflect student integration of technology within the instructional process. They also did not reveal individualized learning activities throughout schools within the system. No evidence indicated that student progress was monitored to determine success at the next level between schools in the system. Interviews with students as well as classroom observations revealed that instructional strategies did not consistently display the needed level of rigor that could be obtained through the use of activities that promote learning, critical thinking, and life skills.

Monitoring student progress across levels provides the system with data needed to ensure that the curriculum is equitable and challenging and preparing students for success at the next level, as well as, beyond graduation. Technology use within classrooms should expand beyond teacher use for lesson presentation, and be focused on student utilization for the attainment and application of content mastery. Disaggregating data beyond grade and content level to include student specific data can be used to develop instructional strategies for individual students. Providing learning opportunities that develop critical thinking, life application, and collaboration skills provides students with life skills that ensure college and career readiness and success.

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

Institutions, regardless of their size, need access to sufficient resources and systems of support to be able to engage in sustained and meaningful efforts that result in a continuous improvement cycle. Indeed, a study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Pan, 2003) "demonstrated a strong relationship between resources and student success...both the level of resources and their explicit allocation seem to affect educational outcomes."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, to meet special needs, and to comply with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staffs who are well qualified for their assignments. The institution provides a safe learning environment for students and staff. The institution provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.		3.25
Indicator	Source of Evidence	Performance Level

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4.1	The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ, and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, and educational programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•District budgets or financial plans for the last three years•Interviews•Documentation of highly qualified staff•Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for the district and schools	3
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs, and system operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•District quality assurance procedures showing district oversight of schools pertaining to school resources•Accreditation Report•Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources•Interviews•District strategic plan showing resources support for district	3
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities and learning environments•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Example systems for school maintenance requests•Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements•Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments•Example maintenance schedules for schools	4

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4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•District strategic plan showing the areas of budget, facilities, quality control, and other strategic systems•District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities, learning environments•Evaluation results of the effectiveness of the district strategic plan or indicators of changes resulting in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategic plan•Interviews•Accreditation Report	4
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Survey results•Interviews•Accreditation Report	3
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model•Policies relative to technology use at the district-level and school-level•District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level•Assessments to inform development of district and school technology plans•Accreditation Report•Interviews•Observations	3
4.7	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Student assessment system for identifying student needs•Accreditation Report•List of support services available to students	3

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4.8	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Description of IEP process•District quality assurance procedures that monitor program effectiveness of student support services•Interviews•Description of referral process	3
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Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The Pascagoula School District maintains facilities, services and equipment to provide a safe, clean and healthy environment for all students and staff. Staff at the district level provided a documented overview of the employment of a systematic, long-range, planning process as a powerful example of how the district addresses the areas of key strategic system components, including facilities, safety, and a healthy environment across the district. Interviews with building instructional and support staff, students, board members, and parents indicated a strong belief that the school system has carefully focused funds and fidelity efforts on ensuring that funds directly and positively impact the environment of each school. A review of recent audits and interviews with administrative staff and stakeholders revealed that the district has made good use of "Katrina" relief funds in providing quality facilities, while at the same time taking the system to a "debt free" status. A review of handbooks, documentation of maintenance records and state and local inspection reports, and evidence that this process is reviewed annually, indicated the commitment to the fidelity required to support the educational goals of the district.

4.3

This intentional focus leads to the staff, students, and community members being assured of a safe, clean, and healthy environment by providing quality facilities, services, and equipment now and in the future to ensure success for all students.

2. The Pascagoula School District demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system. There was ample evidence that the vision, mission, and strategic plan guide the formation and delivery of services. The Five Year Strategic Plan outlines five strategic opportunities that address challenges common across the district, with the objective of working collectively and collaboratively to improve the efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the purpose and direction of the district. The Strategic Plan is reviewed annually to ensure fidelity. Through documents, presentations and interviews with district staff and stakeholders, the External Review team learned that these strategies all guide and support the daily and long-term delivery of services. In order to communicate its annual priorities, the district produces multiple avenues to explain action steps, and the current status of action plans along with the description of work yet to be completed. There were numerous examples in budgets, department plans and handbooks, and various audits and reports, that truly demonstrate the positive influence of the strategic planning on the operation of the district.

4.4

As a result the district has a long-term framework that guides the use of resources focused on the purpose and direction of the system, and works to ensure the success of all students.

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

Systems with strong improvement processes are moving beyond anxiety about the current reality and focusing on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, that is, data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, & Wohlstetter (2007) from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California indicated that data can shed light on existing areas of strength and weakness and also guide improvement strategies in a systematic and strategic manner (Dembo et al., 2005). The study also identified six key strategies that performance-driven systems use: (1) building a foundation for data-driven decision making; (2) establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement; (3) investing in an information management system; (4) selecting the right data; (5) building school capacity for data-driven decision making; and (6) analyzing and acting on data to improve performance. Other research studies, though largely without comparison groups, suggested that data-driven decision making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Lafee, 2002; McIntire, 2002).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures. The system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine strategies to improve student performance. The institution implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained, and the institution demonstrates progress in improving student performance and institution effectiveness.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.			2.2
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols •Interviews •Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local or school assessments on student learning and school performance •Accreditation Report 	3
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accreditation Report •Interviews 	2

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5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Interviews	2
5.4	The school system engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Lack of evidence of student readiness or success at the next level.	2
5.5	System and school leaders monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Survey results•Examples of district marketing tools and websites that cite student achievement results or that make promises regarding student achievement•Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups•Interviews	2

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Implement a systematic process for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning information from all data sources. This includes an expectation that the Pascagoula School District ensures consistent utilization by professional and support staff to make informed decisions on behalf of its students. Artifacts provided by the district included a comprehensive collection of assessments available to the school staff for use in data analysis. This information provided a view of where students were functioning academically as well as how students are continuously growing. However, district interviews revealed that there was no collective representation of a child's battery of testing and results, including the District Assessments and the Common Assessments developed by the teachers, in addition to the summative assessments. The practice of collecting the data in one place, enhances the opportunity to gain a more complete view of each student's progress, and make decisions that are aligned with his/her needs. All stakeholders benefit from receiving and responding to comprehensive information about students to be used in analyzing effectiveness of programs that support student learning. The entire process of continuous improvement is predicated on the belief that ongoing monitoring of comprehensive data contributes to successful growth and achievement of individual learning needs. Consistent, high expectations related to data analysis that is connected to decision making result in the achievement of the school system's vision for its students.

5.2

2. Create additional delivery methods of communicating district information designed to reach all stakeholder groups. 5.5
- PSD provides a great deal of information to stakeholders in the community through various mediums, i.e. a sophisticated calling system, email, and a "backpack" system. Additionally, artifacts, interviews and observations included evidence of newsletters and special public service announcements. Local media outlets were present at board meetings, and covered special events such as Super Saturday, at the Family Interactive Center. Interviews revealed concerns that these various delivery methods may not touch all stakeholder groups. Evaluating the various measures and their effectiveness in reaching stakeholders would be a starting point in understanding what is working and what is not. Developing new strategies in partnership with "hard to reach" parents will ensure a well informed community. With geographical boundaries and various communication barriers, communication can be challenging; however stakeholder perceptions are significant in the achievement of the school district's vision.

Learning Environment

Every learner should have access to an effective learning environment in which she/he has multiple opportunities to be successful. The Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT) measures the extent to which learners are in an environment that is equitable, supportive, and well-managed. An environment where high expectations are the norm and active learning takes place. It measures whether learners' progress is monitored and feedback is provided and the extent to which technology is leveraged for learning.

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External review team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a 4 point scale with 4=very evident, 3=evident, 2=somewhat evident, and 1=not observed. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the 7 learning environments included in ELEOT.

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool

<i>Environments</i>	<i>Level</i>
A. Equitable Learning Environment	2.3
B. High Expectations Environment	2.5
C. Supportive Learning Environment	2.9
D. Active Learning Environment	2.8
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.6
F. Well-Managed Learning Environment	3.0
G. Digital Learning Environment	1.8

Part II: Conclusion

Summary of the External Review

In off-site and on-site review sessions, the AdvancED External Review Team examined artifacts and evidence provided by the institution. During the on-site portion of the review, the team reviewed additional artifacts, collected and analyzed data from interviews, and conducted observations.

The Pascagoula School District (PSD) External Review officially occurred over a period of three days, February 17 - 20, 2013. The External Review Team arrived for its first Team Work Session on Sunday afternoon, with the District's Review activities beginning on Monday morning, concluding with a formally called Board Meeting on Wednesday afternoon. Additionally, it is important to note that, one of the major community-wide activities in which the PSD engages is its "Super Saturday". These events are held several times throughout the year, and PSD actually had one scheduled for the Saturday preceding the start of the External Review. Some of the team members were able to take part in this special activity, which demonstrated a highly effective outreach to the entire school community, hosted in their impressive Family Interactive Center, "where imagination meets innovation". This facility, built and subsidized by donations from the businesses in the community played host to various educators, partnered with community resources to present "Wetland Animals". The team was honored to have been invited to witness this impressive event.

The District submitted its materials for the Accreditation Report in a timely fashion. The interviews yielded thoughtful answers to the team's questions, indicating an overall awareness of the External Review process, and eagerness to contribute towards a positive outcome. The self-appraisal at the district level was high, with many indicators producing an assessment of level 4. The schools however, consistently rated themselves lower. Stakeholders appeared well informed in terms of their understanding of the self assessment process. Interviews indicated that stakeholders felt comfortable with the information that was shared regarding the External Review.

The interviews included a wide variety of stakeholders, including administrators, board members, parents and community members, central office staff, school level administrators, teachers and support staff, as well as students, and totaled 269.

Using the evidence collected, the team engaged in dialogue and deliberations concerning the degree to which the institution met the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators.

From the moment the team began interacting with the materials from the PSD, the commitment to the vision of the district was unmistakable. Stakeholders in every corner of the district were focused on the children. This went beyond commitment to passion! The superintendent has created, and the leadership team supports, a culture in which there is a clear expectation that PSD is a student-centered system, with all decisions made in the best interests of the children. A community-wide theme, "Destination Graduation" is embraced throughout the school district, and is the focus of efforts throughout the district, P-K through 12th grade. There was an impressive display of stakeholder participation in the recent development of an updated strategic plan, providing direction to the entire district.

The superintendent is a highly visible leader throughout the district. His leadership team however, is quick to point out that while he offers strong and appropriate guidance and direction, there is an overall commitment to department and school level autonomy. School level leaders feel very supported, however believe strongly they are provided the opportunity to make the decisions that are best for their "arm" of the district's community. Stakeholders from cab drivers to custodians, students to teachers, indicated that they are kept well apprised of what is occurring in the school district. Of concern, shared by some, is the fact that there are stakeholders who are "disengaged", and it is sometimes difficult to discern if that is by choice, or if there is more work to be done in the area of communication. Data was limited to identify the most successful modes of communication within the district.

The system provides programs for all staff to engage in a systemic mentoring and coaching program that sets high expectations, and is connected to the system's values and beliefs about teaching and conditions that support learning. From the systemic implementation of a mandatory New Teacher Enhancement Academy that provides mentoring, coaching, and professional development support to all new teachers, to the availability of mandatory instructional improvement activities with clear guidelines for every teacher, PSD has committed to enriching the teaching practices throughout the district. Additionally, summative data collection processes exist to provide a review of instructional practices, and inform instructional improvements. The inclusion of the data collected from formative assessments into a comprehensive data system, would clearly complement this analysis of data to include a more complete view of student achievement status. The additional perspective of support staff can yield valuable insights into learning when the activities surrounding data analysis, are shared with all staff. PSD is working to incorporate this.

Classroom observations and other artifacts did not reflect the integration of technology as a student engagement activity within the instructional process. Observations also failed to reveal individualized learning activities throughout system's schools, the correction of which could expand the rigor with which students learn. Stakeholder interviews also shared the lack of articulation vertically between levels of schooling from school to school, and from school to college/career. Since this is such a visible focus within the district, (Destination Graduation) the inclusion of intentional and formal followup activities would offer a better glimpse into the success with which students achieve at the next level. The entire system benefits from the collection and subsequent analysis of this information.

The Team was impressed with the quality of the facilities throughout the school district. Effective resource management, (both from a facilities as well as human capital perspective) has yielded a solvency that is rare. The district is to be commended for being "debt free". A structured, comprehensive strategic plan, including thoughtful long range planning by all stakeholder groups, serves as evidence of a laser like focus on the future of the children of PSD.

During the on-site review, members of the External Review Team evaluated the learning environment by observing classrooms and general operations of the institution. Using data from these observations, the team evaluated the quality of instruction and learning that took place classified around seven constructs or environments: equity, high expectations, support, engagement, progress monitoring and feedback,

management, and use of technology.

Classroom observations throughout 7 schools in the district, yielded the following information. The Team experienced classrooms in which students interacted respectfully with teachers and with peers. Evidence exists that classroom rules were being followed and that students understood the expectations of effective collaboration with peers as appropriate. Also evident were students who demonstrated positive attitudes about learning, and who felt comfortable taking risks in offering information, as well as in asking questions. Students appropriately accessed the support of the adult(s) in the classroom. There was some evidence of students actively engaged in their learning activities, although the team noted that this was inconsistent.

The most challenging environment for PSD, as indicated by the classroom observations, was in the area of a "Digital Learning Environment". While there was technology evident in classrooms, limited examples of student interaction with technology existed. Technology appears to be a "teaching" tool, with limited opportunities for it to be a "learning" tool.

The External Review was a rewarding professional experience for the team. Beginning with Super Saturday, and concluding with the Board Meeting and celebration on Wednesday, the team was treated to the unmistakable hospitality of this MS school district. This hospitality extended to the reception the team received in schools and classrooms as well. PSD was well-prepared to host this review, and did so with the openness consistent with a spirit of continuous improvement. This school system is mired in the belief that everything they do is for the children. That serves as the basis of daily activities, including hosting this review.

A special thanks is to be offered to the district's superintendent, and most especially to the new district coordinator for this activity, appointed only this past August. She led the effort as though she had been engaging in the work for a much longer time! The entire staff of the central office was most accommodating, and shared their work space so the team could devote the necessary time to accomplishing the tasks of the review most efficiently. Pascagoula School District has much to be proud of!

In conclusion, the External Review Team confidently recommends that the Pascagoula School District be granted a new five-year term of accreditation by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. Engage in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, specifically including readiness for and success at the next level.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 5.4

Consistent with "Destination Graduation", the school system needs to clearly KNOW how students do when they transition to the next level. Employing an intentional process to "track" students once they move from one school to another, analyzing their success as a means to improving preparation, is the cement that connects schools through building transitions. While anecdotal data exists, (students who return to report their experiences informally) there is no formal effort to collect and ultimately analyze this information. This effort connects schools vertically in support of student learning, aligning responses in the form of instructional changes in yet another way. In existence already are successful examples such as the elementary "leveling" practices and the transition structures following students in the Pre-K program, which can offer the building blocks to systemic implementation of this practice.

2. Expand the implementation of practices (currently inherent in elementary schools) in which students in ALL schools benefit from a systemic approach to adult advocacy to deepen their learning experiences.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.9

The development of a district-wide system to allow all students to have an adult advocate who understands their achievement successes and challenges, will complement the prevailing focus on the whole child. This is consistently apparent in the elementary schools, however less so when students progress through the middle school and high school system. Expanding the reach of "adult" connections, particularly as focused on academic successes, is yet another way to maximize the system-wide focus on "Destination Graduation". One student actually acknowledged in an interview, when asked about advocacy of this type "....I don't have a Dad, and it would be nice to have someone who cares about how well I do in school..." Once established, the program would benefit from ongoing evaluation, to determine its continuing efficacy.

Part III: Addenda

Next Steps

The institution should:

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

About AdvancED

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

External Review

Pascagoula School District

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI share research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help educational institutions continuously improve.