

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Marion County Board of Education**

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

Quality Assurance Review Report

Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI 3

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review 4

Summary of Findings 5

 Commendations 6

 Required Actions 7

 Next Steps 8

Standards for Accreditation 10

 Standard 1. Vision & Purpose 10

 Standard 2. Governance & Leadership 11

 Standard 3. Teaching & Learning 13

 Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results 15

 Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems 17

 Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships 19

 Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement 20

Quality Assurance Findings 22

Schools Visited 23

Conclusion 24

Appendix 25

 Quality Assurance Review Team Members 25

 AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems 25

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

In 2006, NCA CASI, SACS CASI, and the research and development arm of the accrediting associations, the National Study of School Evaluation, unified to form AdvancED. Dedicated to advancing excellence in education, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 23,000 schools in 65 countries, serving 15 million students.

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

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

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

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

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI Georgia State Office (SACS-CASI-GA), a division of AdvancED, visited Marion County Board of Education on 01/23/2011 - 01/26/2011.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 9 administrators, 30 teachers, 6 support staff, 18 parents and business partners, 25 students, and 4 Board of Education members for a total of 92 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 2 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documenting and Using Results
5. Resource and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

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

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

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

Commendations

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

- **The School Board demonstrated the foresight, fortitude, and decisiveness in the planning and construction of a new high/middle school facility.**

The School Board saw the need to address the deteriorating condition and location of its middle/high school and went to the community through a series of town hall type meetings and proposed the construction of a new school. Through a referendum in the spring 2010 the citizens of Marion County approved a bond, by a very slim 3-vote margin, to build a new school facility. Though not a clear mandate from the community the Board moved forward with the proposal. The proceeds are expected to yield approximately \$21.9 million. The State has committed to provide approximately \$10.6 million dollars. The combined amount of \$32.5 million has been allocated to construct a new middle/high combination school.

If the District is to achieve its vision, mission, and provide a quality education for its students, it was important for it to have modern facilities that support the attainment of its vision and mission.

- **A great number of safety nets are in place in an effort to minimize student academic failures.**

The District has allocated resources to focus on student academic interventions. One such intervention is the institution of a math lab for remediation at L.K. Moss Elementary with a dedicated intervention teacher. In addition at the high school level, the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Team observed a program for credit recovery, referred to as "Second Chance" and designed to increase the number of graduates. The District has provided much needed support through the allocation of both material and human resources, as well as, crafting of local policies and procedures for the implementation of the intervention programs.

Recognizing the need for and implementing programs to improve the District's graduation rate and helping students, who are at-risk of failure, are the initial steps to helping students experience incremental academic success that ultimately leads to receiving a high school diploma.

- **The District has implemented a system-wide data collection and analysis process that serves as the "backbone" for decision-making.**

The District utilizes a comprehensive system of reliable, valid, and bias-free assessments in order to monitor and document student achievement, including common assessments, pre- and post- unit tests, end-of-course tests, benchmark assessments, On-line Assessment System (OAS) tests, and the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) state tests. At the elementary school it has created a data room where student performance data are housed, disaggregated and analyzed to guide instruction. In addition to assessments, it surveys stakeholders and uses the results of those surveys to validate parent and community satisfaction with services and programs of the District.

The institution of a comprehensive system-wide data collection and analysis process helps to ensure that the individual needs of students receive the focus of instructional planning.

- **The Superintendent and the Board have cultivated a strong network of community collaboration and support for the District.**

The District collaborates with and involves many local community and area businesses and organizations in planning directions for the District's educational services for students. Some examples include serving as classroom volunteers and tutors, field trip chaperones, booster club volunteers and organizations such as the Chattahoochee-Flint Regional Educational Service Agency (C-F RESA), South Georgia Technical College, and Columbus State University, through which the District receives training, consultation, and people resources.

Being a school district in a small community necessitates collaborating and working with all entities of the community to provide educational programs and services that meet the needs and expectations of the community. A strong network of collaboration and support allows the District and community to come together and work toward a shared vision and mission so that the District will have the resources needed to provide a quality education for its students.

- **The District adheres to a “chain of command” approach in the resolution of complaints lodged by stakeholders.**

Stakeholders indicated during interviews that a strict protocol is used in the resolution of complaints. Board Members indicated that complaints received by them are remanded to the Superintendent if he has not had an opportunity to resolve the matter. If complaints regarding school issues are brought to the Superintendent without having been handled at the school level, they are also remanded to the school before action is taken at the district level.

Having and enforcing a chain of command approach in the resolution of complaints, issues, and problems minimizes the likelihood of micro-managing affairs by superiors. Such a practice also reinforces and provides positive support for the authority of management at various levels in the district; which results in management speaking as one voice and minimizing divisiveness.

Required Actions

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

- **Seek out other schools and/or districts that are demographically and economically similar to the Marion County School District that have demonstrated success in significantly improving student achievement; then examine, select, and implement the best practices that have the potential for success in the District.**

During stakeholder interviews the QAR team noted numerous references to the level of poverty that exists in the community and its impact on student achievement and the local economy.

The demographics and economics of the community will probably not change significantly in the near future. It will be in the best interest of the District to find other schools/districts that have similar situations who have been successful in such a milieu. Implementing the best practices found to be effective in moving those schools/districts forward will help the Marion County School District move much closer to achieving its vision and mission in spite of the level of poverty that exists.

- **Develop and implement a system for continuously evaluating the curriculum to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness in achieving the District’s vision and mission.**

The QAR team noted two curriculum areas where opportunities exist for continued growth in teaching and learning: curriculum evaluation and rigorous program implementation for academically advanced students.

A comprehensive annual evaluation system will help ensure relevance and relationships between the student and the curriculum especially where constant change and accountability are givens. The curriculum should engage students in three domains: relationship, relevance, and rigor; evaluation will determine the effectiveness of that engagement.

- **Implement additional rigorous academic programs for students at all levels with particular emphasis on students who are capable of performing at higher levels of achievement.**

A review of artifacts, discussions with students and staff revealed a small number of rigorous higher level course offerings. American Government is the only advanced placement course offered by the District and some higher level courses have limited enrollments.

In order to achieve the vision and mission to be number one in the region and the state, it is incumbent upon the District to offer courses of study that will help achieve those goals. In addition, as the District prepares students for life in a global society, higher level programs and courses will help students become more competitive with similar schools/districts at large.

- **Develop and implement a system to evaluate and document the effectiveness and impact of the continuous process of improvement.**

During a review of artifacts the QAR team found no evidence of a formal evaluation being conducted to determine the effectiveness of the District's continuous improvement process.

It is important for the District to determine the effectiveness of strategies and interventions in achieving the goals and objectives of improvement plans as implied in Indicator 7.7 of the AdvancED Standards.

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

Next Steps

The school district should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.

3. Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.
5. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

Summary

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

Standards for Accreditation

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

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

Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

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

Description:

The Marion County School District mission is to provide all students with a quality education in a safe, nurturing, and challenging learning environment. The vision for District is to be #1 academically in the Chattahoochee-Flint RESA and be ranked among the highest of like systems in Georgia. The beliefs are that:

- All students CAN learn.
- Engaged and Guided Learners Equal Success (EAGLE).
- Teachers, administrators, parents and the community share the responsibility for advancing the District's mission.
- The commitment to continuous improvement is imperative for great schools.

This mission was established through the leadership of Board Members, the Superintendent, faculty and staff of each school, and community stakeholders. This task was completed with input from all stakeholders through surveys, leadership team meetings, and public forums. In order to communicate the system's mission and vision, both are:

- Published on the District and school's websites.
- Distributed to students and parents through the District's Code of Conduct Handbook and schools' handbooks.
- Posted in all District facilities.
- Indicated in the Balanced Scorecard.
- Introduced at the orientation for new hires.
- Included in newspaper articles and school newsletters.
- A central focus at Leadership Team and School Council meetings and included on Board agendas.
- Shared with newcomers through Newcomers Welcome Fair.

The mission and vision statements are posted throughout buildings. The staff explained how this visibility affects school culture and student learning. Stakeholders were able to explain how the and mission were developed and acknowledged that they had ample opportunity to have input into the development.

The Comprehensive Local Education Agency Improvement Plan (CLIP) and School Improvement Plans (SIPs) do not appear to be in alignment. When aligned, these documents will ensure that the District's vision and purpose are guiding the teaching and learning process at the school level.

The CLIP goals should be reviewed annually to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of action steps designed to meet the goals and to revise the district improvement plan as needed.

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

- The District has cultivated a strong network of community collaboration and support for the school district.
- The District has successfully involved all stakeholders in the formulation of the mission and vision.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Expand the District profile to make it more comprehensive and use the results of data analysis to develop Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) for the five No Child Left Behind (NCLB) state performance goals, the four Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) state performance goals, and any Local Education Agency (LEA) specific goals. Include major system initiatives or reform efforts that have been implemented in the last three years.
- Annually review the CLIP to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of action steps designed to meet the goals and ensure alignment with SIPs. Revise the District Improvement Plan as needed based on the annual review.

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

Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

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

Description:

The District uses handbooks at both the elementary and middle/high school levels to inform students and their parents of important policies of the school district. A "Code of Conduct" has been produced to provide detailed information to parents and students concerning District policies relevant to student discipline. Policies and procedures are in place to address emergencies and students and staff affirm an understanding of these safety and security mechanisms.

An organizational flow chart is in place along with job descriptions for all positions. By-Laws are provided to assist with the operations of councils and committees such as School Councils and the Career Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) Advisory Committee. It was evident from the interviews

that the Board and stakeholders adhere to the “Chain of Command” and respect the Superintendent’s authority as the head of the school district.

The Board of Education adheres to a “Board of Ethics Policy” as it provides governance and leadership for the District. Artifacts and interviews provided evidence of compliance with local, state and federal laws including standards and regulations in areas such as school bus evacuation procedures, Department of Human Resources Cafeteria Scores, Standardized Testing Calendars, and Georgia Performance Standards and Copyright Laws. Board Members participate in professional training through the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA).

Audit procedures are in place to provide direction and oversight for the fiscal management of the school district. A local certified public accountant reviews the overall finances prior to a review by auditors from the Georgia Department of Education.

The District obtains legal counsel from a local attorney and another law firm specializing in educational law. Development of the budget provides an opportunity for the Superintendent and Board to demonstrate they are good stewards of District funds.

A notebook is on file that contains copies of insurance declarations covering the District. Policies are provided to cover fiscal management of revenue from state and federal governments and funds investment.

Leadership meetings are conducted at the central office with points of interest focusing upon student performance. Leadership is provided by the Superintendent, central office administrators, and school level administrators. Stakeholders are afforded the opportunity to provide input in the overall operations of the District. This is evidenced by the use of stakeholder surveys and School Councils. Leadership Teams are in place to provide teacher input at the school and likewise for staff at the central office.

Models of instruction have been provided through the Georgia Department of Education “Frameworks” designed to support educators in the implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards. Due to limited funds, the District has re-organized in order to work toward accomplishing more with less. Funds are allocated to support student efforts in reaching target areas and for providing remediation for students failing to meet those target areas. A variety of tools are used to align, support and enhance organizational and student performance goals; included are practices such as the organizational flow chart, benchmark testing, pre and post testing, focus walk-throughs, peer observations, and evaluations.

The local newspaper is one resource that is used to communicate information about the District to external stakeholders. Newsletters and “informational menus” are sent weekly from the elementary and middle/high schools. Meetings have been conducted that covered topics in the areas of:

- Parent Support.
- Parent Involvement.
- Transitions from Elementary School to Middle School; Middle School to High School; High School to Post-Secondary Education.
- Special Needs Students and Early Intervention Programs.
- School Councils.
- Parental Rights and Parent Responsibility Training.

Stakeholder expectations and satisfaction are gauged by using stakeholder surveys, school surveys, Title I

surveys, open house events, and School Councils.

Employees in supervisory positions are trained and provided with timelines to evaluate employees under their supervision. Employee handbooks provide specific information concerning employee evaluations. When conducting an overall evaluation for teachers, supervisors use information they collected from focus walks, informal observations, Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument, and general walk-throughs. The results of teacher evaluations and student performance are used to make important decisions regarding professional development offerings and requirements.

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

- The QAR team felt that the District has done an outstanding job providing and obtaining input from all stakeholders. This was evidenced by the District's efforts to conduct more than twenty (20) meetings throughout the community to generate support for a bond referendum proposed for the construction of a new middle/high school.
- Stakeholder collaboration is exemplified throughout the District through the use of school leadership teams, School Councils, surveys, parent/community meetings and a variety of committee meetings.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a systematic approach for reviewing all Board policies during the course of each calendar year. This process should include all sections of the policy manual with particular attention being given to School District Organization, School Operations, Fiscal Management, Business Management, Facility Expansion Program, Personnel, Instructional Programs, Students, General Public Relations, and Inter-organizational relations.
- Expand the District's web presence to the general public to include additional information such as Board policies and procedures, employee handbook, student code of conduct, and any other information of importance for students, staff, and the general public.

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

Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

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

Description:

The Marion County School District has a strong focus on teaching and learning. There is a concerted and organized effort to create a positive instructional culture system-wide. This is accomplished through the implementation of proven time management structures, organized collaboration systems, and deliberate communication mechanisms with faculty and students. In addition, there is a noted synergy between the District support departments (i.e. technology and media services) and the schools to enhance and sustain the level of classroom instruction.

A review of artifacts and discussions with administrators revealed that instructional time is protected through well thought-out master schedules that include teacher common planning time at the elementary and middle school levels. An indirect protection of instructional time is employed by the utilization of research based methodologies of common formative assessments to “diagnose” student deficiencies which allow more focused and effective teaching. Collaborative planning time is used to review and analyze data in order to make appropriate adjustments in the curriculum and pacing. During a school walk-through the QAR team noted that the L. K. Moss Elementary School staff has created a living data room that encompasses individualized standardized assessment portfolios for teacher use during instructional planning and the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. These portfolios are updated and reviewed throughout the year and transferred to the next grade level. At the middle school level, the services of an instructional coach are used to provide additional mathematics instruction for targeted students that are selected based upon benchmark assessment data.

Information gathered through interviews demonstrated a genuine care and concern for student academic achievement and teacher professional success. Students, on every level, commented on their teachers’ and administrators’ “personal touch” approach used to help them in their academic pursuits. Student work and academic recognitions are on display in the commons areas of both school and the District office. Teachers and leadership teams noted that the District personnel were very supportive in helping to acquire the needed materials for delivering instruction. The Superintendent meets regularly with grade levels/subject areas at each school to troubleshoot issues and keep staff apprised of changes in policy and legislation as it relates to instruction.

Utilizing their current data, the District has allocated resources to focus on student academic interventions. One such intervention is the institution of a math lab for remediation at L.K. Moss Elementary with a dedicated intervention teacher. In addition at the high school level, the QAR team observed a program for credit recovery, “Second Chance”, in an effort to increase the number of graduates. The District has provided much needed support through the allocation of both material and human resources, as well as, crafting of local policies and procedures for the implementation of the intervention programs.

The District’s commitment to the utilization of instructional technology is evident from the boardroom to the classroom. All stakeholders are aware and proud of the inclusion of Smart Boards at all grade levels, with the exception of kindergarten which has a specialized roll out initiative for the use of Smart Tables. This focus is substantiated through classroom usage as observed by the instructional walk-throughs. In addition, the District has provided the necessary supports for the effective utilization of the technology by creating a cohort (train the trainer) professional development program in conjunction with their local Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA).

The QAR team noted two curriculum areas where opportunities exist for continued growth in teaching and learning: curriculum evaluation and rigorous program implementation for academically advanced students. The curriculum should engage students in three domains: relationship, relevance, and rigor. In an effort to increase the effectiveness of standards based instruction, additional systematic methodologies and opportunities for teachers to review and evaluate the curriculum are needed. In addition, to ensure relevance and relationship between the student and the curriculum, an evaluative process must be developed and employed. The second opportunity for growth is the implementation of additional rigorous programs at all levels. For example, the initiation of the Advanced Placement Government course in the high school and the implementation of Discovery Stations and Kindergarten Centers Lab in the early primary grades are steps in the right direction. The District should review the data and institute additional enrichment opportunities in grades 2-6, much like the Discovery Station initiative. In high school, analyze the District’s recommended course sequences for graduation requirements especially in the areas of

science and mathematics. Also, consider leveraging technology (i.e. Georgia Virtual School) to increase rigorous offerings. In order to build a robust Advanced Placement program, consider using the tools provided (at no charge) by the College Board for Advanced Placement (AP) Potential and Pre-AP strategies.

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

- There is a strong commitment to the effective implementation of remediation programs for those students who are academically less than successful. These programs and students are supported by a focused allocation of material and human resources.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Implement additional rigorous academic programs for students at all levels with a particular emphasis on students who are capable of performing at higher levels of achievement.
- Develop and implement a system for continuous evaluation of the curriculum to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness in achieving the District vision and mission.
- Seek out other schools and/or districts that are demographically and economically similar to the Marion County School District that have demonstrated success in significantly improving student achievement; then examine, select, and implement the best practices that have the potential for success in the District.

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

Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

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

Description:

The District utilizes a comprehensive system of reliable, valid and bias-free assessments in order to monitor and document student achievement, including common assessments, pre- and post- unit tests, end-of-course tests, benchmark assessments, On-line Assessment System (OAS) tests, and the CRCT state tests. At the elementary school, the teachers use the assessments in a variety of ways to prescribe teaching strategies and interventions for all students. At the middle/high school, the focus of the assessments is primarily to identify students in need of interventions that remedy below-standards or failing academic performance. Assessment data is reviewed and analyzed both at the building level as well as by District administration.

Assessment data is systematically used to assign students to resource opportunities as well as to organize instructional programs. For example, analysis of math assessments in recent years has led to the development of additional mathematics time built into the schedules of middle school students with below-level mathematics academic performance. The math assessment data at the elementary level also prompted the creation of a math lab at the elementary school.

Student progress is reported frequently to parents through progress reports. Parents of secondary students

have immediate online access to their child's grades/assessments through the district Power School "parent portal" and plans are in place to extend the service to parents of elementary students. Results of CRCT tests, including comparative data, are reported to the public as well as to parents.

Serious attention by the District is given to trend and comparative CRCT data involving other Chattahoochee-Flint RESA school districts, as well as comparisons to the statewide results. This is necessary in order to measure progress toward achieving the goal of the District to be "number one" among area RESA school districts. Systemic changes have been instituted in response to this analysis.

The use of multiple assessments at each grade level to measure student progress was noted. The data stored and accessed from Power School is on a secure website, verified by a VeriSign certificate which complies with state and federal regulations.

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

- A system wide data collection and data analysis process is in use.
- The elementary school has begun the development and use of a "data room" to facilitate the use of assessment data to improve student learning outcomes and match assessment results to research-based instructional strategies.
- Instructional, curricular, and organization changes have increasingly become "data driven."

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Refine the use of CRCT comparative and trend data by disaggregating the percentages of students whose performances are at the "meet" and "exceed" levels.
- Analyze year-to-year longitudinal data (from state assessments) that tracks the annual progress of each grade level cohort.
- "Export" the data room model as implemented at the elementary school to the middle/high school level so that teachers can develop a comprehensive view of individual student performance and meet a wider range of student best practices.
- Use assessment data to generate differentiated instruction and program enhancements that benefit high-ability students.

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

Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

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

Description:

The Marion County School District experiences a very high employee retention rate. A system is in place to support the recruitment, employment, and retention of qualified professionals and support staff in order to fulfill the vision and mission of the District. The strategies listed below are utilized to recruit, and employ qualified personnel.

- Attending job fairs at local colleges and universities
- Posting of teacher vacancies on Teach Georgia web
- Sending teacher vacancy announcements to the local Universities
- Orientating newly hired personnel
- Assigning mentors to new personnel

The development of the annual budget for the District is an inclusive process. A review of the artifacts revealed that the process begins with advanced planning by District administrators and Board Members. A review of an agenda and minutes validated that opportunities for stakeholder input were made available.

The District has adopted and uses the State of Georgia's chart of accounts for all financial transactions and budget processes. The District maintains and monitors a balance sheet that describes the overall financial operations and condition of the system.

The District is audited annually by the State Auditor of Georgia in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America, the standards applicable to financial audits contained in Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-133, Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations.

The District maintains a comprehensive facilities plan that is updated every five years. The facilities plan specifies the maintenance, improvement, and space needs for each school site. Consultants from the Georgia Department of Education validate the plan and provide technical assistance when needed. The plans are approved by the State Board of Education which enables the District to participate in Georgia's Capital Outlay Program. The facilities plan has been successfully used in county referendum campaigns. The citizens of Marion County approved a bond in the spring 2010; the proceeds of which are expected to yield approximately \$21.9 million. The State has committed to provide approximately \$10.6 million. The combined amount of \$32.5 million has been allocated to construct a new middle/high combination school.

During campus visits the QAR team noted that schools have controlled entry access systems. They are equipped with camera systems that can be monitored during the school day of the interior and exterior of the building and grounds.

Plant Services Department conducts frequent inspections of facilities to assess health and safety issues and tend to the concerns. The District participates in monthly fire evacuation drills in all schools. Drill records are kept on file at schools and the District office. Schools also conduct scheduled drills for

tornados, intruders, bombs, and earthquakes. As required by the State of Georgia, the schools have a safety plan that addresses events such as natural disasters, hazardous materials, transportation, food safety, and weapons. Schools have received emergency crisis packets.

Technology improvements are well under way. At this time, almost all classrooms have Smart Boards and desktop computer stations. There are complete computer labs in the both schools. A comprehensive technology plan has been developed and is being implemented.

Safety nets and support systems are in place in the following areas:

- Services to students with special needs
- Response to Intervention (RTI)
- Special Education Services
- Health Services
- RESA
- Gifted Educational Services
- Counseling Services
- School Nutrition
- Transportation
- Home Visits
- Athletics

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

- A competent support staff at the District level is in place to perform managerial functions necessary for the effective and efficient operation of the District.
- The Board has effectively demonstrated the foresight, fortitude, and decisiveness in the planning and construction of a new school facility in the midst of budget cuts and dwindling resources.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Promote and expand the professional development offerings to accommodate faculty and staff who are at different levels of development in job performance.

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

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

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

Description:

The District fosters collaboration with community stakeholders by maintaining an active presence in the community and with organizations that serve the community. Examples include the participation of District personnel on various boards, such as the local Chamber of Commerce and the RESA board.

Strategies to establish and maintain two-way communication with stakeholders are actively implemented by the Board, Superintendent and District administration, school administration, and instructional staff. An examination of the various artifacts revealed that newsletters, the district web page, and local newspapers are regularly used to communicate information about the District and schools to the public. Parent surveys are used by both schools and by the Title I Program. Both schools have School Councils with parent and educator participation. Board Members, administrators, and teachers are easily accessed by stakeholders interested in face-to-face communication through group or one-on-one meetings. Classroom newsletters are used in the elementary school and distributed to parents. Requests for parent-teacher conferences are scheduled in a timely manner.

During interviews with teachers they indicated that parents and community stakeholders are encouraged to use their specialized skills to assist the schools in any way possible. Some examples include serving as classroom volunteers and tutors, field trip chaperones, and booster club volunteers. Input from both internal and external stakeholders to enhance the work of the system is constant and both formal and informal.

Stakeholders interviewed by the QAR team indicated that they are well-informed about expectations for student learning and improvement goals. Comparative data about the CRCT results of the District as compared to CRCT results of other C-F RESA districts is presented to the public in newspaper articles and improvement efforts are communicated to all stakeholders. For example, the District's initiative to improve mathematics performance is common knowledge among both internal and external stakeholders.

Information communicated to stakeholders is useful and practical. Parents receive progress reports from the teachers every four and one-half (4 ½) weeks. Information about school or District events is available using numerous communication tools, including newsletters, flyers, website postings, and email.

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

- The District has cultivated a strong network of community collaboration and support.
- The District takes full advantage of educational organizations in the area, such as the C-F RESA, South Georgia Technical College, and Columbus State University, for training, consultation, and people resources.
- The successes of the schools and the efforts to improve are valued as well as supported by all stakeholder groups.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Expand District information on the website to include Board meeting agendas and minutes of the Board meetings along with any other additional information of interest to staff and the general

public.

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

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description:

The Marion County School District is a system that values the concept of continuous improvement which is evidenced by strategic planning in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and operations. The plans for system improvement do not just belong to the District's internal stakeholders, but also are communicated to the external stakeholders through signage, surveys, and the District's website. The District vision for student achievement is interwoven into all dimensions of the continuous improvement plan in both the instructional and operational standpoints. The allocation of resources and the implementation of initiatives all point to student needs as based on data from the District's balanced scorecard.

The District develops and implements an improvement plan and schools are required to develop similar plans that are aligned with the goals and expectations for student learning outlined in the District plan. During the implementation phases of the District and school plans, various monitoring tools are used to ensure fidelity of implementation; among them are school and classroom walk-throughs, focus walks, regularly scheduled leadership and school improvement team meetings, and occasional meetings at schools with the Superintendent.

A District-wide professional learning program is in place where the offerings are generated from assessment data and teacher needs assessment surveys. There is a concerted effort to ensure that there are processes in place to protect planning time for continuous improvement. The use and action of school leadership teams, School Councils, community stakeholders, and District level leadership, along with their meeting minutes and agendas, are evidence of that effort.

The initiatives and programs of improvement have the District moving in a positive direction toward the vision. The one area that serves as an opportunity for growth is the creation of a system for evaluating the continuous improvement process. Evaluation of the process will generate data to allow the District to determine and ensure that all processes are aligned to and help support the mission and vision of the District.

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

- The District has designed and utilizes a balanced score card as a part of the continuous improvement process.
- The District effectively uses strategies to monitor the implementation of the District and school improvement plans.
- Stakeholders are strategically involved in the development of improvement plans.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop and implement a formal system of evaluation to document and determine the effectiveness and impact of the continuous process of improvement.

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

Quality Assurance Findings

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

Description

The leadership of the District has developed a systematic approach to addressing the overall school improvement process. Artifacts and interviews indicate that stakeholders of the District understand the importance of implementing district accreditation as an important indicator in the overall efforts to improve operations and student performance.

The vision of the District is demonstrated in the collaborative efforts being used by the District and stakeholders to meet the standards expected of high performing school systems through AdvancED Standards.

A variety of activities have been implemented to support District efforts to focus and communicate overall improvements. Through this process, the District has used a balanced scorecard approach to achieving the goals. There is a solid focus on collecting data and using the results to align improvements and professional development processes with the mission and vision of the District.

Focusing upon the “Frameworks” provided by the Georgia Department of Education, along with using various monitoring tools and strategies such as benchmarks, pre- and post- tests, focus walks, walk-throughs, and analysis of standardized test data, have provided a foundation upon which to build continuous improvement. The use of School Councils, committees, advisory groups, leadership teams, community meetings, newsletters, and surveys are all means by which the District communicates and obtains input from internal and external stakeholders which helps to assure quality.

Strengths

- District stakeholders have created a meaningful vision that provides a strong foundation for future improvement and growth.
- Teams have been created for each AdvancED standard to collect evidence of how standards are being met and to determine what the District can do to better meet the standards.

Opportunities

- Utilize the data collected throughout the District to ensure integrity and adherence to the overall improvement process.
- Keep the Standards Teams in place to annually review continuous improvement efforts, determine the extent to which the District and schools are demonstrating adherence to the AdvancED standards, and assuring quality throughout the District.

Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Marion County Board of Education on 01/23/2011 - 01/26/2011.

Marion Middle High School	656 HWY 30 E	Buena Vista	Georgia	31803
L.K. Moss Primary	1707 Pineville Road	Buena Vista	Georgia	31803

Conclusion

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

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

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

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. James Brown, CHAIR (PSTB Consulting, LLC)
- Mr. Joe Myles, VICE_CHAIR (Davis Elementary School)
- Ms. Stacey Mabray, MEMBER (Richmond County Schools)
- Mr. Brett Stanton, MEMBER (Haralson County Schools)
- Mr. George Peternel, MEMBER

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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