



Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for Mountain Brook School District

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AdvancED is the parent organization of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE). NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

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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 for Quality School Systems.** School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards 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 recommendations 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 recommendations. The school district acts on the team's recommendations 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.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and recommendations 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 and other stakeholders.

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 team chair 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.

Using the Report – Acting on the Recommendations

The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the recommendations. Two years 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 recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district is addressing the recommendations.

Accreditation Recommendation

The Quality Assurance Review Team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed 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 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited Mountain Brook School District on March 9-13, 2008.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed: 16 administrators, 101 teachers and support staff, 45 parents and business partners, 85 students and four Board of Education members for a total of 299 stakeholders including 47 central office staff in multiple sessions. Additionally, the team visited six schools and while there interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts.

Throughout the visit, the team 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:

- Vision and Purpose
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Documenting and Using Results
- Resource and Support Systems
- Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The Quality Assurance Review Team used the 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 recommendations that are provided below. The commendations and recommendations 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 recommendations.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Mountain Brook School District 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 Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Mountain Brook School District for:

1. **The district has established and effectively implemented technology as a means of communicating in a timely manner to all stakeholders throughout the system.** As evidenced by interviews, tours of the buildings, and examination of varied types of communication, use of technology is at the heart of communication. Every household within the system has access to email and receives critical information on a regular basis. Having access to such extensive ways of communicating within and outside the system certainly impact the tremendous support from the community to the school and vice versa.
2. **The number of students participating in Advanced Placement courses is worthy of special recognition and represents another example of teachers, staff, students, and parents focusing on effective, challenging and engaging curriculum for every student.** Based on data gathered, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of teaching/learning in progress, all indications point toward high expectations of all students followed by strong support from the district stakeholders. Strong support throughout the system not only enhances student success, but inspires all students to strive to do better.
3. **Professional development opportunities for all staff members throughout the system are a top priority for the district.** Group interviews with stakeholders at all levels reinforced the fact that professional development for all personnel is indeed a major focus. Each interview group shared how additional opportunities to upgrade knowledge or learn new approaches were made available to them not only during the school year, but during the summer months as well. These professional development opportunities clearly assist and enhance the staff in continuing to provide the effective, challenging, and engaging learning opportunities for all students.
4. **High level of community and parent involvement provides exceptional opportunities for all students.** Support of this commendation comes from the forming of the Mountain Brook Schools Foundation, which was established by a group of local citizens wanting to undergird the school system should uncertain state funding occur. Additionally, the school system enjoys an extremely high percentage of parents belonging to the local school PTA organization. The parent support is not only financial but is school support-driven by working with a variety of school activities.
5. **A strong working relationship exists between the superintendent and the board of education that allows for an environment that encourages and strongly promotes continuous improvement and high standards of student performance.** There is evidence that procedures are in place to provide for effective and efficient communication between the school leadership and the Board of Education, as well as, effective communication for other critical stakeholders.

Recommendations

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

1. **Expand collaboration with culturally diverse schools.** While the team heard evidence of some collaboration having existed with Mountain Brook Schools, there was no evidence of extensive attempts to expand or elaborate upon these attempts. The team did not see evidence that a plan was in place outlining what next steps might be. A district wide plan, outlining an agreed upon process, with clearly articulated strategies to be implemented throughout the system, will help the district to establish a much needed collaboration with diverse schools. The plan, once implemented and monitored, should place the district in a better position to address the challenge of increasing opportunities for students and staff to collaborate with other students and staffs from more diverse schools.
2. **Assertively recruit teachers and staff from diverse settings.** The team recommends that the district revisit the existing Recruitment Policy and Procedures to ensure that employment interests from diverse populations have been addressed. Various stakeholders, during interviews, identified the need for students to work and study with teachers and students from diverse backgrounds.

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 student performance and the effectiveness of the school district.
3. Develop action plans to address the recommendations made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the recommendations.
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 team's recommendations. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the recommendations. 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 Research and Development division provides online resources, research, handbooks, and tools to assist school districts and their schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for assistance in accessing these resources.

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 recommendations 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.

Standard Reports

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. 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 recommendations 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 recommendations.

Vision and Purpose

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it commits to a purpose and direction that is shared system-wide. The leadership establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the system's vision that is supported by system and school personnel and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and district effectiveness. The system's vision guides allocations of time and human, material, and fiscal resources.

Description

The purpose statement was developed through a collaborative effort of all stakeholders. A conscious effort was made initially by the superintendent to move away from the terms "vision" and "mission" and move towards the use of the word "purpose." The idea was then shared with board members, leadership teams from district and school offices, and key personnel. Because the words "effective," "challenging," and "engaging" have historically been part of the vernacular of the district, they are incorporated into the purpose statement. Additionally, the team finds that all stakeholders desire to create a purpose statement that would address every student within the district.

The district's purpose statement provides focus and direction for all stakeholders throughout the district. Interviews with district and school personnel, students, parents, and community members reveal a strong knowledge of and commitment to the district's purpose statement. Displays and other visuals throughout the district and its schools communicate and reinforce the purpose and values of the district. Leadership actively reinforces the purpose and values during meetings, at district and school gatherings, and through daily interactions with district and school stakeholders.

The district developed a profile of its district, schools, students, and community. The team reviewed the profile data which is available on the district's website and through the district's and schools' annual reports. Stakeholder survey results were also reviewed. The team finds that the profile data provides the district with useful information regarding student performance, district and school effectiveness, and stakeholder perceptions.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The purpose statement of the district is clearly stated and understood by all stakeholders throughout the school system and community.
- The purpose statement serves as the “focus” of the district.
- Parents and community involvement revolve around the purpose of the district.

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- The purpose statement should be revisited each year by all stakeholders.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Highly Functional** indicating that the Mountain Brook School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Vision and Purpose standard.

Governance and Leadership

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has leaders who are advocates for the system’s vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders function with clearly defined authority and responsibility and encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for system and school improvement among stakeholders. The system’s policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Description

The Mountain Brook School District has clearly established a system of Governance and Leadership to promote continuous improvement and a high standard of student performance. There is evidence that procedures are in place to provide for the effective and efficient communication between school leadership and the board of education. In addition, stakeholder involvement and shared decision-making have become ingrained in the culture of the school division with numerous opportunities for teachers, parents, students, and community members to be involved.

The district uses a variety of performance and survey data to analyze student performance and stakeholder perceptions. Student performance data in the form of SAT, ACT, PSAT, Stanford 10/ARMT, and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam are collected annually and analyzed to develop a clear understanding of student performance. Surveys of students and graduates are conducted annually. Surveys of teachers, support staff and parents are conducted every three years. These surveys are extensive and provide the system’s leadership with the perceptions of its stakeholders. Community expectations have also been measured to some degree by the inclusion of community members in a host of school system committees or advisory groups. These groups include the curriculum framework

committee, the Special Education Advisory Council, the Anti-Drug Coalition, and the School Foundation Board of Directors, among others.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Stakeholder involvement and shared decision making are ingrained within the school culture. Teachers, parents, students and community members are involved.
- The effective use of technology throughout the system is commendable.
- Exemplary leadership exists throughout the system.

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- The district should continue its plan for developing leaders from within the district and is to be commended for its current plan.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Highly Functional**, indicating that the Mountain Brook School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Governance and Leadership standard.

Teaching and Learning

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it 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. The system ensures that teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process; provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations; and give students feedback to improve their performance.

Description

The team finds evidence to support alignment of curriculum, instructional strategies and assessments. Each year, curriculum frameworks are reviewed in chosen subject areas and special consideration is given in the selection of resources to support the curriculum. Instructional strategies are directly tied to the purpose statement of “challenging, effective and engaging,” and classrooms are frequently visited by district and school leadership teams to monitor the interconnectedness of curriculum and instructional strategies. Interviews reveal that common assessments continue to be created to evaluate student progress. These assessments are aligned with content standards and enable teachers to provide immediate feedback and additional support to students. Additionally, curriculum and instructional strategies are aligned with the content standards of the Alabama Course of Study. These content standards are assessed annually through the Alabama Reading and Math Test and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. Data substantiate a strong alignment between classroom instruction and the content standards that are assessed statewide.

Through interviews and observations, there exists evidence that research-based instructional strategies and activities facilitate student achievement. Heavy emphasis is placed on creating an environment that is engaging for students. A research-based initiative based on design qualities that support student learning was implemented several years ago and is an evident part of the school culture. Classroom observations, student interviews and survey results find the hands-on, relevant, student-centered activities that actively engage students in the learning process are having a positive effect on student achievement. To ensure that teachers and professional staff members are well-prepared in implementing the curriculum, ongoing, job-embedded professional development is provided through a variety of resources. Reading coaches, technology specialists, math coaches and other specialized personnel collaborate with teachers and additional training sessions are available.

The team found overwhelming evidence that all students have access to comprehensive information, instructional technology and media services. The district employs a Director of Technology, a Technology Coordinator at each school, four technology technicians housed at the central office and a minimum of one certified media specialist at each school. In addition to the state provided library enhancement money, the school district allocates \$60,000 per year to the six media centers with additional sources of revenue being generated through foundation programs. All schools have the most up-to-date technologies including wireless labs, wireless Internet, document cameras, and DVD/VCR players and projection and sound enhancement equipment in all classrooms.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- A strong alignment is evident between classroom instruction and the content standards that are assessed statewide.
- All schools have the most up-to-date technologies including wireless labs, wireless internet, document cameras, DVD/VCR players and projection and sound equipment in all classrooms.

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Continue to explore and expand the good work in building common assessments in all content areas to help with evaluating student progress.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Highly Functional**, indicating that the Mountain Brook School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Teaching and Learning standard.

Documenting and 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.

Impact Statement: A school system is successful in meeting this standard when it uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly-defined performance measures. The assessment system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, identify gaps between expectations for student learning and student performance, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine interventions to improve student performance. The assessment system yields timely and accurate information that is meaningful and useful to system and school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in understanding student performance, system and school effectiveness, and the results of improvement efforts.

Description

Evidence supports a well developed comprehensive assessment system that is based on clearly defined performance measures. The assessment system uses student performance data to guide instruction, and interviews reveal an enormous amount of effort given to the analysis of both formative and summative data. Through district support, professional staff is highly skilled in understanding and using data to drive instruction, which is tailored to meet individual student needs. Interviews of teachers, administrators and parents reveal a strong commitment to the academic success of every student through effective teaching strategies, ongoing assessment and analysis of student performance. Longitudinal data are analyzed to establish trends and district-wide efforts are made to develop goals and strategies to address needs. For example, analysis of recent student performance data determined a need to develop long-range goals for writing throughout various grade levels. The district provided assistance for the development and implementation of these goals by offering opportunities for professional development activities and planning sessions.

As part of its extensive work in the developing Professional Learning Communities, the district has begun the process of developing common assessments among grade levels. These assessments are completely aligned with Alabama Course of Study Standards and the district's curriculum framework. Additionally, the common assessments are used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, identify gaps between expectations for student learning and student performance, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine interventions to improve student performance. Careful consideration is given to the accuracy of the assessment data. Interviews found instances where teachers felt the common assessments needed revisions in order to provide meaningful, accurate information. This dedication validates a commitment to providing timely and accurate information that is meaningful and useful to system and school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in understanding student performance, system and school effectiveness, and the results of improvement efforts.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district is to be commended for the staff development activities and planning sessions available for staff.
- The district, as noted earlier, has participated extensively in developing Professional Learning Communities with emphasis in common assessment development at each level.

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Continue to analyze recent student performance data in all content areas in order to develop goals and strategies to address unique needs.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Mountain Brook School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Documenting and Using Results standard.

Resource and Support Systems

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that: enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, meets special needs, and complies with applicable regulations. The system employs and allocates staff well-qualified for their assignments. The system provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The system ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations.

Description

Through evidence collected from interviews, observations and documentation, the team finds this district is successful in meeting this standard. The district's human, financial and physical resources and support systems comply with applicable regulations and are effectively used to implement the curriculum that enables students to perform at higher levels of achievement. The system employs and allocates highly qualified staff. The system provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness and ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations. The team finds an overwhelming commitment from this school district to provide financial resources to enhance the entire educational process and fulfill its purpose statement.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district has made an overwhelming commitment to provide financial resources to enhance the entire education process and fulfill its purpose.
- The citizens of the community themselves elected to be taxed at the highest rate of any city in the state.
- Approximately 79% of the districts' annual budget is allocated to instruction and instructional support.
- The "forward" thinking and planning of the district in addressing the resources and the system that is in place to support, services, programs and plans for continuous improvement.
- Employees at all levels throughout the system validated their opportunities for professional development existed for them and were utilized by them.

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Recruit and hire new staff from diverse backgrounds.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Highly Functional**, indicating that the Mountain Brook School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Resource and Support Systems standard.

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has the understanding, commitment, and support of stakeholders. System and school personnel seek opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership among stakeholders to help students learn and advance improvement efforts.

Description

The Mountain Brook School District is demonstrating success in meeting the standard for communication and stakeholder relationships. There is clear evidence that the district has the understanding, commitment, and support of stakeholders. Mountain Brook school leaders and school personnel seek opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership among stakeholders to help students learn and to advance improvement efforts.

The school district has established a comprehensive program for using survey data to measure stakeholder satisfaction. Surveys of students and graduates are conducted annually. Surveys of teachers, parents, and support staff are conducted every three years. These data have been collected for 10-12 years and the results indicate an increasing level of stakeholder satisfaction. Additional opportunities for stakeholder input and involvement are available through various committees and focus groups such as curriculum framework committees, the School Foundation, the Special Education Advisory Committee, and the Anti-Drug Coalition, among others.

The Mountain Brook School District uses multiple avenues to communicate information to stakeholders about students, their performance, and system and school effectiveness. "The Reporter", the Mountain Brook quarterly newsletter, includes information about the schools, the school system, and its continuous improvement efforts. The school system has data that indicate that 100% of parents have access to email either at home or at work. This has enabled the system to effectively use email as a means to regularly communicate timely information to all parents. In addition to these strategies, school district leaders provide information to stakeholders through the Mountain Brook Schools' website, monthly meetings with PTA leadership, annual state of the district meetings, and through the local cable access channel.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district has clear evidence that there is understanding commitment and support of stakeholders. Extensive surveys of teachers, support staff, and parents are conducted every three years.
- The district communicates with 100% of parents who have access to e-mail either at home or at work.
- Multiple opportunities for communication to and from school include: various committees, focus groups, monthly PTA meetings, Mountain Brook Schools' website, local cable access channel, and *The Reporter*, the Mountain Brook quarterly newsletter which includes information about the school, the school system, and its continuous improvement efforts.
- The district's supreme effort in timely communication to its stakeholders is to be commended.

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- The district should maintain its current level of communication and stakeholder involvement.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Mountain Brook School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Stakeholder Communications and Relationships standard.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the system with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained and the system and its schools demonstrate progress in improving student performance. New improvement efforts are informed by the results of earlier efforts through analysis of student performance, system effectiveness, and assessment of the improvement process.

Description

The Mountain Brook school district utilizes a successful strategic planning process to ensure continuous improvement. This process originates with the Central Office leadership team, which leads the district in the establishment of goals and objectives for the school district. School leaders use this information to provide direction to the school leadership teams in the development of the individual school's improvement plans. Once developed, these plans are reviewed by central office staff to ensure their adherence to the district's strategic plan. This strategy has enabled the Mountain Brook Schools to establish a culture of continuous improvement that will ensure they continue to offer an effective, challenging, and engaging education for every student.

Each school has a leadership team that participates in some or all of the following continuous improvement processes; the development and implementation of Smart Goals; the establishment of an

on-going process of curriculum revision tied to the state's textbook adoption process; and the use of student performance data to establish groupings of students in order to address their specific learning needs.

The school district has established an exemplary professional development program, providing teachers with a broad range of learning experiences. Additionally, teachers at all schools participate in Professional Learning Communities that address curriculum issues, student data, instructional practices, and the creation of common assessments, among others.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- A professionally trained staff of central office administration and specialists, led by the Superintendent, monitors the continuous improvement process.
- The alignment of curriculum goals both horizontally and vertically occurs each year.
- The implementation of the Professional Learning Communities across all system levels leads to coupling student needs with improvement goals.
- Human and fiscal resources are utilized throughout the system to ensure that continuous improvement occurs.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational** indicating that the Mountain Brook School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Commitment to Continuous Improvement standard.

Conclusion

The commendations and recommendations 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 recommendations 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 several recommendations for improvement that the school district will need to address. Two years following this review, the school district will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's recommendations.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to Dr. Charles G. Mason and Dr. Tim Norris, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS CASI accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

Dr. Emma Bass, Team Chair, (Arkansas) currently serves as AR Director of NCA CASI/AdvancED. Some prior experiences include: Associate Director of School Improvement, AR Department of Education; middle school/junior high school principal; junior high school counselor/elementary principal; and high school English teacher.

Rachel Surles, Vice Chair, (Alabama) currently serves as the Assessment and Accountability Coordinator for Autauga County Schools, in Alabama. Prior roles include: School Improvement Specialist at the school and district levels; K-3 Reading Coach; 8th grade Math teacher; and classroom teacher for grades two and three.

Barry Bottoms, (Alabama) currently serves as the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services in the Etowah County Schools, in Alabama. Prior roles include: Federal Programs Director; 16 years as a principal; and 12 years as a teacher.

Tony Ball, (Alabama) currently serves as the Director of Operations for the Scottsboro City Schools, in Alabama. Prior roles include: high school principal; high school assistant principal; and teacher.

Curtis Hicks, (Virginia) currently serves as the Director of Secondary Instruction for the Salem City School Division, in Virginia. Prior roles include: high school principal, assistant principal; and middle school teacher of Health and Physical Education.

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.