

# Report of the External Review Team for Natrona County School District #1

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# Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation. It energizes and equips the institution's leadership and stakeholders to achieve higher levels of performance and address those areas that

may be hindering efforts to reach desired performance levels. External Review is a rigorous process that includes the in-depth examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with all stakeholder groups, and extensive observations of learning, instruction, and operations.

## Use of Diagnostic Tools

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

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

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

## Index of Education Quality

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

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

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

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

## Benchmark Data

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

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

## Powerful Practices

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

## Opportunities for Improvement

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

## Improvement Priorities

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

## The Review

Preparation for the Natrona County School District #1 (NCSD1) External Review began in the summer of 2016. Lead Evaluator, Dr. W. Darrell Barringer, contacted the Executive Director for School Improvement, Curriculum and Instruction, and began the planning process. Support documents were sent to the school system by the Lead Evaluator which included a bio, a "Setting the Stage" document, and planning templates. A number of subsequent emails and phone calls confirmed details for the Review.

All team members participated in a recorded Go To Meeting outlining preparation expectations as well as reviewing the details of the upcoming Review.

Team Members arrived in Casper on Sunday, October 9, 2016 and met in a planning session at the hotel meeting room. The Lead Evaluator from South Carolina, was joined by five team members from across Wyoming, two from Arizona and one from Idaho and another from South Carolina.

Following an orientation and planning session, the Team joined the Superintendent and the Leadership Team members for a catered dinner at the Central Office. This gave everyone the opportunity to meet and enjoy each other's company and begin building relationships for the week.

The Superintendent continued the session by presenting an overview for Team that highlighted several key questions about Natrona County School District #1. His comments focused on "Who is NCSD#1?," "What is NCSD#1 doing?," "How is NCSD#1 doing?," and "What is NCSD#1 looking for?" The Superintendent extended his appreciation for the Team's efforts and commitment to "investing" in the system's improvement efforts and promised that the feedback will be "worthwhile" for the students of Natrona County School District #1, and that the time, energy and investment would "not go to waste". He asked specifically for affirmation, feedback and advice on their current efforts and that the feedback be specific to four areas: 1) Systems of Improvement; 2) Strategies and Courses of Action; 3) Efforts to Align and Narrow the Work of the System; and 4) Depth of Implementation.

The Team returned to the hotel following the dinner to prepare for Day One of the External Review.

On Monday, October 10, 2016, the Team arrived at the Central Office and engaged in an interview and dialogue session with the Superintendent and the Superintendent's Cabinet (Associate Superintendent for Human Resources, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, both Executive Directors for School Improvement, Executive Director for Business Services, and Executive Director Human Relations).

Following this time, the Team subdivided to meet with the Director of Research and Assessment to discuss Student Performance and with the Director of Human Resources to discuss Stakeholder Feedback Data.

At 10:00 the Team divided into three groups to interview members of the Natrona County School District Board of Trustees (5) including the Chair of the Board. Smaller group settings were required in compliance with laws and regulations regarding board quorum regulations.

Team members divided into domain groups to interview individuals who could best answer questions with respect to each of the five standards. These groups were arranged around Teaching and Learning (Standards 3 and 5), Leadership Capacity (Standards 1 and 2), and Resource Utilization (Standard 4).

In order to be most effective, four Team members departed to conduct school visits at Poison Spider School and Evansville Elementary School. A total of 11 classrooms at Evansville Elementary and 14 at Poison Spider School were observed on Monday afternoon using the eleot® observation instrument. The remaining six team members interviewed principals from schools not selected for school reviews which included 18 professionals across all levels

The day's planned activities concluded with parent and partnership representative interviews. The Team interviewed nine individuals representing these two perspectives.

Following the day's activities, the Team met in Standard groups to review the findings of the day with respect to each of the indicators, a review of evidences and interview information. Reports from each Standard group allowed the Team to get a beginning perspective of how the system meets each of the Indicators and the need for additional information and clarification.

On Tuesday, October 11, 2016, the Team divided into school visit teams of two persons each. Schools were selected by the school district and the Lead Evaluator through a collaborative process to assure schools selected were representative of the school district in all areas including achievement, demographics, geographic location and grade level structure. Schools visited by teams of two (with the number of eleot® observations following in parentheses):

Dean Morgan Junior High School(16)  
Southridge Elementary School (12)  
Frontier Middle School (12)  
Sagewood Elementary School (13)  
Natrona County High School (12)  
Cottonwood Elementary School (11)  
Summit Elementary School (14)  
Roosevelt High School(11)  
Lincoln Elementary School (14)  
University Park Elementary School (11)

At each school the Team interviewed the Administrator and the Leadership Team and conducted eleot® observations in classrooms.

All of the schools submitted their Accreditation Reports in ASSIST and the Self Assessment scores from their Internal Review are reflected at the end of this report. Willow Creek Elementary was unoccupied this year and so no Accreditation Report was required.

Team members returned to the Central Office to begin debriefing the day, review ratings and findings, and begin the process of finalizing the Oral Exit Report. The Team posted the eleot® results for the Team's consideration as an additional evidence.

On Wednesday, October 12, 2016 the External Review Team finalized the findings for the Exit Report, provided written support for these findings, and reached consensus. In the afternoon the Team met with the system's Superintendent and Leadership Team to review the details and findings of the External Review and answer clarifying questions. Following this meeting, an Oral Exit Report was presented at a public meeting called by the Natrona County School District Board.

The External Review Team would like to extend to the Natrona County School District #1 faculty, staff, parents, students and administration heartfelt thanks for allowing us to freely interact and observe in the school system and at the schools. The Team felt that faculty and staff were open to the Team's review and provided them with meaningful information to allow the Team to provide quality feedback to the school system for improvement as well as make an informed decision with respect to system's accreditation.

Stakeholders were interviewed by members of the External Review Team to gain their perspectives on topics relevant to the institution's effectiveness and student performance. The feedback gained through the

stakeholder interviews was considered with other evidences and data to support the findings of the External Review. The following chart depicts the numbers of persons interviewed representative of various stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Interviewed	Number
Superintendents	1
Board Members	5
Administrators	67
Instructional Staff	124
Support Staff	11
Students	141
Parents/Community/Business Leaders	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>363</b>

# Results

## Teaching and Learning Impact

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

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

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

Institutions with strong improvement processes move beyond anxiety about the current reality and focus on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, i.e., data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, and Wohlstetter (2007) from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California indicated that data can shed light on existing areas of strength and weakness and also guide improvement strategies in a systematic and strategic manner (Dembosky, J., Pane, J., Barney, H., & Christina, R., 2005). The study also identified six

key strategies that performance-driven systems use: (1) building a foundation for data-driven decision making, (2) establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement, (3) investing in an information management system, (4) selecting the right data, (5) building institutional capacity for data-driven decision making, and (6) analyzing and acting on data to improve performance. Other research studies, though largely without comparison groups, suggested that data-driven decision-making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Lafee, 2002; McIntire, 2002).

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

### Standard 3 - Teaching and Assessing for Learning

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
3.1	The system's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	2.00	2.66
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	3.00	2.44
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	2.50	2.57
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	3.00	2.67
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	3.00	2.55
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	2.00	2.47
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	3.00	2.56

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
3.8	The system and all of its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of their children's learning progress.	3.30	2.93
3.9	The system designs and evaluates structures in all schools whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports that student's educational experience.	2.30	2.47
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	1.90	2.45
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	3.00	2.60
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	2.70	2.60

### Standard 5 - Using Results for Continuous Improvement

The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	2.60	2.63
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	2.50	2.46
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	2.00	2.11
5.4	The school system engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	2.50	2.48
5.5	System and school leaders monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders.	3.80	2.71

### Student Performance Diagnostic

The quality of assessments used to measure student learning, assurance that assessments are administered with procedural fidelity and appropriate accommodations, assessment results that reflect the quality of

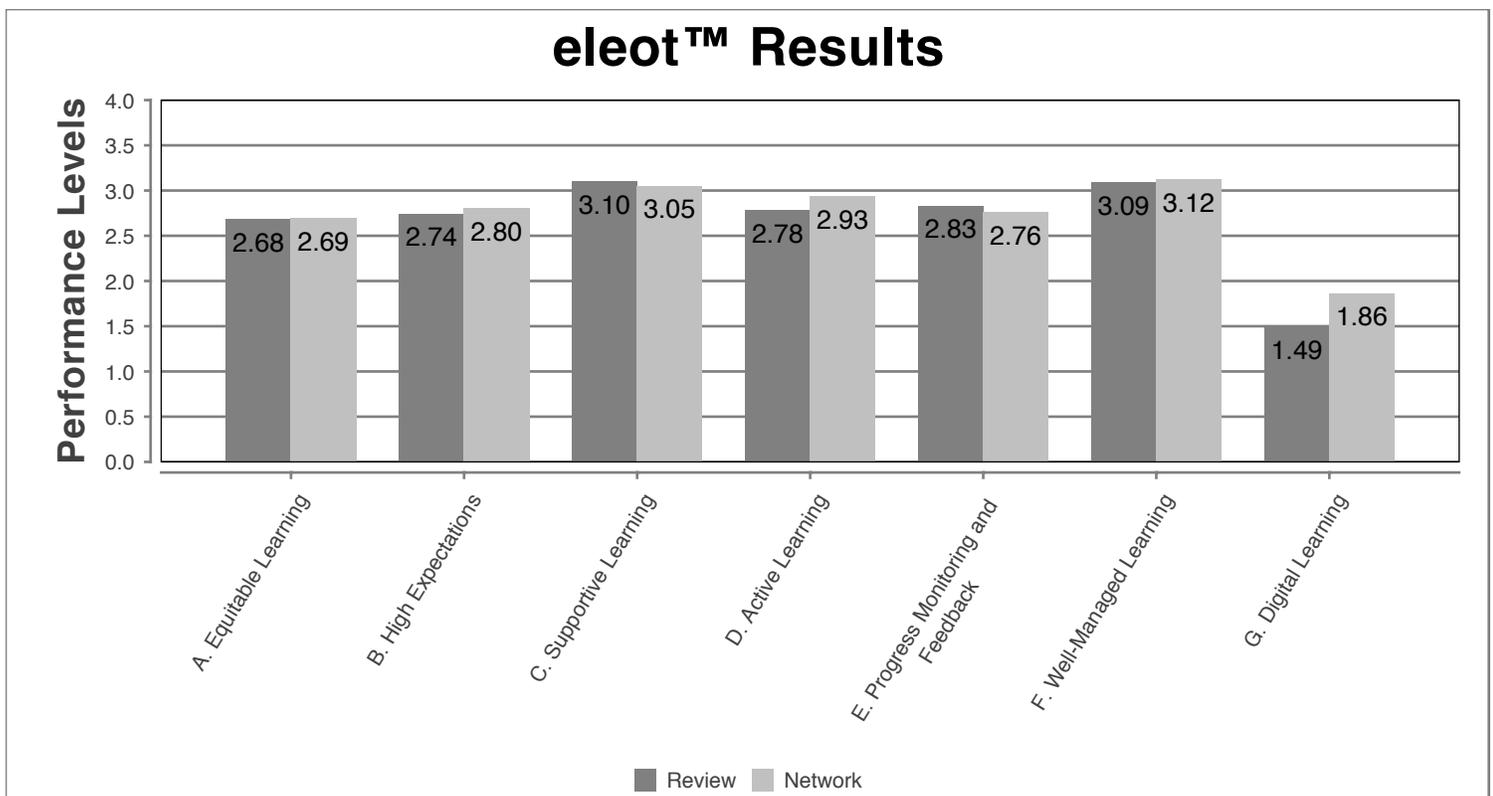
learning, and closing gaps in achievement among subpopulations of students are all important indicators for evaluating overall student performance.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Assessment Quality	4.00	3.30
Test Administration	4.00	3.50
Equity of Learning	2.00	2.51
Quality of Learning	3.00	2.98

## Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™)

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

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. Every member of the External Review Team is required to be trained and pass a certification exam that establishes inter-rater reliability. Team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a four-point scale (4=very evident; 3=evident; 2=somewhat evident; and 1=not observed). The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the seven learning environments included in eleot™ as well as benchmark results across the AdvancED Network.



The External Review Team made a concerted effort to observe a representative number of classrooms across the system. A total of 151 observations were conducted, which equates to observing 50.3 hours of instruction.

The overall score for Equitable Learning Environments on the eleot® was 2.68, which meets the AdvancED network average (AEN) of 2.69. Across all school sites the team members consistently observed equitable

access for students to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology and support. Similarly, Team members observed that students knew that rules and consequences are fair, clear and consistently applied. These observations are supported by the interviews, artifacts and data that the team reviewed and led to the identification of the powerful practices that the team identified in indicators 1.4 and 5.5.

The system overall average for the eleot® Item Descriptors for section B, High Expectations Environments, is 2.74 and the international average is 2.80 indicating that teachers and staff have set high expectations for student learning. During observations these high expectations were evident. Teachers challenged students to stretch their reading, math and writing skills. Teachers differentiated instruction to ensure students were challenged but still each student could attain their individual objective. The teachers are using building grade level curriculum to set the rigor in the classroom. Classroom discussion and activities provide evidence that students are engaged in rigorous learning. Many classroom teachers are using higher order thinking questions to engage students. The use of exemplars was the lowest Item Descriptor. Team observers did not see many exemplars being used to enhance instruction.

In the utilization of the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot®), the Supportive Learning Environment emerged as an area of strength across the system and the highest scoring area of 3.10. Overall, students consistently demonstrated positive attitudes about the classroom and learning. Students smiled, appeared relaxed, and willingly engaged in the learning activities. Teachers provided support and assistance to students that was well received and productive. Students were comfortable taking risks by responding to questions and attempting activities without apparent fear of making a mistake or receiving negative feedback. Students tackled the tasks given to them and appeared to make progress in their learning. This kind of supportive environment provides greater learning opportunities for students as they are willing and able to engage in challenging activities knowing they can make mistakes and learn from them, as well as having confidence that teachers will support them in being successful. The lowest score in this area was for the Item Descriptor that addressed additional/alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge. Whether this is the result of the descriptor simply not occurring as frequently during the time of the observations, or not being implemented on a regular basis, it is an important area in which to raise teachers' awareness so they can ensure they are meeting the needs of their students. The final score for this area was a 3.10, higher than the AEN of 3.05, reinforcing the positive and supportive learning environments found in classrooms across the system.

The Active Learning Environment Item Descriptor 3 had a 39.07% very evident rating. A consistent effort by the teaching staff to individually engage their students with quality learning experiences was observed by the Team. The teachers posed questions which engage the students to participate in both the activities and the thinking process. Teachers continually monitored and questioned students as they performed their activities, giving the students the encouragement to continue the process of learning. Connecting the lessons and activities to real-life experiences appeared to be the most difficult task; however, the teaching staff attempted to link student learning some of the time to the current real-life experiences of the students. That rating was a 10.60% very evident and 31.79% evident rating. The implementation of the curriculum, assisted by the work of the Curriculum Leadership Institute, will move the school system forward. Teachers continuing to monitor instructional and assessment practices, supported by collaboration will ensure the full implementation of the

system's instructional process.

The overall score for Progress Monitoring and Feedback on the eleot® was 2.83 which is greater than the AEN average of 2.76. Across all of the school sites the team members consistently observed teachers asking students about their individual learning. The Team also observed students responding to their teacher's feedback which demonstrated their improvement in understanding, revising and improving their work based on the feedback. The engagement of students by their teachers and the students' willingness to provide their understanding of the content with the subsequent adjustments to their understanding based on teacher's feedback were consistently observed across the system. These observations were supported by the interviews, artifacts and data that the Team reviewed throughout the visit.

Well-managed Learning Environment was also an area of strength as indicated by a 3.09 rating which is very close to the AEN average of 3.12. Observations revealed that students clearly followed rules and routines established in classrooms (3.21-students follow rules and work well with others). The highest scoring Item Descriptor under Well-managed Learning Environment was 3.26 (90.06% evident/very evident) in which students interacted respectfully with teachers and peers, and 3.25 (88.74% evident/very evident) in which students demonstrated they knew classroom routines, behavioral expectations and consequences. These scores indicate that students had the flexibility to communicate openly when appropriate and understood when to adjust their mannerisms to support the learning environment. The lowest scoring Item Descriptor under Well-managed Learning Environment was a 2.68, in which students collaborate with others during student-centered activities. However, observations indicated a 64.57% evident/very evident in this indicator. Examples of this partnering were discussing and sharing a writing assignment, documenting and compiling lab results of an experiment in a middle school science class, and numerous student centered activities at the elementary level. Overall, this is a strength of the system.

The system scored below the national average on the eleot® Item Descriptor Digital Learning Environment with a score of 1.49, as compared to the AEN average of 1.86. Observing the use of digital technology inside of a twenty minute observation is challenging. Throughout the course of 151 observations, some level of technology use was observed less than 50% of the time. As the district enriches its collaborative model, integration of technology use in the classrooms should increase.

Overall, the classroom observations clearly support the findings of the External Review Team both with respect to Powerful Practices and Improvement Priorities. The Team delayed final discussions around Standard 3 until classroom observations were completed to be able to utilize this information for decision making. The system has committed to providing an engaging learning atmosphere and continuing to examine both practices in place through formal and informal observations, and by providing additional training and support through professional development. There is a clear focus on the teacher as the designer of engaging work for students.

**eleot™ Data Summary**

<b>A. Equitable Learning</b>			<b>%</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Very Evident</b>	<b>Evident</b>	<b>Somewhat Evident</b>	<b>Not Observed</b>
1.	2.56	Has differentiated learning opportunities and activities that meet her/his needs	18.54%	36.42%	27.81%	17.22%
2.	3.32	Has equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	41.06%	50.99%	7.28%	0.66%
3.	3.17	Knows that rules and consequences are fair, clear, and consistently applied	27.81%	60.93%	11.26%	0.00%
4.	1.66	Has ongoing opportunities to learn about their own and other's backgrounds/cultures/differences	2.65%	19.21%	19.87%	58.28%
<b>Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.68</b>						

<b>B. High Expectations</b>			<b>%</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Very Evident</b>	<b>Evident</b>	<b>Somewhat Evident</b>	<b>Not Observed</b>
1.	3.05	Knows and strives to meet the high expectations established by the teacher	23.84%	58.28%	16.56%	1.32%
2.	3.05	Is tasked with activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	25.83%	54.97%	17.88%	1.32%
3.	2.03	Is provided exemplars of high quality work	10.60%	23.84%	23.84%	41.72%
4.	2.90	Is engaged in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks	19.87%	53.64%	23.18%	3.31%
5.	2.69	Is asked and responds to questions that require higher order thinking (e.g., applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	21.85%	37.75%	27.81%	12.58%
<b>Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.74</b>						

C. Supportive Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.17	Demonstrates or expresses that learning experiences are positive	32.45%	53.64%	11.92%	1.99%
2.	3.19	Demonstrates positive attitude about the classroom and learning	32.45%	56.95%	7.95%	2.65%
3.	3.21	Takes risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	36.42%	48.34%	14.57%	0.66%
4.	3.18	Is provided support and assistance to understand content and accomplish tasks	39.74%	41.06%	16.56%	2.65%
5.	2.74	Is provided additional/alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge for her/his needs	23.18%	37.09%	29.80%	9.93%
<b>Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.10</b>						

D. Active Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.98	Has several opportunities to engage in discussions with teacher and other students	30.46%	46.36%	13.91%	9.27%
2.	2.13	Makes connections from content to real-life experiences	10.60%	31.79%	17.88%	39.74%
3.	3.23	Is actively engaged in the learning activities	39.07%	44.37%	16.56%	0.00%
<b>Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.78</b>						

E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.79	Is asked and/or quizzed about individual progress/learning	20.53%	48.34%	21.19%	9.93%
2.	3.08	Responds to teacher feedback to improve understanding	26.49%	57.62%	13.25%	2.65%
3.	3.14	Demonstrates or verbalizes understanding of the lesson/content	29.80%	55.63%	13.25%	1.32%
4.	2.27	Understands how her/his work is assessed	8.61%	37.09%	27.15%	27.15%
5.	2.87	Has opportunities to revise/improve work based on feedback	22.52%	52.98%	13.25%	11.26%
<b>Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.83</b>						

F. Well-Managed Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	3.26	Speaks and interacts respectfully with teacher(s) and peers	36.42%	53.64%	9.93%	0.00%
2.	3.21	Follows classroom rules and works well with others	35.76%	49.67%	13.91%	0.66%
3.	3.07	Transitions smoothly and efficiently to activities	32.45%	46.36%	16.56%	4.64%
4.	2.68	Collaborates with other students during student-centered activities	25.83%	39.74%	10.60%	23.84%
5.	3.25	Knows classroom routines, behavioral expectations and consequences	36.42%	52.32%	11.26%	0.00%
<b>Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.09</b>						

G. Digital Learning			%			
Item	Average	Description	Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	1.70	Uses digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	13.91%	10.60%	6.62%	68.87%
2.	1.54	Uses digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	9.93%	9.27%	5.96%	74.83%
3.	1.24	Uses digital tools/technology to communicate and work collaboratively for learning	1.99%	6.62%	4.64%	86.75%
<b>Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 1.49</b>						

## Findings

### Improvement Priority

Facilitate a collaborative process to design, implement and evaluate the district’s curriculum, assessments, and instructional process in all content areas and across all grade levels to ensure it is horizontally and vertically aligned, articulated and delivered in a manner that guarantees all students receive a rigorous and challenging education that prepares them for success at the next level.

(Indicator 3.1, Indicator 3.6)

#### Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.1

#### Evidence and Rationale

Evidence review and interviews indicated that while there is currently a process in place to create a new curriculum and assessment system, there is not currently a fully-developed systemic practice in place at this time. Additionally, the development of the curriculum and assessment plan does not currently address the need for a district-wide program in the area of instructional processes. Stakeholder feedback from staff showed mixed agreement in the area of assessment measures being used clearly and consistently across grade-levels and classrooms. Feedback also indicated that staff members, particularly experienced staff, do not feel adequately trained in the the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data in their instruction. In order for the curriculum, assessment, and instructional process program to be implemented with maximum effectiveness, this piece must be embedded.

A comprehensive curriculum, assessment, and instructional program, when implemented effectively, has the potential to radically improve student achievement results through a more engaging, challenging, and individualized classroom experience for students that better prepares them for success.

Marzano, 2009: "Create defined autonomy that allows teachers creative freedom while ensuring student achievement."

### **Improvement Priority**

Systemically align grading and reporting practices in order to adequately measure student proficiency on required content knowledge and skills.

(Indicator 3.10)

#### Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.10

#### Evidence and Rationale

Interviews with school and system personnel indicate that grading and reporting practices are inconsistent across the system. A review of documents revealed that grading practices are not aligned to standards. When asked about grading practices, teachers' responses were inconsistent. While the discussion about moving towards standards based grading is taking place, the consensus is that the system needs to fine tune their curriculum alignment before changing grading policies. Formalizing the policies and processes of grading and reporting will contribute to clearer student understanding of grading expectations and increased achievement. By carefully monitoring those schools piloting the Standards-based Grading, the district may discover they have a quality, best-practice internal model in place.

### **Opportunity For Improvement**

Create, formalize, implement and evaluate guiding principles and practices for schools in the area of instructional technology, including student use of technology as a learning tool and professional development for appropriate staff.

(Indicator 3.3)

#### Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.3

#### Evidence and Rationale

Classroom observations and interviews with students and staff indicated that while there is much technology available in the classroom, there is no uniformity or regularity in which it is used. Findings from the eleot® results indicated that the digital learning environment was the lowest rated of the seven environments, with a 1.49 score, compared to the average network score of 1.86. Students indicated that they do not utilize technology at all in many of their classes. Interviews with staff members showed that while there are many resources available to schools, there are few plans in place to guide staff in how to best utilize it.

While it is recognized that the technology offerings may differ from school to school, it is essential that schools are provided with guiding principles regarding the best practices of how to most effectively establish student

technology use as an ongoing aspect in the instructional process. Professional development should be designed and offered to instructional staff to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to embed these practices in the classroom.

Student use of technology can enhance learning and provide for more engaging and relevant classroom experiences for students. Research indicates that when students have the opportunity to utilize technology resources in the classroom, they are more likely to be proficient and have more positive attitudes about learning (Kulik, 1994).

### **Opportunity For Improvement**

Develop, formalize, implement, and evaluate an advocacy program to ensure that all students throughout the system are well known by at least one adult in the student's school who will support that student's educational experience.

(Indicator 3.9)

#### Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.9

#### Evidence and Rationale

Classroom observations and student/staff interviews at all instructional levels revealed that students have concerned adults to support and follow their educational progress. However, through a review of documents, the Team determined that the system has not designed and evaluated a structure in all schools to provide adult advocates for each student. Teachers and staff at some schools noted that although a student advocacy program was currently being utilized at their respective sites, it was not standardized and consistent across the system. Ensuring that every student has an adult advocate through a consistent and formalized process will result in greater student attendance and participation, improved student achievement, improved growth towards proficiency, and improved graduation rates.

### **Opportunity For Improvement**

Standardize and disaggregate the common assessment data from the district generated assessments in order to leverage powerful teaching practices across the district and identify areas that require remediation.

(Indicator 5.1, SP1. Assessment Quality )

#### Primary Indicator

Indicator 5.1

#### Evidence and Rationale

The district has established a clear and organized plan to create, modify, and align local assessments through a nine-year cycle. The cycle is closely related to standards adoption and curriculum cycles.

By collecting and disseminating the current assessment data from the existing tests, teachers and school leaders could have informed and productive conversations about classroom practices and lessons that yield

high results while augmenting their own capacity to analyze data and craft powerful assessment items.

Additionally, current local assessment data could be correlated to statewide achievement tests to determine if the district tests are aligned to the state tests. When this correlation is established, the local assessments become predictive of how students will perform on high stakes assessments. Along those lines, a correlation study of the assessments will highlight where there are discrepancies between what is being measured locally and what is being measured statewide.

# Leadership Capacity

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

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

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

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

AdvancED's experience, gained through evaluation of best practices, has indicated that a successful institution has leaders who are advocates for the institution's vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders. The institution's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

## Standard 1 - Purpose and Direction

The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	3.00	2.64
1.2	The system ensures that each school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	3.20	2.68
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	3.00	2.86
1.4	Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	3.20	2.62

## Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	3.00	2.96
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	3.00	2.90
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	3.50	3.14
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	3.00	3.00
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	3.00	2.70

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	2.70	2.66

## Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic

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

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

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Questionnaire Administration	1.00	3.36
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	3.00	3.03

## Findings

### Powerful Practice

The school system implements a continuous improvement process that engages all stakeholders in clear goal-setting expectations and accountability aligned with the purpose and direction of the school system.

(Indicator 1.4, Indicator 5.5)

#### Primary Indicator

Indicator 1.4

#### Evidence and Rationale

Interviews and a review of artifacts indicate that several processes are well-documented and systematic in holding all schools accountable for aligning school improvement processes with the district's Strategic Plan and improvement initiatives. A Strategic Plan Quarterly Report is produced and distributed that outlines the district's progress in meeting its goals as well as progress reports from each school. These quarterly reports identify progress made on the school's goals, a report on the strategies, timelines and the focus of the quarter. Results are identified and next steps are outlined. This report, along with a host of other communication activities, communicates comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the

achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders. Structures are in place to assure that continuous improvement processes are implemented with fidelity including “Goal Teams” on each campus. Three key personnel roles have been assigned to assist schools in achieving the goals of the individual school improvement plans. The school system is committed to keeping its Strategic Plan “dustless”. The School Board is intimately involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Strategic Plan and its accompanying school improvement plans.

The school system has operated since 2001 under a Compact which outlines specific roles all stakeholders play in decision-making across the district. This structure has undergone a number of revisions since its inception and effectively and efficiently moves the system forward in key decisions with respect to operations and allows them to clearly monitor information about district strategic goals.

“The district — including the school board, the superintendent, key staff and influential stakeholders in the community — must have the capacity to develop and articulate both a vision and a set of practices that send a clear message of what schools are to be about. The authenticity of this message is affirmed through the district’s development of a strategic plan that manifests the vision — and then by district actions that establish the conditions necessary for principals and teacher leaders to create a different kind of school. These conditions include aligning all policies and resources to the plan; creating a collaborative and supportive working relationship with each school; expecting and supporting the principal to become the school’s instructional leader; and communicating the vision and strategic plan to the public in a highly visible way that provides the context for principals to make decisions supported by parents and the larger community” (<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Three-Essentials-to-Improving-Schools.pdf>).

# Resource Utilization

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

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

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in the more than 32,000 institutions in the AdvancED Network that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, meets special needs, and complies with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staff members who are well qualified for their assignments. The institution provides a safe learning environment for students and staff. The institution provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff members to improve their effectiveness and ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

## Standard 4 - Resources and Support Systems

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

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
4.1	The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ, and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, and educational programs.	3.30	2.81
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs, and system operations.	3.00	2.84
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	3.30	3.01
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	3.40	2.69

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	3.00	2.68
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	3.00	2.65
4.7	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	3.00	2.56
4.8	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	3.00	2.58

## Findings

### Powerful Practice

All buildings and departments across the system implement an effective planning process that includes long-range planning and quarterly reporting on results to support the system’s purpose and direction.

(Indicator 4.4)

#### Primary Indicator

Indicator 4.4

#### Evidence and Rationale

Natrona County School District #1 provided evidence that the system administrators utilize effective policies and procedures to lead planning in all areas. The board and system leadership develop a strategic plan utilizing stakeholder input to guide continuous growth and improvement. All departments and schools create improvement plans that must align with the district strategic plans. The plans include long-range goals and interim strategies to meet the goals. Quarterly reports to the board and community provide and disseminate information on progress and results. As Wyoming goes through an economic change, the district has been proactive in dealing with the budget cuts by adjusting areas that have the least amount of impact towards student learning. They are strategically abandoning programs that are not effective.

Strategic resource management that includes a long-range plan and supports the purpose and direction of the system demonstrates responsibility and good stewardship of their resources.

### Powerful Practice

The system has developed thorough and comprehensive recruitment hiring and retention processes to ensure high quality employees fill all needed positions.

(Indicator 4.1)

Primary Indicator

## Indicator 4.1

Evidence and Rationale

Woven throughout the system's artifacts and interviews are practices that the system engages to recruit, employ, and retain employees to support the purpose and direction of the system. Following Natrona County's Hiring Process Guidelines, district leaders facilitate the hiring process beginning with an evaluation of staffing needs using their staffing formula and budget allocation to guide decisions. Human Resources staff recruit a hiring pool using a variety of strategies. Building Principals and department leaders participate in the process as they interview applicants and recommend candidates for hire. All hiring decisions align with the system's strategic plan for supporting their purpose and direction.

The system maintains a high retention rate throughout the district, utilizing information garnered from interviews. Leaders systematically compile a market study used to modify salaries, benefits, and other incentives that help the district to remain competitive.

Implementing a clearly defined and systematic recruitment, hiring, and retention process ensures that the school district has responsible high quality employees with integrity to support the district's purpose and direction.

# Conclusion

The school system, under dynamic and passionate leadership, has defined those values that govern decision making in all areas. The district purpose is to "empower every learner to grow, excel and be successful contributors to the local and global community." This purpose is achieved by believing and instilling the values of transparency, excellence, joy, responsible risk-taking, considerate and meaningful communication, collaboration, integrity, diversity, mutual trust, and fairness.

The External Review Team acknowledges that Natrona County School District #1 faces a number of challenges and applauds the transparency with which the system approached the Internal Review process. Knowing the system's commitment to quality teaching and learning and a real desire to embrace improvement efforts of quality, the Team committed to be transparent and open with its findings.

The school district during a quality Internal Review has identified several areas in need of improvement. These areas coincide clearly with many of the findings of the External Review Team. The system has identified one of their challenges as the shift from thinking of accreditation as an event to utilizing the processes for continuous improvement. Other areas identified by the system as needing improvement include the further development of a comprehensive assessment system (Standard 5.1). Providing support for the schools that have been identified as "not meeting expectations" and "partially meeting expectations" as defined by the Wyoming School Accountability Model is another area of focus for the school system. The variation in grading practices across the system is another area of focus for the system (Standard 3.10). The competent and effective interpretation of data to change teaching practice presents a challenge to the school system as well (Standard 5.3).

Natrona County School District has begun the process of the study and development of an effective instructional model for district processes around curriculum, instruction and assessment.

In the overview remarks made by the system's Superintendent, four key areas were identified for the Team's work during the External Review. Specifically, information is requested around the system's

1. Systems of Improvement
2. Strategies and Course of Action
3. Efforts to Align and Narrow the Work
4. Depth of Implementation.

The Team accepted the challenge and used this challenge as a lens to review and validate the system's adherence to each of the five Standards and 35 Indicators.

A predominant theme across the system that has significant impact on each of these areas is the concept of autonomy and the clear need to define the balance between a "systems" approach (somewhat defined by the AdvancED Standards for Quality Systems) and current practices with respect to autonomy of schools and school leadership. While AdvancED does not define structures of organizational structure, it does define clearly the impacts such structures should have on student learning, the conditions that support student

learning, and organizational effectiveness. The current structures and practices operating in the system presented some challenge to the Team in determining appropriate ratings with respect to a number of Standards from a systems perspective.

With the variation in programs, resources, philosophies and the supporting professional development across the system's schools, vertical alignment seems to be a challenge. Having a number of elementary schools with varying programs feed into single middle schools does point out the need for examination and dialogue around providing an effective and meaningful transition.

With the freedom that schools seem to have with respect to instructional decisions, professional development and academic approaches, and the operating "choice" system in the district it appears that some competition for students is present and such practices tend to stifle collaboration and sharing of best practice across the system.

Effective decision-making at the school level is a critical skill and the system must be assured that school administrators have the skill, training, and capacity to make good decisions, particularly using appropriate and valid data to make such decisions.

Consistent implementation of curriculum across the system is hindered by the variety of instructional programs and materials in use from school to school. This somewhat inconsistent curriculum makes it difficult for the system to gather consistent and meaningful data with respect to teacher performance and program evaluation. Interviews across the twelve schools visited indicate a variety of supervision practices in place that do not yield a common picture of teaching and learning in the system.

Students who move from school to school may encounter difficulties in acclimating quickly into new settings due to the lack of articulation across the system.

Research is available that tackles this difficult question of centralized direction and "individualized empowerment". Robert Marzano in his book, *District Leadership that Works: Striking the Right Balance* discusses the concept of "defined autonomy". "Defined autonomy creates an effective balance of centralized direction and individualized empowerment that allows building-level staff the stylistic freedom to respond quickly and effectively to student failure." (Solution Tree).

### Systems of Improvement

The school system has undertaken a number of initiatives to move the system forward to increase opportunities for higher levels of student learning and program effectiveness. In its efforts to create a "guaranteed and viable curriculum", the system has begun a Curriculum Development and Revision Cycle. Professional development utilizing the Curriculum Leadership Institute has begun for school and system leaders. The alignment of the system's Strategic Plan with the school improvement plans is another system of improvement operating in the system. Refer to the Improvement Priority (Standards 3.1 and 3.6) outlined in this report.

The development and support mechanisms of Policy "6220" has defined the levels and types of support that will be provided for schools at the various levels of the Wyoming School Accountability Model and may be a driving force in looking at the areas of autonomy schools may exercise.

### Strategies and Courses of Action

A number of strategies and courses of action have begun to impact the system including the development of common assessments, the relocation of Instructional Facilitators back to the school sites, professional learning community training for school leaders and teachers and the decentralization of budgets. The school district has identified the variance in grading practices as an area of study. Refer to Improvement Priority for Standard 3.10.

### Efforts to Align and Narrow the Work

A number of alignment processes are in place and will assist the school system in defining the balance between centralized direction and local school autonomy. School level improvement plans are aligned with district goals as identified in the system's Strategic Plan. Goal Teams at each school monitor the progress made on the goals identified in these plans. The Quarterly Report monitors school goals and results and communicates this information to a variety of stakeholders. Refer to Powerful Practices identified in this report with respect to Standards 1.4 and 5.5.

### Depth of Implementation

Some of the initiatives implemented recently by the school system are in early stages of implementation and adoption. Through interviews with all of the school principals and site visits to twelve of the system's schools, there is still work to be done for full implementation and "buy in". Professional Learning Communities are operational in various degrees across the system. Teacher evaluation and classroom supervision practices have not been fully implemented in ways that provide quality feedback to teachers and assist them in their own professional growth. The interpretation and utilization of data by classroom teachers in meaningful and powerful ways is not prevalent and there is a continuing need for teachers to have additional training. Eleot® observation results in the area of Digital Learning indicate the need for higher levels of student engagement in using technology as a learning tool. Classroom observations also indicate the need for teachers to have professional learning opportunities on effective ways to integrate technology into the classroom to support student learning. Refer to Opportunity for Improvement for Standard 3.3.

The External Review Team acknowledges that the core values of Natrona County School District #1 truly permeate the system in ways that assist the system in achieving its Purpose and Direction.

### Integrity

The Team saw many areas where the system demonstrates "Integrity". There is a genuine effort in adhering to the school improvement process with fidelity. Decisions are made with integrity with respect to those decisions aligning with the system's Purpose and Direction as defined in the system Strategic Plan.

### Transparency

The Team appreciates this district's willingness, through all of the individuals with whom the Team talked, to

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answer all of questions and provide the information needed. The openness with which the Team was welcomed to the district and the access given speaks to the system's strong emphasis on transparency.

#### Excellence/Diversity

The Team is impressed with the system's drive for excellence, to be the best school possible through the diversity of instruction, the efforts to meet the individual needs of every student within the district, and the philosophy of meeting the needs of the whole child.

#### Considerate and Meaningful Communication

The Team noticed that every decision is made and implemented through considerate and meaningful communication. Decisions are intentional and the system evaluates the impact of those decisions on staff, students, and families. The system seeks input from all of these groups and really works to ensure that as much as possible, everyone is on the same page and that all stakeholders are working together to make determinations. Interviews indicate that staff and students truly feel that they have a voice in this district and that they are valued and listened to. This is a key foundational piece in creating a culture of caring and cohesiveness, and the Team applauds the system for establishing that sense of community.

#### Fairness

The Team felt that an area of strength was the District Compact, which ensures fairness in equal representation of stakeholders in the decision-making process.

#### Collaboration

The Team would like to acknowledge and celebrate Natrona's commitment to ensuring that all major decisions are reached through collaboration with full consensus from all stakeholders including Trustees, employee organizations, parents, students, and the community. This decision-making process honors the diversity of perspectives and interests and gives legitimacy to the systems values.

#### Responsible Risk-Taking

The district demonstrates this value by considering benefits against risks when making decisions. Several examples of decisions made this way include:

- The decision to make the least possible impact on classrooms when cutting budgets.
- Streamlining initiatives by employing strategic abandonment.
- Improving the system by embracing innovation in areas such as planning building construction, improving technology, and communication with stakeholders.

#### Mutual Trust

As the Team interviewed multiple stakeholders in numerous interviews, it was felt that even with the changes being made, some especially stressful in some schools, there is a genuine feeling of trust. The changes being made are for all the right reasons. What is being asked is truly kid centered and not adult centered. There is a true commitment to kids in this district.

#### Joy

Natrona County School District #1 exhibits in all of its interactions with the External Team a real sense of joy and pleasure in the work. There is a clear culture of hope established across all schools in the system. Interviews indicated that system focuses on building and sustaining powerful relationships and these relationships leverage support and satisfaction in the job.

It is the Team's profound belief that the Natrona County School District has the capacity and means to continue to reach high levels of teaching and learning. Under its current dynamic leadership, and a clear and continued focus on its continuous improvement processes, the school system will continue to provide the opportunity for all of its students to "develop dreams" and have the means to reach them.

The Team further reminds the school system that this is a next step in the journey of continuous improvement. With a genuine commitment to school and system improvement and teaching and learning, the students of NCSD have nothing to hold them back from continued success at high levels.

The school system is encouraged to utilize all the resources available through AdvancED including the survey capacity of eProve ([www.advanced.org](http://www.advanced.org)) and suggest that practices and protocols available for this review become part of the regular system improvement processes.

The External Review Team wishes to go on record with the school system and AdvancED to add some clarity to the system's Index of Education Quality. The minimum response rate was not met across all stakeholder groups which forced the system in its Self Assessment and the Team in its scoring of the Evaluative Criteria to score it at Level 1. This Evaluative Criteria score had a negative impact on the overall Index of Education Quality and the score for Leadership Capacity. The actual performance of the system with respect to all other 40 measurable components (35 indicators, 4 Evaluative Criteria for Student Performance, and 1 Evaluative Criteria for Stakeholder Feedback) is outlined below:

Index of Education Quality

- Self Assessment Score: 273.17
- External Review Team Score: 287.67
- External Review Team Score: 294.39 (if the Stakeholder Feedback Minimum Response had been met)

Teaching and Learning Domain

- Self Assessment Score: 261.90
- External Review Team Score: 276.61
- Score unaffected by Stakeholder Feedback Evaluative Criteria

Leadership Capacity

- Self Assessment Score: 275.00
- External Review Team Score: 288.33
- External Review Team Score: 313.33 (if the Stakeholder Feedback Minimum Response had been met)

Resource Utilization

- Self Assessment Score: 300.00
- External Review Team Score: 308.75
- Score unaffected by Stakeholder Feedback Evaluative Criteria

## Improvement Priorities

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

- Facilitate a collaborative process to design, implement and evaluate the district's curriculum, assessments, and instructional process in all content areas and across all grade levels to ensure it is horizontally and vertically aligned, articulated and delivered in a manner that guarantees all students receive a rigorous and challenging education that prepares them for success at the next level.
- Systemically align grading and reporting practices in order to adequately measure student proficiency on required content knowledge and skills.

# Accreditation Recommendation

## Index of Education Quality

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

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

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

	External Review IEQ Score	AdvancED Network Average
Overall Score	287.07	278.03
Teaching and Learning Impact	276.67	267.91
Leadership Capacity	288.33	292.76
Resource Utilization	312.50	284.48

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

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

# Addenda

## Individual Institution Results (Self-reported)

Institution Name	Teaching and Learning Impact	Leadership Capacity	Resource Utilization	Overall IEQ Score
Alcova Elementary	266.67	236.36	228.57	251.28
Bar Nunn Elementary School	276.19	300.00	300.00	287.18
Casper Classical Academy	271.43	281.82	257.14	271.79
Centennial Junior High	271.43	281.82	271.43	274.36
Cottonwood Elementary School	280.95	263.64	300.00	279.49
Crest Hill Elementary	300.00	290.91	300.00	297.44
CY Middle School	271.43	290.91	300.00	282.05
Dean Morgan Junior High	228.57	281.82	300.00	256.41
Evansville Elementary	261.90	309.09	328.57	287.18
Fort Caspar Academy	333.33	309.09	314.29	323.08
Frontier Middle School	261.90	300.00	300.00	279.49
Grant Elementary School	271.43	272.73	271.43	271.79
Kelly Walsh High School	285.71	290.91	271.43	284.62
Lincoln Elementary School	247.62	281.82	285.71	264.10
Manor Heights Elementary	300.00	281.82	300.00	294.87
Midwest School	219.05	254.55	157.14	217.95
Mills Elementary	309.52	372.73	271.43	320.51
Mountain View Elementary	238.10	272.73	271.43	253.85
Natrona County High School	257.14	245.45	242.86	251.28
Oregon Trail Elementary School	333.33	327.27	314.29	328.21
Paradise Valley Elementary	295.24	272.73	342.86	297.44
Park Elementary School	300.00	363.64	342.86	325.64
Pineview Elementary School	271.43	281.82	314.29	282.05
Poison Spider Elementary	252.38	290.91	314.29	274.36
Powder River Elementary	257.14	218.18	257.14	246.15
Red Creek Elementary	290.48	272.73	314.29	289.74

This report is pending final approval by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Institution Name	Teaching and Learning Impact	Leadership Capacity	Resource Utilization	Overall IEQ Score
Roosevelt High School	271.43	290.91	357.14	292.31
Sagewood Elementary School	285.71	245.45	328.57	282.05
Southridge Elementary	304.76	318.18	328.57	312.82
Summit Elementary School	338.10	363.64	357.14	348.72
University Park Elementary	290.48	336.36	328.57	310.26
Verda James Elementary School	304.76	290.91	300.00	300.00
Willard Elementary	290.48	263.64	357.14	294.87
Woods Learning Center	342.86	336.36	371.43	346.15

## Other System Institutions

The following institutions did not utilize ASSIST to complete the Accreditation Report for this External Review. Therefore self-reported results are not included as part of this report. Some institutions appearing below may have been required to submit the Accreditation Report outside of ASSIST.

Institution	Institution
Willow Creek Elementary	

# Team Roster

Member	Brief Biography
<p>Dr. W. Darrell Barringer</p>	<p>Dr. Barringer's educational career spans 40+ years. On June 30th, 2012, he retired from Lexington School District One in Lexington, SC after working there for 34 years. During that time, he served as an elementary principal for 29 years and had the privilege of opening two new schools. He has taught grades 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, served as an Assistant Principal in addition to the Principal role. He has also served with SACS (AdvancED) since 1983 having chaired teams in Egypt, Thailand, India, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan, Bahrain, Costa Rica, Japan, Guyana, Guatemala and Nicaragua as well as in the U.S. His service has included schools, systems, digital learning institutions, and corporations. Dr. Barringer's BA is in Biblical Education from Columbia International University, and his MEd (Elementary Ed), his EdS (Administration) and PhD (Elementary Ed) are from the University of South Carolina. Dr. Barringer joined the AdvancED family officially on July 1st of 2012 as Director for AdvancED South Carolina.</p>
<p>Mrs. Mary Ann DeHaven</p>	<p>Mary Ann DeHaven has worked with special education students at the middle school and high school levels for 34 years in West Virginia, Maryland and Wyoming. During her career as an educator, she developed a self-contained multiple grade-level classroom for the emotionally disabled, developed a comprehensive life skills class, and taught resource English classes for grades 9-12. She retired from teaching at Cody High School in Cody, Wyoming in 2014 and is currently serving as the District Facilitator for Accreditation for Park County District #6 Schools. She joined the AdvancEd accreditation process in 2005 and has served on External Review teams in Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, Wyoming, and Okinawa. She has served as the Lead Evaluator on school level accreditation teams for nine schools in Wyoming and as Associate Lead Evaluator on teams at Fort Benning, Georgia and in Okinawa. She believes AdvancEd provides schools and districts with a valuable framework in which educators can evaluate program success and maximize academic achievement of their students.</p>
<p>Dr. Sharon A Knudson</p>	<p>Dr. Knudson has worked with children in a variety of capacities from professional storyteller to teacher/principal in schools. A summary of her professional experience is 2010-present---Lead Evaluator with AdvancED; 1993-2010---Laramie School District #1,WY-Director, Non-tenured Teacher programs; Director, Professional Development; principal; teacher; and UW graduate instructor. Her WY Certification is Superintendent K-12, Principal K-12, Elementary Education-highly qualified, Speech Pathologist, Ex.-Gen. K-12. Her professional activities related to AdvancED include Lead Evaluator/team member to twenty-three states, DoDEA and International Schools---Japan, Europe, Egypt, Diagnostic Review Lead Evaluator, and Lead Evaluator Mentor. Dr. Knudson has received several national and state leadership and teacher awards. She recently participated as a district observer in a national Teacher &amp; Leader Evaluation Systems research study.</p>
<p>Mr. Brian Brandon</p>	<p>Mr. Brandon has been in the world of education for 18 years. He started his teaching career in Crow Agency &amp; Hardin, Montana as a 3rd and 5th grade teacher, respectively. After 7 years, he moved to Gillette, Wyoming to continue being a 5th grade teacher. The last 5 years at Pronghorn Elementary he was a Technology Facilitator. Currently, he is an Assistant Principal at Moorcroft K-8, and teaches education and computer classes for Moorcroft's Outreach Campus of Eastern Wyoming College. This will be his 8th accreditation visit with AdvancED. Mr. Brandon possess a Masters in Educational Technology and another in Educational Leadership (K-12).</p>

Member	Brief Biography
Ms. Pandi Elison-Chang	Currently serving as assistant principal at Preston High School and special education director for Preston School District, Pandi Elison-Chang has worked in education for numerous years. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and History, Master's degree in Education, an Ed.S. in administration, and is currently working on her Ph.D. through Northwest Nazarene University, focusing on special education law. She has worked with a variety of teachers from many different state systems in serving on committees and attending classes.
Ms. Dianne Frazer	As a teacher certified for K-9, Dianne taught at the elementary level in Iowa for 2 years. Later she taught pre-K in Iowa for 3 years. Pursuing her interest in young children, she became a Head Start director and held this position for 19 years. During that time she participated in federal peer reviews throughout the Midwest. The peer reviews are similar to accreditation visits and involve a review of all systems as well as planning processes. During that time she also taught Early Childhood classes at the local community college. After relocating to Colorado Dianne joined the staff of the Wyoming Department of Education as an accreditation consultant. Her role has expanded to include school improvement support. Over her 12 years of work with the department, Dianne has been involved in AdvancED accreditation as a team member and team leader. She has participated in school and district visits in Wyoming as well as school visits in 3 other states and one international visit.
Mr. Joshua Kitchens	Josh Kitchens graduated from Georgia Southern University in 2007 with a B.S. in Political Science Education. In 2011, he earned his M.Ed. in School Administration from Liberty University. Currently, he serves as the middle and high school principal for South Carolina Connections Academy, an online public school serving students in grades K-12. Prior to this role, he served as the high school assistant principal and taught high school social studies at SC Connections Academy. He has also served as the school's trainer.
Mr. William P Nelson	William P. Nelson is currently serving as the Director of Assessment and Data at the Agua Fria Union High School District. He earned his undergraduate degrees (B.A. in Secondary Education, English, and Arts) at the University of Findlay in northwest Ohio. He began his career as an English teacher and transitioned to Chairman of Arts at Mountain Ridge High School. He later taught English and Yearbook in the Phoenix Union High School District. After earning his M.A. in Educational Administration at Arizona State University, William began his administrative career as an assistant principal at Desert Edge High School and then Millennium High School. Mr. Nelson has served on visiting teams with the AdvancEd organization as a team member and has served as a Lead Evaluator on several visits. Mr. Nelson specializes in the use of data to drive student achievement.
Ms. Kathy Powers	Kathy Powers has been an educator for 25 years. Her teaching adventures started at an Air Force base in Germany, on to Guam and then Alaska as an elementary teacher, grant administrator and elementary principal. During these years she has been passionate about kids and their future. She is excited to return to her home state of Wyoming and believes AdvancEd can provide a framework to educators to help assist students to reach a high potential.

Member	Brief Biography
<p>Ms. Jody Rakness</p>	<p>Jody Rakness is the Curriculum Director/Grants Manager for Washakie County School District No. 1 in Worland, Wyoming. In this position, she oversees curriculum and instruction, writes and manages consolidated and competitive grants, oversees continuous improvement efforts, and works with the Administrative Team and Instructional Facilitators to monitor the progress and success of district and school improvement efforts to ensure the cohesive alignment of continuous improvement efforts district wide.</p> <p>Jody is an NCA Ambassador, Quality Assurance Review Team Chair/Member, and External Team Chair/Member. She has worked with AdvancED/NCA Accreditation in Wyoming, Nebraska, and Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS) both as an external team member and external team chair.</p> <p>Prior to her position as Curriculum Director/Grants Manager, Jody served as the District Leadership Coordinator. She has taught at the college, high school, and middle school levels in the areas of Business Education, Social Studies, and Computer Technology.</p>
<p>Dr. JoAnn Stevens</p>	<p>Dr. Stevens is a retired Middle School &amp; High School Principal, presently living in Peoria, AZ. She has K-12 teaching experience in Nebraska, as well as Middle School Assistant Principal, Middle School Principal, High School Assistant Principal and High School Principal experience in Nebraska and Kansas. She has a B.A., M.A., Ed.S. and Ed.D. from the University of Nebraska. Her experience in school improvement includes coordinating school and district school improvement programs, serving on external review teams, as well as serving as an external review leader.</p>

## Next Steps

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

## About AdvancED

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

In 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), both founded in 1895, and the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form AdvancED: one strong, unified organization dedicated to education quality. In 2011, the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) that was founded in 1917 became part of AdvancED.

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

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