Report of the External Review for
Newton County School System

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Covington, GA, 30014-2459
US

Mrs. Samantha Fuhrey, Superintendent

Date: March 23, 2014 - March 26, 2014

North Central Association on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.
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Introduction to the External Review

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

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

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

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

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

The Findings section presents the External Review Team’s evaluation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators. It includes Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement identified by the External Review Team, as well as observations about Student Performance, the Learning Environment, and Stakeholder Feedback.

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

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

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED’s Accreditation Standards and Indicators, identification of Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards (if appropriate), and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team.

The AdvancED Standards and Indicators are the first of three primary areas of evaluation for AdvancED’s Performance Accreditation model. Using indicator-specific performance levels, the External Review Team evaluates the degree to which the institution meets each indicator on a scale of 1 to 4. The scores assigned to the indicators are averaged to arrive at a single score. This score, along with scores from evaluations of student performance and stakeholder feedback, will be used to determine the accreditation status of the institution.

| Average Indicator Score for this Institution | 3.06 |
Standard 1: 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.

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 30,000 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Indicator</td>
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<td>Indicator</td>
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</table>
| **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. | • Survey results  
• Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the schools’ purpose statements  
• Written District Quality Assurance Review procedures and documents that monitor schools’ adherence to the district purpose and direction and that of the school  
• Examples of school purpose statements if different from the district purpose statement  
• Examples of written stakeholder communications or marketing materials that portray the school purpose and direction  
• Accreditation Report  
• Interviews | 3.0 |
| **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. | • Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders about educational programs and equitable learning experiences  
• Interviews  
• District Quality Assurance Review plans that document two-way communication on district and school effectiveness and learning, thinking, and life skills  
• Examples of schools’ continuous improvement plans  
• Survey results  
• Accreditation Report  
• Statements or documents about ethical and professional practices  
• Statements of shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning  
• The district strategic plan | 3.0 |
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<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>Performance Level</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Interviews</td>
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<td>• Accreditation Report</td>
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<td>• Examples of schools continuous improvement plans</td>
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<td>• District Quality Assurance Review plans that document two-way communication on district and school effectiveness and learning, thinking, and life skills</td>
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<td>• Survey results</td>
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<td>• Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs</td>
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<td>• Agenda, minutes from continuous improvement planning meetings</td>
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<td>• Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders</td>
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<td>• The district data profile</td>
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<td>• The district strategic plan</td>
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**Opportunities for Improvement**

1. Commit to a sustainable process for actively reviewing, revising, and communicating the system’s recently developed purpose/mission and direction/vision statements.

Rather than being bound by the accreditation cycle, an on-going process for reviewing, revising, and communicating the purpose/mission and direction/vision will support long term continuous improvement. With regard to the purpose and direction statements, Newton County School System acknowledged in the Accreditation Report that “…we could not demonstrate the process of review, revision, and communication.” System leader interviews confirmed the need for adherence to a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process. The reviewing, revising, and communicating protocol for purpose and direction will benefit Newton County School System as it establishes the guidance framework for future growth and success.
**Standard 2: The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system 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.

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<th>Performance Level</th>
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| 2.1 | The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools. | • Interviews  
• Student handbooks  
• Staff handbooks  
• Accreditation Report  
• District operations manuals  
• Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions  
• School handbooks  
• Evaluation schedules, Performance evaluation | 4.0 |
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<th>Performance Level</th>
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</table>
| 2.2 | The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively. | - Communication plan to inform all staff on code of ethics, responsibilities, conflict of interest  
- Proof of legal counsel  
- Governing authority training plan  
- Assurances, certifications  
- Accreditation Report  
- Historical compliance data  
- Interviews  
- Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest  
- Governing code of ethics | 3.0 |
| 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. | - District strategic plan  
- Examples of school improvement plans  
- Roles and responsibilities of school leadership  
- Roles and responsibilities of district leadership  
- Observations  
- Interviews  
- Accreditation Report  
- Survey results regarding functions of the governing authority and operations of the district  
- Stakeholder input and feedback  
- Agendas and minutes of meetings | 3.0 |
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<th>Indicator</th>
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<th>Performance Level</th>
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| 2.4       | • Examples of decisions aligned with the district's strategic plan  
            • Professional development offerings and plans  
            • Examples of collaboration and shared leadership  
            • Examples of decisions aligned with the school's purpose statement  
            • Interviews  
            • Examples of improvement efforts and innovations in the educational programs  
            • Examples of decisions aligned with the district's purpose and direction  
            • Accreditation Report | 3.0 |
| 2.5       | • Accreditation Report  
            • Minutes from meetings with stakeholders  
            • Examples of stakeholder input or feedback resulting in district action  
            • Interviews  
            • Survey responses | 3.0 |
| 2.6       | • Interviews  
            • Accreditation Report  
            • Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation  
            • Job specific criteria  
            • Observations  
            • Representative supervision and evaluation reports | 3.0 |
1. Newton County School System has developed policies and procedures that provide clear operational direction for the effective administration and oversight of the system and its schools.

   The contents of the policies and procedures are organized in clearly worded sections that outline the parameters the district is to follow in its operational processes and the leadership's administration. The policies state in detailed language the philosophy of the operations of the district. Artifact reviews, observations, and interviews with school administrators and teachers described consistent actions of adherence to system policies by central office staff.
**Standard 3: The system’s curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.**

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 to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership" (Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of quantifiable and intangible characteristics 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.
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<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>• Interviews&lt;br&gt;• Course or program descriptions&lt;br&gt;• Lesson plans&lt;br&gt;• Observations&lt;br&gt;• Survey responses from program leaders receiving students from previous programs, schools, or grade-levels&lt;br&gt;• Graduate follow-up surveys&lt;br&gt;• Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices&lt;br&gt;• Enrollment patterns for various courses and programs&lt;br&gt;• Accreditation Report</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>• Curriculum guides&lt;br&gt;• Accreditation Report&lt;br&gt;• Common assessments&lt;br&gt;• Standards-based report cards&lt;br&gt;• Interviews&lt;br&gt;• Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices&lt;br&gt;• Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum</td>
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<td>3.3</td>
<td>Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.</td>
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<td>• Authentic assessments&lt;br&gt;• Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource&lt;br&gt;• Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool&lt;br&gt;• Student work demonstrating the application of knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Interviews&lt;br&gt;• Accreditation Report&lt;br&gt;• Observations&lt;br&gt;• Interdisciplinary projects</td>
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<td>Indicator</td>
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| **3.4**   | System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success. | • Curriculum maps  
• Accreditation Report  
• Supervision and evaluation procedures  
• Peer or mentoring opportunities and interactions  
• Recognition of teachers with regard to these practices  
• Examples of improvements to instructional practices resulting from the evaluation process  
• Interviews  
• Observations | 3.0 |
| **3.5**   | The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels. | • Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees  
• Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings  
• Survey results  
• Professional development funding to promote professional learning communities  
• Interviews  
• Evidence of informal conversations that reflect collaboration about student learning  
• Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration  
• Accreditation Report | 3.0 |
| **3.6**   | Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning. | • Observations  
• Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance  
• Interviews  
• Accreditation Report | 3.0 |
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| 3.7       | Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning. | - Accreditation Report  
- Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to district and school beliefs and values about teaching and learning  
- Records of meetings and informal feedback sessions  
- Observations  
- Interviews  
- Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff  
- Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices  
- New teacher induction PowerPoint and timeline/checklists, Descriptions of mentoring programs, Content teacher leaders. | 3.0 |
| 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. | - Performance-based report cards  
- Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance  
- Observations  
- Survey results  
- Accreditation Report  
- Parental/family/caregiver involvement plan including activities, timeframes, and evaluation process  
- Interviews  
- Title I compacts, After School Program Handbook, Study Island, Stakeholder interviews, Interviews with school-based teams, Parent surveys, Parent suggestion surveys, College nights. | 4.0 |
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| 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. | - Accreditation Report  
- Description of formalized structures for adults to advocate on behalf of students  
- Interviews  
- Master schedule with time for formalized structure  
- Description of high school IF time, After school program in elementary schools | 3.0 |
| 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. | - Interviews  
- Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices  
- Sample communications to stakeholders about grading and reporting  
- Accreditation Report  
- Sample report cards for each program or grade level and for all courses and programs  
- Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting  
- Sample standards based report card | 3.0 |
| 3.11      | All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning. | - Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs  
- Crosswalk between professional learning and district purpose and direction  
- Accreditation Report  
- Interviews  
- Professional development calendar, Content focus specialist meeting, Content leader meetings, Enrollment list for professional development, Data rooms and walls, Data binders with listed activities. | 2.0 |
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<td>3.12</td>
<td>The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.</td>
<td>- Schedules, lesson plans, or example student learning plans showing the implementation of learning support services - Interviews - Accreditation Report - Observations - Response to Intervention discussion with special education specialist, guidance counselors at schools</td>
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**Powerful Practices**

1. Newton County School System has unique partnerships with parents and other community stakeholders who support the vision and mission of the school system through meaningful participation in the education of children.

   Based on the system’s overview, an interview with Superintendent Fuhrey, stakeholder interviews, and school-based interviews with leadership teams, it is well demonstrated that multiple stakeholder partnerships and parent engagement events are present at both the district and school levels. Stakeholder partnerships include Covington–Newton County Chamber of Commerce, Newton Medical Center, City of Covington, Wells Fargo, Newton Education Foundation, and many others. Parent event activities include an Education Summit, five Title 1 events for every Title 1 school, elementary honor roll ceremonies and academic trainings, high school parent nights, parent college nights and school councils. Parents have multiple options for communication modes with their child’s school. The stakeholders, parents, and school staff spoke highly of the school system and the opportunities available to serve the students of Newton County.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

1. Improve the coordination of learning support services to meet the unique needs for all of the students.

   School-based officials, stakeholders, and school-based leadership teams made reference to the need to increase services for all students specifically for the gifted and students in the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. District level officials, when interviewed referred to the need to revise the RTI data collection process and to streamline the paperwork for the system. Interviews with stakeholders and school-based leadership teams indicated the need to increase the services and teacher certification for the gifted students including students with unique artistic abilities.
Standard 4: The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.

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 30,000 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. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

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<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Accreditation Report</td>
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<td>District budgets or financial plans for the last three years</td>
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<td>District quality assurance procedures for monitoring qualified staff across all schools</td>
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<td>School budgets or financial plans for last three years</td>
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<td>Interviews</td>
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<td>Assessments of staffing needs</td>
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<td>Documentation of highly qualified staff</td>
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<td>Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for the district and schools</td>
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<td>Teacher training PowerPoint, Teacher evaluation training materials, Leadership evaluation training materials</td>
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<td>Performance Level</td>
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| 4.2       | 3.0              | - Observations
- Examples of school schedules
- District quality assurance procedures showing district oversight of schools pertaining to school resources
- Accreditation Report
- Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources
- Interviews
- Alignment of school budgets with school purpose and direction
- Alignment of district budget with district purpose and direction
- End-of-year checklist, Budget analysis reports, NCSS Annual Financial Report including independent auditor's report, Public Forum Budget Reduction agenda |
| 4.3       | 3.0              | - Interviews
- Observations
- Accreditation Report
- Example systems for school maintenance requests
- Survey results
- Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements
- School safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes
- Example school records of depreciation of equipment
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<td>4.4</td>
<td>The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.</td>
<td>- District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities, learning environments&lt;br&gt;- Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments&lt;br&gt;- Accreditation Report&lt;br&gt;- Observations&lt;br&gt;- System Support Team Checklist</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.</td>
<td>- Observations&lt;br&gt;- Survey results&lt;br&gt;- Interviews&lt;br&gt;- Accreditation Report&lt;br&gt;- Data on media and information resources available to students and staff&lt;br&gt;- High school program planning guide, After School Academic Program (ASAP) Evaluation Report 2013, Media services Policy and Procedure Manual, Rethinking Technology in a 21st Century Education PowerPoint handout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Source of Evidence</td>
<td>Performance Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4.6 | **The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.**  
- Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model  
- Policies relative to technology use at the district-level and school-level  
- Survey results  
- District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level  
- Accreditation Report  
- Interviews  
- Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness  
- Observations  
- Internet Acceptable Use Board Policy, Satisfaction Survey results by school, Technology survey results by schools, Descriptions of the Learning Management System | 4.0 |
| 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.**  
- Interviews  
- Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support  
- Survey results  
- Accreditation Report  
- Benchmark results by school/content area, Nursing assignments, Student registration checklist, Residency statement, Admission forms, Rights for homeless, Crisis intervention team flowchart | 3.0 |
### Powerful Practices

1. Newton County School System utilizes a structured process to recruit, employ, acclimate and retain staff who have the skills, knowledge, and commitment to the system’s mission and vision.

   The human resources of the system are deployed and supported to maximize student learning through the employment of qualified administrators, teachers, and support staff. The system has a 99.84% highly qualified rate.

   Candidates for employment are selected based on their qualifications and their commitment to the system’s mission and vision. Teacher assignments are based on their training and experience in the assigned subject. Through its teacher induction program, professional development and support is provided to teachers who are new to Newton County School System.

   Administrators are certified for the positions they hold and have the leadership skills and experience to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. The system uses an evaluation process to assess the performance of personnel, to identify strengths and areas of improvement, and to provide professional development to engage the staff in continuous improvement of their performance.

2. The system has made a commitment to providing technology at all levels and to support, manage, train, and use technology to improve the performance of students and staff members through the implementation of instructional technology in the classrooms.

   Observations of the classrooms provided evidence of a variety of technology available in the classrooms and in the hands of teachers and students.

   The system’s modern, fully functional technology infrastructure is considered to be a model. Highly trained technical support is provided at the system level and at the school level through site-based technology leaders.

   The process of planning, securing equipment and software, and employing adequate staff to manage technology has all the components to successfully implement and achieve the goals of the system. A 3-year technology plan is in place to continuously improve technology services, infrastructure, and equipment.
Standard 5: 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.

Systems 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **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. | • Examples of data used to measure the effectiveness of the district systems that support schools and learning  
• Accreditation Report  
• List of data sources related to district effectiveness  
• Survey results  
• Examples of changes to the district strategic plan based on data results  
• Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning  
• Interviews  
• List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning  
• PowerPoints from meetings to illustrate student achievement, School improvement plans, Lexile scores | 3.0 |
| **5.3**   | Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data. | • Accreditation Report  
• Documentation of attendance and training related to data use  
• Interviews  
• Standards overview | 2.0 |
| **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. | • Interviews  
• Accreditation Report  
• Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data  
• Evidence of student readiness for the next level  
• Evidence of student growth  
• Evidence of student success at the next level  
• CCRPI reports for 2012 and 2013 | 3.0 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>Performance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Accreditation Report, Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals, Examples of district marketing tools and websites that cite student achievement results or that make promises regarding student achievement, Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Opportunities for Improvement**

1. Revise the 5-year Strategic Plan to include timelines to aid in the implementation and monitoring of the numerous strategies listed in the plan.

The system has identified 2 non-negotiable goals aligned with its mission and vision - increased student achievement and more effective teaching. To target these goals, objectives and key initiatives have been identified to address research based instructional strategies, building background knowledge, technology integration, and the use of highly effective professional learning communities. A total of 40 "objectives" have been set and 62 "key initiatives." Without a timeline for implementation of the key initiatives, it is not clear which have been previously implemented, which are currently being implemented, and which are a focus for upcoming years. Revising the Strategic Plan to include timelines can ensure that key initiatives are implemented, monitored, and evaluated in order of priority.
Learning Environment

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

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External Review Team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a four-point scale. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the seven learning environments included in ELEOT.
Student Performance

Student Performance on assessments is the second of three primary areas of evaluation for AdvancED’s Performance Accreditation model. Institutions are asked to collect and analyze student performance data, then submit the data and the analyses to the External Review Team for review. The External Review Team evaluates the quality of the assessments used by the institution, the degree to which the institution properly administered the assessments, analyzed and acted on the results, and the overall performance of students using a set of rubrics. Results of that evaluation are reported below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Performance Evaluation</th>
<th>Evaluative Criteria</th>
<th>Performance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Quality</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Administration</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Learning</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity of Learning</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholder Feedback is the third of three primary areas of evaluation in AdvancED’s Performance Accreditation model. The AdvancED surveys are directly correlated to the AdvancED Accreditation 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 and the degree to which the institution analyzed and acted on the results. Results of that evaluation are reported below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Feedback Evaluation</th>
<th>Evaluative Criteria</th>
<th>Performance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire Administration</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Institution Results

AdvancED requires internal and external stakeholders from each individual institution within the system to evaluate their institution on the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools, student performance, and stakeholder feedback. The following table provides the results of those self-analyses. Higher scores indicate higher perceived performance on each of the measures. The range of possible scores for each of the institutions within the system are 1 (low performing) to 4 (high performing).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Indicator Averages</th>
<th>Questionnaire Administration</th>
<th>Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis</th>
<th>Assessment Quality</th>
<th>Test Administration</th>
<th>Quality of Learning</th>
<th>Equity of Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcovy High School</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>Clements Middle School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cousins Middle School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Newton Elementary School</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastside High School</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairview Elementary School</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint Hill Elementary School</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard-Mixon Elementary School</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indian Creek Middle School</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberty Middle School</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Live Oak Elementary</td>
<td>3.55</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Livingston Elementary School</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mansfield Elementary School</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Ridge Elementary School</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<td>Newton College and Career Academy</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newton High School</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oak Hill Elementary School</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Indicator Averages</td>
<td>Questionnaire Administration</td>
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<td>Assessment Quality</td>
<td>Test Administration</td>
<td>Quality of Learning</td>
<td>Equity of Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Porterdale Elementary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rocky Plains Elementary School</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Newton Elementary School</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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Part II: Conclusion

Summary of the External Review

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

The External Review team visited Newton County School System on March 23-26, 2014. After introductions on Sunday evening in the hotel conference room, the team held an orientation meeting to review the schedule for the next 3 days and to discuss initial assessments of the information provided in the system's Accreditation Report. Following the orientation meeting, the team enjoyed dinner with the superintendent and deputy superintendent. After dinner, the team continued its work reviewing artifacts, discussing indicator ratings, and preparing for stakeholder interviews.

On Monday, March 24, system leaders and staff made presentations to provide an overview of the district and a report on the standards. The superintendent and other system personnel were well prepared to present information and to address questions. Throughout the day, team members interviewed the superintendent, 52 system-level and school-level administrators, 5 board members, 7 support staff, and 18 parent and community stakeholders. Team members found their questions were answered openly and candidly. During a working dinner Monday night in the hotel conference room, the team perused a plethora of artifacts, engaged in a second round of indicator ratings with collaborative input, and prepared for school visits the following day.

On Tuesday, March 25, team members visited 2 elementary, 2 middle and 2 high schools to interview their leadership teams and to conduct classroom observations using AdvancED's Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT). A total of 62 ELEOT observations were conducted by the review team to identify observable evidence of classroom environments that are conducive to learning. Upon returning to the hotel, the team members entered ELEOT observation data in ASSIST, discussed findings and indicator ratings, and identified potential powerful practices, opportunities for improvement, and required actions in support of the system's commitment to continuous improvement.

By Wednesday, March 26, the External Review team was comfortable identifying actions and opportunities for system improvement and recognizing practices employed by the system that support student achievement and organizational effectiveness. The team completed final indicator ratings to compute the Index of Educational Quality, entered data on the Team Workspace in ASSIST, wrote narrative summaries of each standard, and prepared the exit report. The lead evaluator met with the superintendent and deputy superintendent to report the team's findings. The review concluded with the exit report delivered to the board during an official meeting.

In summary, the External Review for Newton County School System was well planned and coordinated. Arrangements for the team's hotel accommodations, ground transportation, technology needs, and meals were in place. Artifacts were available in electronic and hard copy format prior to and during the review. System administrators and school-based personnel were gracious in their interactions with the team and readily provided information and assistance. Board members made special efforts to be available for interviews despite work and...
personal responsibilities.

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

During the review, the team engaged in lengthy discussions regarding the degree to which Newton County School System meets AdvancED accreditation standards and indicators in application of policies and daily operation. Several themes emerged across the standards.

Newton County School System has established a clear mission and vision that serve as a screen for all decision making. During interviews stakeholders consistently expressed understanding and ownership of the system’s mission, vision, and goals. Teachers, building-level administrators, and system leaders demonstrated a commitment to the non-negotiable goals of increased student achievement and more effective teaching. The community benefits from the vast use of technological resources (e.g., Twitter feeds, Infinite Campus Reports, school messengers) allocated to support the system’s mission and vision and recognized by stakeholders as powerful communication tools that support system expectations.

The system’s mission to "provide educational excellence for all students," was displayed in numerous places throughout the system and was included in handbooks, communications to students and parents, and on system and school websites. The system’s vision statement supports the system’s mission. The team noted that system leadership by the board and central office staff provides stability and functions effectively. Following interviews, the team concluded that Newton County School System has a unique partnership with parents and other community stakeholders who support the mission and vision of the system.

System staff is engaged in the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards and Georgia Performance Standards using locally developed curriculum maps, common assessments, and benchmark assessments. Data from multiple sources are used to determine areas of strengths and areas of improvement and to implement programs to further meet the needs and challenges of students. In interviews several system leaders outlined the different steps they are using to implement programs based on data that is reviewed on a continuous basis. Although the system focuses on using data to drive instruction at the administrative level, efforts must continually be assessed and monitored at the classroom level to ensure best practices are being utilized. Through 62 classroom observations using AdvancED's Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT), it became evident that utilization of data to differentiate instructional practices to meet the needs of all students occurs sporadically. Ongoing professional development for all teachers and support staff in the disaggregation and utilization of data to drive instructional practices in the classroom will positively impact student achievement. Dialogue centered on defining differentiated instruction as well as the implementation of other research-based instructional strategies can serve as a foundation for teacher training.

The system has clearly developed expectations for a safe, clean, and healthy learning environment and utilizes resources to support those expectations. One parent stated, "When I drop my children off at school, I do not worry about them during the day. I know they are safe at school." Parents noted that many administrators are on duty and measures are in place to ensure stakeholders are safe at school events. Not only is it evident that the system aligns their fiscal resources to provide clean, safe facilities, it is also evident that the system supports the learning environment by purchasing emerging technologies and other instructional materials. The system clearly has a technology infrastructure to support the learning needs of students and address the needs of the district. Newton
County School System is considered to be a model in the area of technological progress.

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

The review team visited six schools in Newton County to collect data using AdvancED’s Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT). Sixty-two classrooms were observed across 2 elementary, 2 middle, and 2 high schools. Using data from these observations, the team evaluated the quality of instruction and learning classified around seven constructs or environments: equity, high expectations, support, engagement, progress monitoring and feedback, management, and use of technology.

Well-managed and supportive learning environments were noted at all grade levels and received the highest overall ratings on ELEOT with 3.57 and 3.51. Students interacted respectfully with teachers and peers, followed classroom rules and routines, transitioned smoothly during change of activities, and demonstrated positive attitudes. Students received support and feedback to further their understanding of content and to ensure successful accomplishment of tasks.

During interviews with stakeholders, the team was informed of the committed nature of school administrators and teachers to address students’ educational needs. The overall ELEOT rating of 3.04 for equitable learning environment reflects this commitment. Students have equal access to resources and support and equal access to participate in discussions and activities. The team did note, however, that in many of the classrooms observed, students were not provided with differentiated learning opportunities and activities (ELEOT rating 2.24). An increased focus on differentiated instruction can enhance the system’s efforts to further student achievement.

During school visits and classroom observations, the team saw evidence that the school system is supportive of the instructional program. Teachers are provided numerous resources and a variety of technological tools to enhance instruction across all grade levels. The school system has invested in a technology-rich learning environment that includes interactive boards, classroom computers, and electronic response devices for individual students. Based upon ELEOT observations, however, the digital learning environment rated lowest at 2.70. Although students and teachers were observed using technology at all grade levels, few students were observed using technology to conduct research, solve problems, or create original work. Likewise, students were not observed using technology tools to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning.

Newton County School System is commended for its hard work in assessing its effectiveness through the AdvancED process. The strengths and areas cited for improvement in the system’s Accreditation Report establish a foundation for building a bright future for the system and its students. The External Review team offers thanks to all of the staff for their open and honest responses to its questions and to the schools for welcoming team members for classroom observations. The team appreciates that the system was well prepared for the review and that the technology necessary for the review team to complete its work was provided.

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 criteria. Beginning with
school year, 2013-14, AdvancED is introducing a new framework to describe the result of an accreditation review.

Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduces an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ). The IEQ is comprised of three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; 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.

The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and Indicators; the Analysis of Student Performance; and the Engagement and Involvement of Stakeholders. Within each domain institutions will be able to 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 can be a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Required Action as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected Indicator.

The IEQ provides a new framework that recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement. Your institution's IEQ is the starting point for continuous improvement. Your actions for improvement that have a positive impact will be reflected in your IEQ score.

IEQ Institutional Score: 312

Teaching and Learning Impact: 305
(Standards 3 and 5; Student Performance Criteria)

Leadership Capacity: 317
(Standards 1 and 2; Stakeholder Engagement Criteria)

Resource Utilization: 325
(Standard 4)

The External Review team recommends that Newton County School System be accredited by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission for a five-year term of accreditation
Required Action

1. Develop and implement a rigorous, continuous program of professional development that is aligned with the system’s vision and mission to ensure that all professional and support staff are adequately trained.

   Related Indicator or Assurance: 3.11

   Description:
   System level personnel noted there is no formal process in place for data training in the district. Evidence was not provided to show a formalized, long-term plan for professional development. Instead the evidence shows professional learning communities (PLCs) for training of building-level principals and content specialists. All local schools and the district office present a data room; however, without a planned program to train all staff, efforts may or may not address the needs of the system or build capacity among staff members. To be effective, professional learning should be rigorously and systematically monitored and evaluated. Attention to professional development in Standard 3 is directly linked to the review team’s concerns in Standard 5, Indicator 5.3.

2. Design and implement a plan to ensure all professional and support staff are trained to evaluate, analyze, interpret, and use data to further the purpose and direction of the system.

   Related Indicator or Assurance: 5.3

   Description:
   The district has high expectations of school personnel to maintain and use data in multiple ways, including data notebooks, data walls, and data rooms. Individuals are expected to analyze and use data to adjust instruction to meet the needs of their students. The capacity to effectively use data would be greatly enhanced if all professional and support staff were trained in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data through a systematic professional development program as noted by system personnel in the standards overview. Skillful analysis of data is critical for determining verifiable improvement in student achievement and instructional and organizational effectiveness.
Part III: Addenda

The External Review Team

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Reviewer:
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Mrs. Linda Pratt
Next Steps

The institution should:

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

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

About AdvancED

In 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), both founded in 1895, 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 joined NCA CASI and SACS CASI as part of AdvancED. AdvancED is the world's largest education community, representing 30,000 public and private schools and systems across the United States and in 75 countries worldwide and educating 16 million students.

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

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