Report of the
External Review Team
for
Alabaster City Schools

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AdvancED®

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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

The Alabaster City Schools External Review Team convened at 4:00 pm on Sunday afternoon, September 20, 2015 in a converted workroom in the only hotel in Alabaster, Alabama. System personnel had made appropriate arrangements with the hotel for a very comfortable stay for the Team. Internet access proved to be a challenge at the hotel but the Lead Evaluator from out-of-state and the in-state Associate Lead Evaluator (ALE) had made sufficient plans before the Review to deal with this challenge. The Team was comprised of these two Team members, two resident Alabama Team members and one member from Florida.

Previous to the Sunday afternoon meeting in Alabaster, the Team utilized the AdvancED Team Workspace to share AdvancED documents, tools, system documents and the Accreditation Reports. The Alabama Continuous Improvement Plans (ACIP), the newly constructed system strategic plan, and an extensive array of documents and evidences provided by the system had been reviewed by the Team. The Team met via conference call to establish Team assignments and responsibilities, discuss the evidence and artifacts available at the time, and establish Team processes that were utilized throughout the preparations and the Review.

The system leadership which included the superintendent, central office directors and school principals

participated in a brief "meet-and-greet" with the External Review Team at the hotel on Sunday evening which served to establish rapport between the Team and system personnel that was ongoing throughout the visit. The Team noted the close camaraderie, trust, professional respect and openness the system personnel shared. This same closeness was noted among school personnel throughout the visit. After the meeting the Team continued team building processes and preparations for the next day at the central office.

On Monday, the Team was transported to the Alabaster City Hall for a day of meeting with central office personnel, system stakeholders and school principals. The city hall facility is shared between the system administration and the city of Alabaster at the current time. One of the challenges cited by system personnel is the building and facilities acquired at the separation of Alabaster City Schools from the surrounding district school system two years earlier. This division left the system with limited appropriate space for the system administration offices and work spaces. The city made the agreement with the school system to share their new city hall facility which also houses courtroom facilities. This facility opened in 2013. The challenges of this arrangement were noted by the Team but this also confirmed how system personnel are committed to conserving school space for teaching and learning.

The Monday meetings, interviews and the examination of artifacts and evidences took place smoothly and efficiently according to the schedule agreed upon by the Team and system personnel. At the end of the workday the Team was transported back to the hotel for dinner and the work sessions planned for the evening.

All schools in the system were visited on Tuesday, the eleot™ observations were conducted as well as interviews with students, teachers and school personnel. The school visits were notable because of the very consistent focus on high quality teaching and learning. Teachers echoed the sentiment of stakeholders interviewed: "We want our students to be the best!"

At the end of the day, the Team returned to the hotel for data entry, dinner and the evening work session. When the Team began the data entry on the eleot™ observations internet connections were repeatedly dropped. While hotel personnel worked closely with the Team to solve the problems, the connectivity issues remained throughout the evening. The eleot observations were finally completed and the Team enjoyed another dinner supplied by local restaurants and facilitated by system personnel. The work session continued in order to share data among the Team and across the Standards and to complete the final round of Indicator ratings. Again connectivity was a challenge but the experienced Team Members complete the tasks of the evening.

The Team was transported on Wednesday morning to the central office for breakfast and the scheduled day of work. The work sessions continued through lunch and concluded with the Exit Report presented to the school board and local stakeholders in the afternoon. The Exit Report was attended by the entire school board, central office and school personnel.

The Alabaster City Schools Review Team extends their thanks to all personnel for their generous hospitality and for their concerted, thorough efforts on their Internal Review. The quality of the External Review is

indicative of how the system involves stakeholders in their processes and guides all to work in harmony for the good of their students. In only their third year of existence as a system since their separation from the larger school district, system personnel exhibit significant camaraderie, unity, sense of purpose and focus on student performance. Their efforts have been rewarded by recent significant increases in student performance.

The range of surveys conducted by the system in conjunction with the External Review included the required AdvancED surveys and the results corroborate the high levels of stakeholder involvement and support for the system. The excitement for their accreditation and their recent and future growth was contagious, particularly at the school level. Personnel across the system voiced their belief in the accreditation process as a tool to guide their growth. A notable level of alignment and common practices was noted among the schools that belied their youth as a system, this finding supported by conversations with school personnel during visits to the schools.

Eleot™ scores from the classroom observations corroborate the strength of school level practices supporting learning. School personnel pointed to the central office personnel: "One of our major strengths is in the support we receive from the central office - they are always ready to help us when we call . . . the hands-on support they provide," stated one teacher. A parent stated during the Monday interviews with stakeholders: "I believe in what they are doing . . . I mean the Superintendent, the board, and the central office. I believe it will only get better."

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	22
Instructional Staff	53
Support Staff	3
Students	57
Parents/Community/Business Leaders	14
Total	**155**

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.	2.80	2.68
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	2.50
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	3.00	2.55
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	3.00	2.73
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	3.00	2.57
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	3.00	2.48
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	3.00	2.60

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.	3.00	2.92
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.	2.00	2.40
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.	3.00	2.53
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	3.00	2.64
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	2.80	2.66

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.	3.00	2.66
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.	3.00	2.41
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	2.20	2.15
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.	3.00	2.46
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.	3.00	2.72

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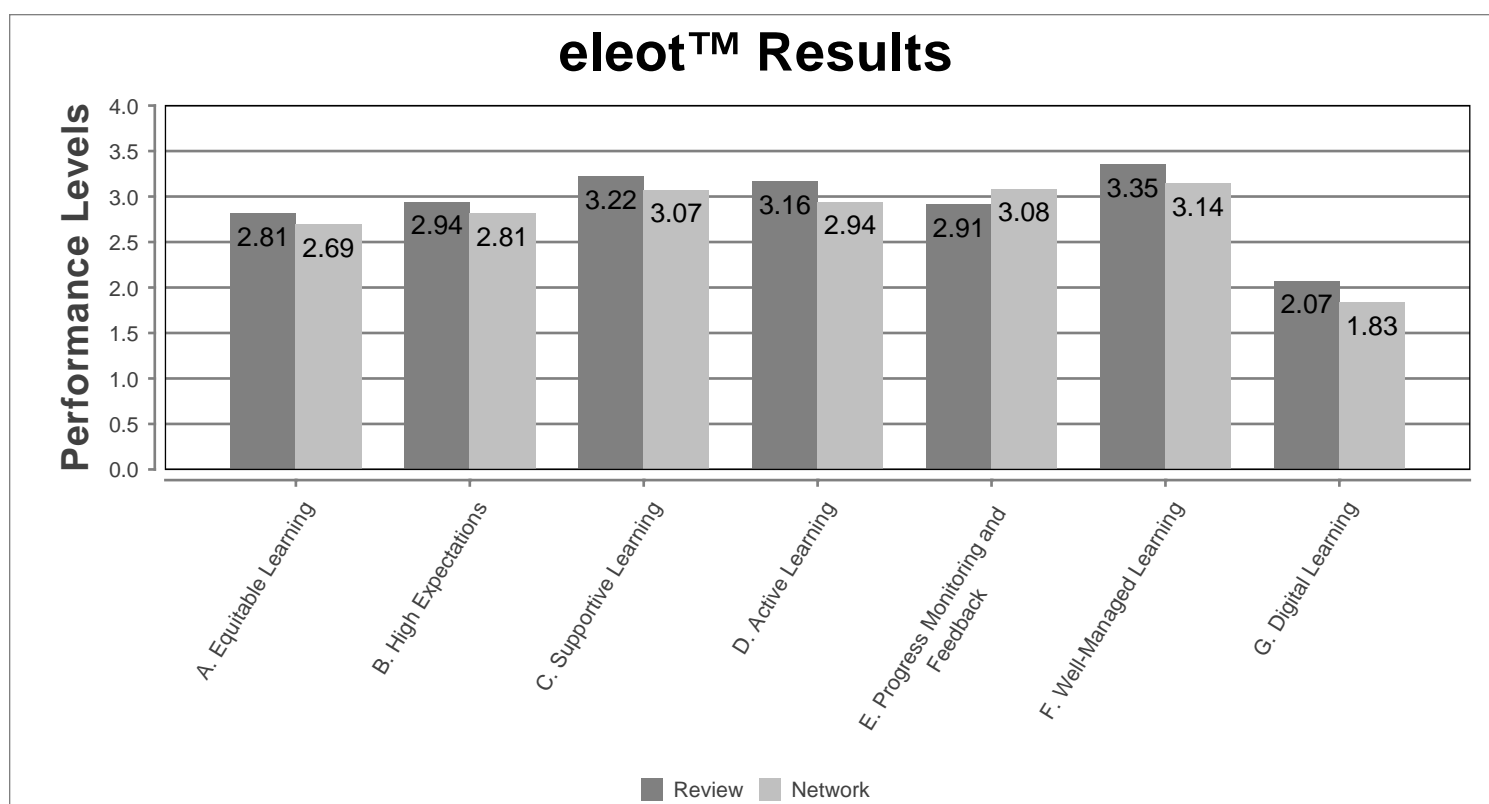
learning, and closing gaps in achievement among subpopulations of students are all important indicators for evaluating overall student performance.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Assessment Quality	4.00	3.28
Test Administration	4.00	3.50
Equity of Learning	2.00	2.44
Quality of Learning	3.00	2.97

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.

eleot™ Results

Performance Levels

Environment	Review	Network
A. Equitable Learning	2.81	2.69
B. High Expectations	2.94	2.81
C. Supportive Learning	3.22	3.07
D. Active Learning	3.16	2.94
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback	2.91	3.08
F. Well-Managed Learning	3.35	3.14
G. Digital Learning	2.07	1.83

■ Review   ■ Network

A total of fifty-four eleot™ observations and a number of informal walk-through observations were conducted in all of the schools of the system. Team members interviewed fifty-three teachers, fifty-seven students and three support staff while at the schools. The observations and interviews on Tuesday greatly broadened the understanding of the system and how it provides the education processes for students..

The eleot™ observations resulted in a system picture of thoughtful deliberate instruction delivered to students for acquisition of knowledge and skills. Students were often involved in teacher-led class discussions and strove to meet the expectations of the teachers, responding to the teachers and their peers in a positive, respectful manner. Student engagement most often involved individual written or oral responses to questions or tasks that were presented to them. While many instances of hands-on learning, higher-order thinking activities and small group work were noted, eleot™ scores indicate room for improvement in these areas. Technology that was actually utilized by the students was noted in the observations. Classroom management was not an issue in any of the classes since teachers are proactive and utilize their experience and relationships with the students to keep them engaged.

The classroom visits were conducted across the system in core classrooms as well as elective courses per the AdvancED observation protocol. The seven learning environments were observed and results tallied to produce a snapshot of the school's learning environment. The eleot™ averages for six of the seven domains are slightly above the AdvancED Network (AEN) scores and are described below. The AEN score provides a basis for comparison between the school's scores and those of similar institutions accredited by AdvancED.

The Equitable Learning Environment scored 2.81 compared to the AEN score of 2.69.

This score confirms that students have equal access to classroom instruction and activities and know that behavioral expectations are fair and consistently applied. The score reflects the commendable behavior, on-task behaviors and engagement levels the Team observed in classrooms. A strength in this environment is the equal access to activities, instruction and support enjoyed by students.   A low indicator for this environment concerns opportunities for students to learn about other students in the classrooms, their cultures and differences.

The High Expectations Environment scored 2.94 in comparison to the AEN score of 2.81

The Team observed that students know and strive to meet the high expectations established by the teacher and are tasked with activities and learning that are attainable. A student told an observer: "He always makes learning fun. We get to work in groups a lot, but we still have to look up stuff on our own."

Many engaging discussions were witnessed that challenged student knowledge and thinking, but this score could have been higher had teachers consistently provided examples of the work they expect and moved more away from teacher-centered learning activities to increase the rigor and higher order thinking. Learning tasks and responding to questioning that require higher order thinking (e.g., applying, evaluating, synthesizing) is a definite area for improvement as well.

The Supportive Learning Environment score of 3.22 is above the AEN of 3.06.

Students are very positive about the learning experiences in their classrooms. Classrooms exhibited high rates of on-task behaviors and engagement even in those where instruction was more traditional. Additional or alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge to meet learning needs scored lowest

in this environment. Though students are attentive and rise to the expectations of the teachers, monitoring of individual progress and providing individual assistance could be improved.

The Active Learning Environment score of 3.16 is above the AEN of 2.94.

The stronger indicators on active engagement in discussions and activities are evident in this environment. Teachers facilitate some opportunities to make connections between learning and students' lives but this is an area for improvement in instructional strategies. The Team noted the free-flow of comfortable conversations among students as well as between students and teachers that could easily evolve into more connections with students' lives and experiences.

The Well-Managed Learning Environment scored 3.35 compared to 3.13 on the AEN.

Speaking and interacting respectfully with teachers and peers scored high along with following classroom rules and working well with others. These scores are high because of the high expectations and culture that are consistently maintained throughout the schools of the system. Within this domain are also indicators on classroom transitions that are smoothly and efficiently executed and collaboration with other students during student-centered activities, both of which scored lower. Simply stated, fewer classroom transitions were observed because learning activities tend toward large group and teacher-centered. Student collaboration is most often large group discussion which affords minimal opportunity for quality collaboration. Many examples of small group student collaboration were observed in various formats that could be shared among the classroom professionals in the system. It should be noted again that this Environment scored above the AEN.

The Digital Learning Environment score of 2.07 is below the AEN of 1.82

This AEN score across accredited institutions appears low because educators everywhere are struggling to learn what their students can do instinctively- utilize digital tools/technology in learning processes. The 2.07 score is a commendable score and indicates the progress the system is making in technology-supported teaching and learning.

A number of instances were observed in which technology was being used though mainly in large group, display fashion, to communicate and work collaboratively for learning. The use of personal electronic devices such as smartphones and other personal electronic devices was found in a surprising number of classrooms supporting effective learning activities. This indicates the willingness of teachers to integrate technology into their teaching and learning practices. However, room for growth is apparent using digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, to create original works for learning, support differentiation and higher order learning tasks, and to facilitate collaboration and communication to provide highly productive learning situations.

In one classroom the teacher provided exemplars for students who were creating their own poetry. The assignment was given after the students completed the reading of a novel. The author was a fiction writer who had a very distinctive style of writing. The teacher distributed exerpts from the novels to students, each

student given a sheet from the novel to assist in creating his/her own original poem. Students were instructed to use a marker to "get rid" of the words they did not want to have included in their poem. Students could use their creativity in designing their poem by creating an object to complement their poetry, keeping in mind the style of the writer as they created their poetry.

In an elementary classroom most students used their personal Smartphones to research possible solutions to problems presented by the teacher. Those who did not have their own device were provided with iPads from the classroom stash of technology that seemed to be available in most classrooms. Given the ease and familiarity with which students utilized their technologies, the high levels of on-task behaviors (students utilized their technology as instructed) and with which the teacher guided the learning processes, this seemed to be a very common occurrence.

Eleot™ classroom observations confirm that there is an environment of caring and mutual respect between the classroom teachers and students that is pervasive across the system. Students generally enter the classrooms in an orderly fashion and are aware of what is expected of them when they arrive. Teachers greet students upon arrival and utilize a minimum amount of time to complete the routine daily items such as taking attendance. Although the Team noted a limited number of exemplars in the classrooms visited, teachers commonly provided generalized feedback in large group as assignments were reviewed with students. A number of instances were observed of teachers providing individualized review and feedback on assignments though this was not observed to be a systemic practice.

The following eleot™ data summary provides a breakdown of average scores in each of the seven learning environments as well as for each Indicator. The Team discussed how effectively the strong scores in each environment identified strong classroom practices that have kept student and system performance at strong levels. These practices should be clearly defined, strengthened, and used as models for improvement. At the same time, the lower Indicator scores clearly identify areas for improvement that, when addressed through systemic alignment and improvement processes, will provide improvement across the spectrum of Indicators.

eleot™ Data Summary

A. Equitable Learning				%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**		**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	2.72	Has differentiated learning opportunities and activities that meet her/his needs		31.48%	27.78%	22.22%	18.52%
2.	3.30	Has equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support		35.19%	61.11%	1.85%	1.85%
3.	2.94	Knows that rules and consequences are fair, clear, and consistently applied		27.78%	53.70%	3.70%	14.81%
4.	2.30	Has ongoing opportunities to learn about their own and other's backgrounds/cultures/differences		25.93%	22.22%	7.41%	44.44%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.81							

B. High Expectations				%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**		**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	3.26	Knows and strives to meet the high expectations established by the teacher		27.78%	70.37%	1.85%	0.00%
2.	3.17	Is tasked with activities and learning that are challenging but attainable		29.63%	57.41%	12.96%	0.00%
3.	2.50	Is provided exemplars of high quality work		35.19%	14.81%	14.81%	35.19%
4.	2.93	Is engaged in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks		22.22%	50.00%	25.93%	1.85%
5.	2.85	Is asked and responds to questions that require higher order thinking (e.g., applying, evaluating, synthesizing)		27.78%	37.04%	27.78%	7.41%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.94							

C. Supportive Learning			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	3.37	Demonstrates or expresses that learning experiences are positive	37.04%	62.96%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	3.31	Demonstrates positive attitude about the classroom and learning	31.48%	68.52%	0.00%	0.00%
3.	3.20	Takes risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	42.59%	44.44%	3.70%	9.26%
4.	3.28	Is provided support and assistance to understand content and accomplish tasks	37.04%	53.70%	9.26%	0.00%
5.	2.93	Is provided additional/alternative instruction and feedback at the appropriate level of challenge for her/his needs	27.78%	46.30%	16.67%	9.26%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.22						

D. Active Learning			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	3.20	Has several opportunities to engage in discussions with teacher and other students	35.19%	55.56%	3.70%	5.56%
2.	2.93	Makes connections from content to real-life experiences	35.19%	37.04%	12.96%	14.81%
3.	3.35	Is actively engaged in the learning activities	48.15%	38.89%	12.96%	0.00%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.16						

E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	2.78	Is asked and/or quizzed about individual progress/learning	18.52%	51.85%	18.52%	11.11%
2.	3.19	Responds to teacher feedback to improve understanding	33.33%	51.85%	14.81%	0.00%
3.	3.30	Demonstrates or verbalizes understanding of the lesson/content	37.04%	57.41%	3.70%	1.85%
4.	2.50	Understands how her/his work is assessed	24.07%	31.48%	14.81%	29.63%
5.	2.80	Has opportunities to revise/improve work based on feedback	24.07%	38.89%	29.63%	7.41%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.91						

F. Well-Managed Learning			%			
Item	**Average**	**Description**	**Very Evident**	**Evident**	**Somewhat Evident**	**Not Observed**
1.	3.54	Speaks and interacts respectfully with teacher(s) and peers	53.70%	46.30%	0.00%	0.00%
2.	3.41	Follows classroom rules and works well with others	40.74%	59.26%	0.00%	0.00%
3.	3.43	Transitions smoothly and efficiently to activities	59.26%	31.48%	1.85%	7.41%
4.	2.94	Collaborates with other students during student-centered activities	38.89%	31.48%	14.81%	14.81%
5.	3.44	Knows classroom routines, behavioral expectations and consequences	44.44%	55.56%	0.00%	0.00%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 3.35						

G. Digital Learning				%			
Item	Average	Description		Very Evident	Evident	Somewhat Evident	Not Observed
1.	2.69	Uses digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning		25.93%	42.59%	5.56%	25.93%
2.	1.70	Uses digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning		11.11%	16.67%	3.70%	68.52%
3.	1.83	Uses digital tools/technology to communicate and work collaboratively for learning		16.67%	12.96%	7.41%	62.96%
Overall rating on a 4 point scale: 2.07							

Findings

Improvement Priority

Design and implement a formal, system-wide structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports their educational experience.

(Indicator 3.9)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.9

Evidence and Rationale

As the External Review Team reviewed documentation and held interviews, there was found that no formal, system-wide structure to ensure adult advocacy for all students. There was no master list of student-adult pairings. While schools had many opportunities that facilitated long-term opportunities for relationships and advocacy through these, it was not intentional and formally facilitated to make sure that no student is overlooked.

A formal structure to give school personnel long-term interaction and relationships with individual students will allow them to build strong relationships over time and ensure that no student is left without strong, intentional support by an adult.

Improvement Priority

Develop and implement a plan to ensure that all personnel directly involved in teaching and learning are trained on the interpretation and use of data.

(Indicator 5.2, Indicator 5.3, SF2. Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis, SP2. Test Administration, SP4.

Equity of Learning)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 5.2

Evidence and Rationale
The system Accreditation Report stated that most professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data to guide instruction. Interviews confirmed that most personnel involved in instruction are provided with professional development in this area. Some gaps in this training were identified by the Team during interviews with school level personnel.

The system also identified and the Team confirmed through observations and interviews that the consistent use of multiple data sources to guide improvement is an area in which they should grow.   The Team noted how more focused alignment of data processes and training with the guiding beliefs of the system will support improved student performance.

Data analysis provides a picture of what students know, what they should know, and what can be done to meet their academic needs. With skilled analysis, interpretation and consistent practices in the use of multiple sources of data, all classroom professionals make more informed decisions to positively affect student outcomes.

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	2.62
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.	3.00	2.63
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.	4.00	2.89
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.	3.00	2.61

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	2.95
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	3.60	2.92
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.	3.00	3.12
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	3.00	2.97
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	3.00	2.67

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.	3.00	2.76

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	4.00	3.36
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	3.00	3.04

Findings

Powerful Practice

Alabaster City School System, through a carefully executed process of stakeholder involvement and input, has established a strong culture of high expectations for student success and for the performance of all personnel of the system.

(Indicator 1.1, Indicator 1.3)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 1.3

Evidence and Rationale

During the summer before the system's opening year of 2013, a collaborative stakeholder involvement process to design a logo and a tagline included school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members. After this work the logo and tagline were unveiled at a board meeting. The Accreditation Report stated, "The tagline 'Champions of Our Future' embodied the emotions and desires of the community to create a championship school system." This tagline is visible throughout the buildings of the system and the community.

During the 2014-2015 school year, a strategic planning process was employed to construct mission, beliefs and strategic action steps to guide the system for the next five years Stakeholders involved in this process included teachers, support staff, parents, community members, school board members, city council members, and administrators.   Stakeholder groups met multiple times and community forum events were utilized to make sure all had opportunities to be informed and provide their input.

As a result, the system has developed a strong commitment to shared values and beliefs that are found in the mission and belief statements. The work to consistently communicate these to stakeholders is very visible. School and central office utilize social media and technology to inform stakeholders of activities and constantly communicate the school and system mission for student success.

The strong deliberately established culture of high expectations for student success and for the performance of all personnel will drive performance higher as the system improves processes and programs supporting teaching and learning.

Powerful Practice
The governing body has made a commitment to their system by actively participating in training specific to the roles and responsibilities of school board members.
(Indicator 1.3, Indicator 2.2)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 2.2

Evidence and Rationale
Interviews with board members confirmed that their training in leadership and governance is ongoing with strong commitment from the current board members. Interviews with numerous stakeholder groups indicate that the governing body knows their roles and perform them within the guidelines of their guiding statements and legal roles and responsibilities. The governing body demonstrates a clear instructional focus with consistent communication efforts to maintain a collaborative environment with stakeholders as full partners in productive working relationships.

The system has established a strong culture of caring and concern for student achievement that begins with the superintendent/governing body and permeates each of the schools. A board member stated: Our strength? A robust budget, the local monies and the fact that the community knew what it wanted (when it established the new school system).” Another board member identified their challenge: “. . . the fact that we are a young system and being sure we are getting it right.”

The governing body and central office administrative staff are highly visible in schools in order to promote a collaborative environment which supports the advancement of the system purpose.

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.	3.80	2.92
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	2.93
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	3.00	3.05
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	3.00	2.63

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	2.74
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	2.20	2.54
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	2.66
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	2.60

Findings

Improvement Priority

Develop and implement a process that will guide and ensure the alignment of all system programs, initiatives and operations with the mission, strategic plan and guiding statements of the system.

(Indicator 4.4)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 4.4

Evidence and Rationale

During the 2014-2015 school year, a strategic planning process was implemented that identified the district's mission and beliefs, as well as strategic action steps the district should take in the next five years. This plan described in broad terms the overall goals identified and agreed upon by stakeholders during a commendable stakeholder involvement process. The Accreditation Report describes the myriad of challenges, tasks, programs and the efforts to "establish a district identify" that system personnel have undertaken since then, all while conducting the day-to-day work of the system. Career academies, a self-contained special education program, a credit recovery program and pre-K programs have been added. Planning for reorganization of the schools and central office is well underway. The strategic plan is a very recent step in the progress of the system that began operation as a district in the 2013-14 school year.

It is clear to the Team that all programs and initiatives were established with specific intent though not all guided by the strategic plan and perhaps not by system beliefs and guiding statements simply because the system and the strategic plan are so new. Powerful mission, purpose and belief statements and unifying goals are evident throughout the system in various formats, particularly the tagline "Champions of Our Future."

The External Review Team noted the unity and focus of personnel across the system on making the district work, especially after their visits to the classrooms. A teacher stated: "One of our major strengths is in the

support we receive from the central office – they are always ready to help us when we call . . . the hands on support they provide."   After interviews with system leadership, principals and school personnel, the Team identified the strengths of the highly qualified teaching force and the skilled guidance of central office personnel as key factors in the recent impressive improvements in the graduation rate, successes with at-risk students, increases in ACT Aspire scores, as well as in math and reading scores.

The Team discussed how the improvements in performance will be sustained by the careful examination and alignment of all processes, programs and initiatives with the purpose and direction statements of the system with the focus on increasing student performance. Discussions with system personnel and examination of documents revealed that there is no structured guiding document or plan to draw these together to unite and align all elements of system operations to meet carefully defined expectations. As one Team member stated: "They need to get all the arrows pointing the same way."

The system should maintain their current momentum and intensify systemic focus on improving instruction and increasing student performance by adding measurable goals and action steps to provide specific guidance to the system and schools. Accompanying this plan could be a simple monitoring tool to quickly but systematically evaluate each measure for effectiveness in improving instruction.

System performance will improve and students will benefit from a process that will ensure the alignment of all system programs, initiatives and operations.

Opportunity For Improvement

Revisit the system technology plan and revise as necessary to ensure that it: is aligned with the guiding statements adopted by the system and with the strategic plan, specifies the necessary improvements to the technology infrastructure of the Alabaster City Schools, will provide students and teachers broad opportunities to experience a technology-rich learning environment, and supports continued improvements and expansion of technology capabilities system-wide.
(Indicator 1.4, Indicator 4.6)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 4.6

Evidence and Rationale
Interviews with teachers and parents revealed that teachers and students experienced difficulties when utilizing technology in instructional activities and projects. The perception by these technology users in the system is that as the number of devices being used increases the reliability of connectivity decreases. During classroom visits the Team saw varying levels of technology use from entire classes utilizing personal devices to standard display projection for large group instruction.

The Team heard how, when the system separated from the surrounding district, they were left with decided deficits in their technology infrastructure. With the addition of new technology director it is clear that the system is moving forward quickly to integrate technology supported learning into all classrooms equally. The

Team discussed how important it is that this integration be driven by differentiated instruction, application of knowledge, higher order thinking skills and increased student engagement in learning processes and should be tightly aligned with the guiding statements of the system.

Improvements to the technology infrastructure will allow students to fully utilize technology in their learning experiences and benefit from the advantages of differentiation, collaboration, creativity and thinking skills supported by intentionally embedded technology.

Powerful Practice

The system demonstrates its commitment to the community and to the high quality education of students through the systematic process to recruit and retain highly qualified staff.
(Indicator 3.6, Indicator 4.1)

Primary Indicator
Indicator 4.1

Evidence and Rationale
Evidence provided by the system confirms that the system is able to fill both professional and support staff positions with highly qualified employees. System leadership explained to the Team their efforts to recruit and retain strong teachers and personnel to provide high quality teaching and learning in all schools. Ample system resources provide the means for competitive salaries and benefits to attract and keep high quality personnel. Central office personnel stated that potential new hires come from a significant pool of applicants and undergo a process of interviews by principals and coordinators and a recommendation is forwarded to the superintendent. This recommendation includes the number of applicants for the position and the rationale for why the particular applicant is right for the job. The superintendent then makes the decision to recommend the new hire to the board. Through this process the autonomy of the principal to select the right fit and alignment with system purpose and mission are preserved.

Strong, highly-qualified, motivated certified and support staff strongly support greater student achievement.

Conclusion

The New System

The separation of Alabaster City Schools from the surrounding school district presented challenges and possibilities for the new system including some aging facilities, a lack of office space for central office personnel and the opportunities to redistribute resources and construct learning the way they believe it should be for their students. The system has made commendable progress over a short period of time in updating and maintaining learning spaces for students. An agreement with the city of Alabaster has provided central office space while the plan for reorganization and upgrades for system facilities is completed and implemented.

The formation of the new system took place after a very successful stakeholder involvement process that resulted in strong guidance and support from stakeholders. The system has established a strong culture of high expectations for student success and for the performance of all personnel of the system. While all are very supportive of the guiding statements and the direction of the system, focusing all aspects of system operations on the highest priority, teaching and learning, takes time and maturity as an organization.   "So much so fast" is a statement heard from parents and board members. The system is beginning its third year of operation. Stakeholders strongly support the system and progress made to date though some are concerned about the pace of changes. A board member echoed this concern: "the fact that we are a young system- being sure we are getting it right (is crucial)." The system will benefit from a process that will guide and ensure the alignment of all system programs, initiatives and operations with the Mission, Strategic Plan and guiding statements.

Technology Integration

Significant strides in technology have been made since the new system was left with little classroom technology and with outdated infrastructure. The drive to bring the system fully into 21st Century technology status should be directed by the guiding statements crafted by stakeholders after careful analysis and planning to make sure that every dollar spent and every instructional minute counts.

Strength of the Teaching Force

The system exhibits its commitment to the community and to the high quality education of students through the systematic process to recruit and retain highly qualified professionals for the classrooms. Examples of high quality classroom instruction exist across the system that serve as models for improvement. All students have access to the teacher, discussions, activities and support for their learning needs.

Continued Growth

This report provides "Improvement Priorities" which the External Review Team determined to be next steps in improvement of school and student performance. Additionally, "Powerful Practices" and "Opportunities for

Improvement" provide additional support and guidance toward meeting the Powerful Practices. These "Actions" do not stand alone, but are inter-related to the Opportunities and build on the Powerful Practices in the sense that strengths and improvement in one area support growth in the others, thus empowering the systemic operations supporting continual improvement in student performance. The system has achieved remarkable growth in the short period of their existence. The guidance provided by the External Review Team, particularly Improvement Priority 4.4 on alignment, will assist them in sharpening the focus on system processes on increasing the performance of students.

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:

-   Design and implement a formal, system-wide structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports their educational experience.
-   Develop and implement a plan to ensure that all personnel directly involved in teaching and learning are trained on the interpretation and use of data.
-   Develop and implement a process that will guide and ensure the alignment of all system programs, initiatives and operations with the mission, strategic plan and guiding statements of the system.

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	303.41	278.34
Teaching and Learning Impact	294.29	268.94
Leadership Capacity	321.67	292.64
Resource Utilization	300.00	283.86

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
Creek View Elementary School	319.05	327.27	285.71	315.38
Meadow View Elementary School	319.05	327.27	357.14	328.21
Thompson High School	300.00	300.00	300.00	300.00
Thompson Intermediate School	280.95	309.09	271.43	287.18
Thompson Middle School	295.24	290.91	285.71	292.31
Thompson Sixth Grade Center	333.33	336.36	271.43	323.08

Team Roster

Member	Brief Biography
Dr. Drew Moore	Drew Moore began his teaching career as an elementary music teacher in Shreveport, Louisiana. In 1978 he moved to the middle laboratory school at Northwestern State University adding multiple subjects to his teaching repertoire and began working in accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) which accredited his school. Professional experiences include media director at a residential high school for the gifted in math, science, and performing arts; teaching adjunct for the local university and university laboratory school administrator. Retired after thirty-three years in public and higher education, he now chairs and serves as team member on external review teams at the school, district, distance learning, and corporate level. Drew also serves on the Louisiana State AdvancED/SACS committee and the AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Degrees include: Bachelor of Music Education, Master's in Music, Specialist Degree in Public School Administration and Doctorate in Education Technologies from Northwestern State University in Louisiana and additional graduate work at Memphis State University in Tennessee and Louisiana State University- Shreveport.
Mrs. Charlotte A. Oglesby	Charlotte Oglesby, a retired educator, currently serves AdvancEd as a team member, both for Alabama and out of state teams, and Lead Evaluator for Alabama. She has been serving on review teams since the late 1980's. She received her BS in Elementary Education from Judson College, her Masters of Library Services as well as a higher certificate in Elementary Education from the University of Alabama. She started her career as an elementary teacher in Florida and then moved to Alabama where she completed 44 years. She has taught elementary and middle school students, served as the librarian at the middle school and high school level, and completed her career at the central office as the system technology coordinator for Perry County Schools. While in the schools, she served as school professional development contact, parental involvement chairman, school technology coordinator and Federal Programs contact. She currently serves as night librarian at Marion Military Institute, a member of the Alabama Junior College Association.
Dr. Barbara J Remondini	Dr. Remondini is the Vice President of Operations, Mountain - USA. Prior to this assignment, Barbara served as the Vice President of Accreditation - Public School Systems for AdvancED. From 2010-2013, Dr. Remondini was the Assistant Superintendent in the J.O. Combs Unified School District, San Tan Valley, AZ, where she was responsible for the Human Resources, Curriculum and Instruction, and Professional Development Departments. From 2001 to 2010, Dr. Remondini was the Principal of Brimhall Jr. High in Mesa, AZ. From 1996 to 2001, Dr. Remondini served as the Assistant Principal of Lynn Middle School in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Barbara has taught grades 4-7, specializing in Math and Science. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction and Ph.D. in Educational Administration, all from New Mexico State University. She is currently an adjunct faculty member for Northern Arizona University in the Educational Leadership Department.
Ms. Bobbie R Escalante	Ms. Bobbie Escalante was employed by the School City of Hammond (Indiana) for 36 years. During her tenure she was a classroom teacher for 19 years. In addition to being a classroom teacher, she was the Business department chair, Business Professionals of America sponsor, and speech and debate coach. Ms. Escalante was a professional development coordinator for the Hammond Leadership Academy. She was a middle/high school assistant principal and a middle school principal. Ms Escalante was a guest lecturer at Purdue University North Central. She served for five years on the Indiana AdvancED State Board before retiring and moving to Florida. Ms. Escalante has served as a chair and team member on numerous school and district visitations.

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

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Member	Brief Biography
Mrs. Susan C Gandy	Susan C. Gandy has been associated with AdvancED-SACS for over 20 years. She has taught in the private and pubic schools for 26 plus years and currently teaches kindergarten in Macon County, Alabama. She has been a facilitator, chairperson, associate Lead Evaluator for in-state and out-of-state schools and school district review teams.. Susan is now recognized as an AdvancED Certified Quality Assurance Review Chair. Currently serving as the 2015-2016 Teacher of the Year for her school, Susan was also selected as the 2015-2016 Macon County's School District Teacher of the Year. Serving on the on the Alabama State Council for AdvancED has been a rewarding and enjoyable experience, Susan says.
Dr. Fanchon Muhammad	Dr. Fanchon D. Muhammad currently serves as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for Bessemer City Schools. She received her Bachelor's degree in Journalism from Florida A&M University and a Master's degree in Elementary Education from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She began her career in education as an elementary school teacher where she taught for almost ten years. Her administrative career began as an assistant principal at a K-8 school and an elementary school where she held the positions for eight years. In 2013, she served as an adjunct professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Dr. Muhammad received her Education Specialist degree and Doctorate degrees from Samford University in Birmingham. She is a 2012 graduate of the University of Alabama's Superintendent's Academy and a participant in the 2012 NABSE Aspiring Superintendent's Institute. In addition, Dr. Muhammad was a 2011 participant in the Harvard University Leadership Institute for Superintendents. She has also presented The Desegregation of Birmingham City Schools: A Historical Perspective at the 2013 National Writing Project's Urban Sights Network Conference. She is married to Maurice and is the proud mother of three children.

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

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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