

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

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

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

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

1) Meet the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools. Schools demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.

2) Engage in continuous improvement. Schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose the school is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results).

3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review. Schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, schools host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and recommendations to help the school improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school and a written report detailing the team's recommendations. The school acts on the team's recommendations and submits a progress report two years following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help schools be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

A key aim of the quality assurance review is to verify that the school is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

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

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

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

Using the Report - Acting on the Recommendations. The school uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The NCA CASI/SACS CASI State Office is available to assist schools in addressing the recommendations. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review team visit, the school must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress the school has made on the team's recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school is addressing the recommendations.

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited the St. Michael Parish School in Wheeling, West Virginia on 01/15/2008 - 01/16/2008.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed the Principal, 1 member of the administrative team, 10 students, 9 parents, and 22 teachers. In addition, team members of Advisory Council members and Support staff members were interviewed. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

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

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

Through its examination of the school's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review team identified the following commendations and recommendations.

Commendations

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

- **There is an ongoing commitment to the integration of technology into all curricular areas on a daily basis by providing teachers with resources and training.**

All classrooms have interactive whiteboards for classroom instruction. Teachers are well versed in the integration of technology into the classroom. The school has a well maintained computer lab. There is a full time technology teacher who assists teachers and operates and maintains the computer lab. There is an ongoing technology plan. Each family pays a \$75 technology fee to fund technology upgrades and replacements.

The school must meet the expectations from stakeholders for technology use in the classroom. There is a clear focus on the maintenance of computer equipment that will meet the needs of staff and students.

- **Policies and procedures are in place to allow the effective operation of the school in the areas of school discipline, communications to all stakeholders and safety for staff and students**

The school has an up to date student handbook, safety procedures, and a well established communications network in place. The school utilizes a door buzzer system to prevent unauthorized visitors. The parent community is very satisfied with the school in these three areas as evidenced by the interview process.

Expectations are very high for the school from the parent community. The school has gone to great lengths to ensure that all staff and students are in a safe environment. It communicates exceptionally well to all stakeholders, and maintains very structured disciplinary procedures to ensure that students are on task and follow school rules and regulations.

- **The school has supplemented the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's teacher mentoring program by providing ongoing support for new teachers at the school.**

New teachers are thoroughly versed concerning the high expectation level for teachers that permeates the school. The Diocese provides an initial mentoring program for new teachers. The school assigns each new teacher to a veteran teacher who works with the teachers throughout the year in a program designed to enhance training done by the Diocese.

New teachers often struggle with the rules, regulations, and expectations in a school. The school mentoring program makes new teachers feel comfortable in their position

- **There is a well established school communications network both internally among staff and externally to the parent community.**

The concept of internal teacher Learning Communities provides teachers with the opportunity to support each other, provides articulation through the grades, and provides internal/informal staff development on a continuing basis. The internal school e-mail system provides good communications with staff members and the school administration. The principal operates on an open door policy to meet with staff, students and parents. School newsletters, the school web page, the school Parish structure, provide information about the school on a regular basis. Each teacher maintains their own web page to provide relevant information regarding student assignments and performance expectations.

Many schools believe they communicate well with their stakeholders and find out differently when an onsite visit reveals that there are communications gaps that hinder school progress. In this case, all stakeholders are kept current with all facets of school activities and student performance.

- **There is a strong working relationship between the school staff and the school**

administration.

Teachers are provided with administrative support and resources and respect for their profession by the school leadership team. Teachers are encouraged by the school administration to take risks in implementing innovative teaching methods that may improve student performance. The writing prompt peer to peer best practice submitted with this report is an outstanding example of teachers being encouraged by the administration to be creative in areas identified in the school improvement plan.

In a high performing school it is often difficult to find ways to raise the bar to increase achievement levels. Motivational teaching practices are critical to reach higher levels of achievement. Support from the school administration for innovative teaching practices is present across all grade levels.

- **The Transitional Kindergarten Program is an innovative approach to the placement of students entering the school. The program provides a thorough understanding and assessment of incoming students' ability levels. Moving the kindergarten start date to June 1st has been beneficial to students who need extra time to mature prior to the start of school. The placement process is a wonderful benefit to the school, students, and parents to insure a good start to school for all students regardless of ability level.**

Students entering the school are screened based on their readiness for Kindergarten. Students who are assessed by the school as not being ready for regular kindergarten are placed in a Transitional Kindergarten class geared to their readiness level. Documentation is available to verify placements. A full time teacher is assigned to the Transitional Kindergarten class.

Students entering school for the first time are not all at the same level of readiness. By giving students an extra year of preparation they are able to enter the regular Kindergarten program a year later ready to perform on an equal footing with those students who are developmentally ready for regular Kindergarten. This benefits students who would otherwise begin their school years always behind their classmates.

- **The school maintains a clear and powerful focus on student performance that permeates all levels of the organization.**

As evidenced by statements from stakeholder interviews and through classroom observations, all stakeholders know the school's student performance objectives, are aware of current performance levels, and can articulate what strategies are being implemented to address gaps in performance.

The school has a clearly defined school improvement process in place that concentrates on math and writing which were identified through data analysis as two areas that needed strengthening.

The staff at the school was clearly involved in the identified school improvement process. This has contributed to the school's increased focus on further improving student performance in math and writing in a school that is already high performing by all comparable standards in West Virginia schools both public and private.

Recommendations