

BOARD AGENDA ITEM

December 11, 2012

SUBJECT:

AdvancED Accreditation Progress Report

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Accreditation Progress Report (APR) is a critical component of the AdvancED accreditation process. It engages the district in a detailed review and analysis of the steps it has taken to address the required actions made by the AdvancED Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team. Completing the report helps the district/system focus and reflect on its continuous improvement efforts.

It is the responsibility of the district to address each of the QAR report's required actions within the 5-year term accreditation. Deadlines for completion of the report are based on the district's accreditation status and must be met to maintain accreditation. Some districts may complete multiple reports during the 5-year term to demonstrate that they have fully addressed the required actions.

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATION:

At the conclusion of the 2009 AdvancED Quality Assurance Review (QAR), Aiken County Public Schools began immediately to address the recommendations submitted by the team. Actions included making adjustments to the strategic plan, the five-year facilities plan, and the five-year technology plan. We have also studied our approach to providing instructional services and have moved toward more consistency in delivery for special education students, gifted and talented students, and English language learners; a common curriculum aligned to Common Core State Standards is also being established and implemented district-wide. The details of these actions are included in the Accreditation Progress Report.

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive as information

ATTACHMENT:

AdvancED Accreditation Progress Report

PREPARED BY:

King Laurence
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Accreditation Progress Report

**Aiken County School District
Accreditation Status: Accredited**

Summary

1. Based on the actions taken by your institution to address the required actions provided by the QAR team, what has been the impact on your institution's overall effectiveness?

The QAR Team's report has provided guidance for short-range and long-range planning, which has helped to improve the district's overall effectiveness. The district has used the information from the report to provide direction for committees as they meet and plan to better serve the students of Aiken County. Details of these improvements are included in this report.

2. What would you consider to be challenges that still lie ahead and how do you plan to address those challenges?

The main challenge for the district is overcoming the reduction of state funds, and this has provided the biggest financial obstacle to overcome in meeting the needs of the district's facilities.

In May of 2010, a proposed \$236 million bond referendum failed. The bond was going to address the six neediest schools and include major renovations and additions at two large high schools. If the bond referendum had passed, the district would have been able to use additional dollars from bonds that are issued within the State's legal debt limit to address the needs of other facilities.

In an effort to overcome this challenge and provide additional funds to upgrade the district's facilities, the school board appointed a board subcommittee to explore funding options and make recommendations to the school board for alternative funding. The Facility Funding Options Presentation, which was presented to the school board on May 22, 2012, by the board subcommittee, is on the school district's website, www.aiken.k12.sc.us.

Additionally, the base student cost for 2012-2013 is \$2,012. While this amount is \$132 higher than the 2011-2012 base student cost of \$1,880, it is on par with the base student cost that was funded in 2000-2001.

3. How will you use the insights gained from your accreditation activities to inform and enhance your quality assurance and school improvement efforts?

The AdvancED process for district accreditation has helped the district in designing a more coherent transition plan for district improvement. The AdvancED process has changed the way the district communicates and involves teachers when making major instructional decisions. The process of utilizing

focus groups, involving stakeholders, and following up with input surveys are common practices within the district.

This process is currently being used in the district's development of a common curriculum for all core subjects in grades Pre-K through twelve that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. The district's Curriculum Instruction Assessment Team is responsible for developing the common curriculum and for providing professional development for the curriculum. Additionally, a cadre of 600 teachers meets monthly to create a bank of assessment items that can be used by all teachers. Following each principals' meeting and each early release Wednesday, teachers and administrators provide feedback through online surveys on the professional development initiated by the CIA Team.

Required Action 1

Required Action

Establish and communicate a common service delivery model used across the district for targeted populations (i.e. special education, gifted and talented, and English Speakers of Other Languages).

Evidence

During evidence review and school visits, the team noted wide variance in instructional services offered to targeted populations among schools. Several staff members were unaware of services available or programs offered by the district to these groups and unfamiliar with district protocols for targeted populations. In addition several schools implemented curriculum and instructional activities inconsistent with those used at other schools in the district.

Rationale

Providing consistent access to programs and services throughout the district will eliminate inconsistency that occurs when students transfer and promote equitable instruction and learning opportunities.

Progress Status: Complete

Response:

The following information details the steps the district has taken to establish, communicate, and provide consistent access to special education, ESOL, and gifted and talented programs and services throughout the district.

The Special Education director, school psychologists, lead speech therapists, school-based therapists, therapeutic counselors, and special education coordinators meet monthly for professional development. Each meeting consists of departmental updates and small group professional development sessions. During the small group sessions, the lead psychologists, therapists, counselors, and coordinators provide professional development on curriculum and instruction for their specific areas of oversight. This process ensures common service delivery for instruction and consistent communication throughout the special education department.

Additionally, the Office of Special Programs works collaboratively with the Curriculum Instruction Assessment Team to provide special education teachers and coordinators with systematic professional development that complements the regular education program and supports the alternative learning initiative in the district.

To provide consistent communication and implementation of the district's preschool literacy initiative to all regular education and special education preschool classes, the school district established a preschool lead teacher. This person plans and facilitates professional development for all regular education and special education preschool classes.

During the 2011-2012 school year, the district's Gifted and Talented (GT) coordinator established bi-monthly meetings for all GT teachers to analyze the GT curriculum at each grade span so that a common scope and sequence could be developed for all gifted and talented classrooms at all levels. As a result of these bi-monthly meetings, all elementary and middle school GT teachers are currently guiding students through one common curriculum unit and high school GT students are developing a GT Research Portfolio that begins in the ninth grade and culminates in a final project that is a component of the students' college admissions resume. GT teachers continue to meet throughout the school year to review, discuss, modify, and develop additional curricular units.

To ensure that the program for the district English Language Learners (ELL) population is effectively established and communicated, the district's ESOL coordinator provides monthly professional development sessions for all ESOL teachers. The ESOL coordinator and ESOL partner teacher assist ESOL teachers throughout the year in program strategies, implementation, and compliance, and they assist and advise mainstream content area teachers in how to provide daily instruction and assessments and how to make content modifications in the mainstream classrooms. Additionally, the ESOL coordinator provides an overview of the requirements and services for ELL students at the beginning of the school year to principals and new teachers, and ESOL teachers provide information to all teachers during faculty meetings at their assigned schools.

Required Action 2

Required Action

Develop, implement, and communicate a district-wide framework to ensure the consistent implementation of the core curriculum across the school district.

Evidence

While the district has initiated a praiseworthy program to establish goals, objectives, and assessments for the core curriculum at all schools, several staff members noted that some areas do not know and understand the curriculum change and improvement process. Some schools visited by the team, and individual subject area teachers, are well aware of the plan and process of reform while others indicated they were aware of curriculum change but not actively engaged in the process and could not articulate the structure or timeline for implementation.

Rationale

Initiating a core curriculum development and improvement process across the entire district requires consistent and effective communication with all stakeholders and the monitoring of implementation to ensure widespread involvement and knowledge of the process components and procedures for adopting these changes.

Progress Status: In Progress

Response:

In the winter of 2012, the district began developing a common curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. When completed, this initiative will provide a curriculum and pacing guides for all English/language arts, math, science, and social studies in grades Pre-K through twelve. A link to the curriculum and timeline for this project is on the school district's website, www.aiken.k12.sc.us.

The district's Curriculum Instruction Assessment Team is working to develop the curriculum and to guide curriculum teams of teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in the analysis of the Common Core State Standards and in the creation of a bank of assessment items that can be used by all teachers. Currently, all teachers in grades Pre-K through eight are implementing the Common Core State Standards. By the end of the 2013-2014 school year, all teachers in Pre-K through twelve will be implementing the Common Core State Standards.

Additionally, the district's Curriculum Instruction Assessment Team provides monthly training and materials on the curriculum to principals and their instructional assistants. After principals receive training and materials from the CIA team, principals and their assistants provide curriculum training to their teachers on

Early Release Wednesday, which is the first Wednesday of each month. This process ensures consistent development and communication of the curriculum throughout the district.

At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, the district re-organized its supervisory structure. Previously, five area assistant superintendents provided administrative and instructional supervision of a region of schools. Now, four of these individuals are academic officers who focus on the instruction in a grade span of schools, and the fifth individual is the director for administrative services. These four academic officers develop and facilitate professional development for their assigned grade spans, devote two days per week for coaching by observing classrooms and providing feedback to teachers and principals, lead the Common Core State Standards transition for their grade spans, and meet weekly with the district's academic leadership team and superintendent's cabinet. This organizational structure supports the consistent implementation of the district's curriculum in all of the schools.

Required Action 3
Required Action

Review the existing facility improvement plan to include renovations to existing facilities and new/ additional facilities and explore available funding options.

Evidence

Stakeholders stated that several facilities in the district needed renovations, and the review team noted that facilities, while well kept and functional, needed upgrades especially to accommodate the increase in technology anticipated in the near future. District building and renovation initiatives have been limited in the past thirty years and structural limits are now hampering upgrades for technology hardware and communications.

Rationale

Reviewing the critical building needs of the district, even during this period of economic distress, will provide a priority order for addressing issues and establish a timeline for addressing these priorities. In addition, including a large segment of the community in the process will help to increase support and identify imaginative funding sources for these critical district needs.

Progress Status: Complete

Response:

To ensure the district effectively evaluates and prioritizes the facilities' needs in the district, the deputy superintendent receives annual input from principals and the district's maintenance staff concerning the facilities' needs for improvement. Additionally, area advisory councils review the facilities in their areas and report their findings to the district superintendent as dictated by school board policy. After all of the input has been gathered, the school district's deputy superintendent and members of the Facilities Construction Department and Maintenance Department review the input and apply best practices formulas for cyclic maintenance to develop a facility improvement plan for submission to the school board for approval. A link to the school district's five year facility plan is on the school district's website, www.aiken.k12.sc.us.

In an effort to provide additional funds to upgrade the district's facilities, the school board appointed a board subcommittee to explore funding options and make recommendations to the school board for alternative funding. The Facility Funding Options Presentation, which was presented to the school board on May 22, 2012, by the board subcommittee, is on the school district's website, www.aiken.k12.sc.us. Also, the school board met with the legislative delegation on November 12, 2012, to discuss funding options to improve facilities.

Additionally, the school district received an upgrade in its bond credit rating and sold a \$17.5 million general obligation bond in August 2012. This amount gave the district approximately \$1 million additional funds per

year for facilities. The bond proceeds and the bond premium are being used to finance capital projects approved in the district's five-year facility plan.

Required Action 4
Required Action

Review and revise the school district technology plan and include a timeline for implementation.

Evidence

The team reviewed the district technology plan and examined technology available during school visits. While access and use is district wide, there appears to be no consistent purchasing policy and a wide disparity among school sites in technology available and in use. Several staff members noted that elementary and middle schools had more available access to computers, SmartBoards, and software and used additional funds to increase their technology inventory. In addition, the district has not established a timeline for implementing the technology plan in all schools and has not established guidelines and a schedule of implementation.

Rationale

Implementation of a technology plan communicated to all stakeholders will increase consistency of effort to use technology as an instructional tool, and management of the plan will insure equity and adequacy.

Progress Status: Complete

Response:

Prior to the 2010-2011 school year, the Education Technology Committee was formed. The mission of this committee is to allow the instructional department to inform the technology department of the instructional technology needs of the district. Committee members are representatives from the Division of Instruction and Accountability, Career and Technology Education, Instructional Technology Department, and the Deputy Superintendent. This committee continues to meet quarterly to advise the Deputy Superintendent and Director of Technology Services of the instructional technology needs of the district. In addition to the information received from the Education Technology Committee, the Deputy Superintendent and the Director of Technology Services receive input from users in the schools. All input is used to inform, prioritize, and update the district's technology plan.

Each summer the Director of Technology submits the technology plan to the State Department and presents it to the school board. A link to the district's technology plan is located on the school district's website, www.aiken.k12.sc.us.