



Accreditation Progress Report

Aiken County School District

Dr. Elizabeth Everitt, Superintendent

1000 Brookhaven Dr
Aiken, South Carolina, United States 29803-2109

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1.0 About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

Background. Dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 27,000 schools in 65 countries. AdvancED provides accreditation under the seals of 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).

The Accreditation Process.

To earn and maintain accreditation, district/systems must:

- 1. Meet the AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems.**

District/Systems demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school systems to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.

- 2. Engage in continuous improvement.**

District/Systems implement continuous improvement focused on improving student performance and school effectiveness.

- 3. Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.**

District/Systems engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, district/systems host an external Quality Assurance Review team once every five years. The team evaluates the district/system's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the district/system's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the district/system improve. The district/system acts on the team's required actions and submits an Accreditation Progress Report at prescribed intervals following the Quality Assurance Review.

The AdvancED accreditation process engages the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help district/systems be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

2.0 Introduction to the Accreditation Progress Report

Purpose

The Accreditation Progress Report (APR) is a critical component of the AdvancED accreditation process. It engages the district/system 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/system 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/system's accreditation status and must be met to maintain accreditation. Some district/systems may complete multiple reports during the 5-year term to demonstrate that they have fully addressed the required actions.

Structure of the Report

The APR is organized around the required actions in the district/system's QAR team report. The APR lists the required action from the report along with the rationale and evidence supporting the required action. The district/system then indicates the progress that it has made toward meeting the required action and provides a more detailed response describing the actions it has taken and the results obtained. The district/system provides a response for each of the QAR team required actions.

Following the district/system's response is the reviewer's response. Each APR is read by an AdvancED reader in the state or regional office who reviews the district/system's response to determine if the required action has been met. The reader provides his/her assessment of the progress the school has made and then offers comments to the district/system. If required actions remain in progress or not addressed, a new APR will be created with a new deadline for completion. As noted earlier, the district/system must address the required actions within the 5-year accreditation term.

Conclusion

The Accreditation Progress Report is a useful report for members of the district/system and broader community. It helps community members see and monitor the ongoing improvement efforts of their district/system. It demonstrates how the district/system uses its accreditation for the ongoing benefit of the students it serves.

3.0. Summary

1.1. 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 within this report.

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

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

In May of 2010, a proposed \$236 million bond referendum failed. This 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 legal debt limit to address the needs of other facilities.

Additionally, the base student cost for 2011-2012 is \$1,880. While this amount is \$165 higher than the 2010-2011 base student cost of \$1,615, it is on par with the base student cost that was funded in 1998-1999.

Because of budget reductions and economic woes in general, administrators and twelve-month employees received a ten-day furlough and teachers and nine month employees received a five-day furlough in 2009-2010. No employees received raises or step increases in 2010-2011, but step increases were given to teachers and a modest 1% increase was given to others for 2011-2012.

Class sizes have increased by two to three pupils per teacher, dependent on grade level, because of budget reductions in 2009-2010. Those pupil-teacher ratios have carried forward to 2010-2011, and they remain for 2011-2012. Funding is not to the level needed to reduce class-sizes to previous levels and sustain them.

Another financial challenge that could impact the district is with the State's failure to meet its maintenance of effort for IDEA. Because of this, the state's IDEA allocation could be reduced by 20%. This reduction is reported to be perpetual and would begin in 2012-2013.

1.3. 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 with the district's transition from the state standards to the Common Core State Standards, for updating the district's technology plan, and for developing a common delivery model for interventionists, special education, ESOL, and gifted and talented classes.

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Aiken County School District hosted a Quality Assurance Review team on 11/15/2009 - 11/18/2009. Through interviews with district/system stakeholders, classroom observations, and a review of district/system documents and student performance results, the team developed a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) report detailing its findings from the visit. The full report can be viewed at www.advanc-ed.org.

The QAR report contained commendations and required actions for the district/system. The district/system is responsible for addressing each of the required actions in the report. At prescribed intervals based on the district/system's accreditation status, the district/system must complete an Accreditation Progress Report. Below, please find the required actions from the QAR report and the district/system's response to each required action. Following the district/system's response is the reviewer's progress response and comments.

4.0. Required Action 1

Source: QAR

Date: 2009-11-22

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.

4.1. District/System Response

Progress Status: In Progress

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

With the inclusion model being much of the basis for classroom instruction, fewer self-contained classes are offered at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, thus providing students with mainstreamed experiences. The curriculum used for all diploma track students is based upon the state's curriculum standards. Teachers, special education coordinators, and school psychologists use results of PASS, HSAP, MAP, and End of Course tests to identify and implement modifications for student plans.

To facilitate professional development and provide a common delivery model of instruction, all special education coordinators and ESOL teachers are currently participating in the Learning Forward professional development for coaching. The Office of Special Programs has hired a professional development facilitator whose primary task is to provide special education teachers and coordinators with systematic professional development that compliments the regular education program and supports the Alternative Learning Initiative in the district.

High school special education students benefit from Project Discovery, vocational rehabilitation, and the Aiken County Employability Skills (ACES) diploma program. Project Discovery uses the Tools for Transition screener for career goals, promotes service learning, provides students with work-based experiences where students are able to apply classroom learning in the “work world”, and provides transition goals for post-school experiences for all special education high school students. The ACES program preps special education diploma and certificate students for post-school experiences.

All regular education and special education pre-school classes in the district are implementing the pre-school literacy initiative. All preschool special education students have access to PALS if language acquisition is an issue. Professional development for all pre-school teachers is planned and facilitated by the district’s pre-school coordinator and the professional development facilitator for Special Programs.

Gifted and Talented teachers are currently analyzing the GT curriculum at each grade span in order to develop a common scope and sequence for all gifted and talented classrooms at all levels. Each gifted and talented teacher has been surveyed to determine the curriculum materials that are available at each grade span. Grade-span-specific teachers’ meetings are held bi-monthly for discussions of programmatic issues and for the development of a common service delivery model.

To ensure common service delivery, ESOL teachers continually participate in ongoing professional development. For five summers SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) professional development was provided to assist core content area teachers and main-streamed teachers with strategies for actively engaging English Language Learners.

Because writing is the instructional focus for ESOL teachers and because it is the most difficult part of ELDA for English Language Learners to score “Fluent”, writing professional development has been provided for all English and ESOL teachers. All English teachers participated in the professional development during the summer of 2011. All ESOL teachers participated in a year-long bi-monthly professional development on writing during the 2010-2011 school year. This TKL-provided professional development reviewed ELDA data, students’ grades, and observed teaching styles to develop specific strategies for teaching writing to English Language Learners.

In the elementary and middle school classrooms, ESOL instruction is a pull-out. In the high schools, it is a scheduled class. ESOL classes are designed to help with the four communication skills while providing content area support for language acquisition. All ESOL teachers use their SIOP and writing strategies to provide instruction that is based on the state’s curriculum standards, and all ESOL students have access to the Rosetta

Stone software.

4.2. Reviewer Response

Progress Response:

**Comments for
Institution:**

5.0. Required Action 2

Source: QAR

Date: 2009-11-22

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.

5.1. District/System Response

Progress Status: In Progress

Response: To ensure the consistent implementation of the English/language arts curriculum across the school district, the district has implemented a district literacy model for its elementary and middle schools. To support this model, a district-based professional development facilitator, two curriculum coaches, four district-based partner teachers, three school-based partner teachers, four middle school interventionists, and twenty-five elementary interventionists provide assistance to principals and teachers in the implementation of the literacy model. In addition to providing support for the district's literacy model, the district-based professional development facilitator, curriculum coaches, partner teachers and middle school interventionists provide cross-content support to assist with the consistent implementation of the core curriculum. All principals and support personnel from the Division of Instruction and Accountability are

participating in the Learning Forward professional development for administrators and coaches.

So that more attention of the district-level and school-based administration is focused on instruction, the district provided Break Through Coach professional development during the summer of 2010 for all administrators. 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. 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 Standard transition for their grade spans, and meet weekly with the district's academic leadership team and superintendent's cabinet.

All teachers use the TesTrakker grade planner when developing their lesson plans. All first and second grade teachers are implementing the Common Core State Standards. A four-year implementation plan is in place for all teachers to base their lessons on the Common Core State Standards. Curriculum, ELA, and math assessment trainers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels are analyzing the Common Core State Standards and creating a bank of assessment items that can be used by all teachers. Compass Learning software has been installed at the elementary, middle, and high schools to provide interventions to at-risk students. MAP testing is conducted three times a year for first through ninth grade students. Teacher use the MAP data to differentiate classroom instruction.

5.2. Reviewer Response

Progress Response:

**Comments for
Institution:**

6.0. Required Action 3

Source: QAR

Date: 2009-11-22

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.

6.1. District/System Response

Progress Status: In Progress

Response: The existing facility improvement plan, which covers a five year period, has \$14,500,000 budgeted annually for facility improvements. Currently, seven schools are scheduled for major renovations. In addition to the \$45,925,000 allotted for major renovations for the next five years, approximately \$6,400,000 is budgeted annually for cyclic maintenance.

In 2008 M.B. Kahn, an independent consulting firm, conducted a facilities assessment to evaluate the district's future building needs and to assist with developing a long-range construction plan. Annually, input concerning facilities' needs for improvement is received from principals and area advisory councils. The school district's deputy superintendent, 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.

Based on the recent recommendation of the Division of Fiscal services, the school board voted to change the pay schedule on the district's bonds. This change will produce \$13,700,000 in additional funds for building projects over the next five years.

Additionally, the school board has chosen to appoint a board subcommittee that will explore funding options and make recommendations to the school board for funding.

6.2. Reviewer Response

Progress Response:

**Comments for
Institution:**

7.0. Required Action 4

Source: QAR

Date: 2009-11-22

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.

7.1. District/System Response

Progress Status: In Progress

Response: During the 2010-2011 school year, the Education Technology Committee was formed. This committee was staffed with representatives from the Division of Instruction and Accountability, Career and Technology Education, Instructional Technology Department, and the Deputy Superintendent.

During the 2010-2011 school year, middle school CAI labs were upgraded to newer forty-station labs, out-of-warranty computers were replaced in high school classrooms and media centers, accommodation labs were installed in the middle and high schools, 121 five-station netbook carts were installed in each ELA and math class at all middle and high schools, and out-of-warranty routing switches were upgraded in all schools.

Major projects scheduled for 2011-2012 are the installation for wireless overlays in sixteen schools, the replacement of switches in the remaining schools, the upgrade of data circuits at AT&T sites, the implementation of the new School Fusion web portal for school and district websites, the installation of an ETV portal for ETV/Video, the implementation of new technology initiatives for the Center for Innovative Learning, and the installation of a Synergistic Lab in one middle school.

Major projects scheduled for 2012-2013 are the completion of the wireless overlays in the remaining schools, and the installation of Synergistic Labs in three middle schools.

When the budget was developed for the 2011-2012 school year, the school board added \$400,000 to the district's technology budget to provide funds for the wireless overlays.

Since there has been an overall reduction in funds and hardware must be replaced on a continual basis, the school district has begun purchasing refurbished computers so that the replacement schedule can be maintained.

In addition to technology provided to the schools through the implementation of the district's technology plan, schools use their supplemental funds to provide technology in their schools, which causes a disparity between the amount of technology some schools have over other schools.

7.2. Reviewer Response

Progress Response:

**Comments for
Institution:**

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