

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
St. Clair County Board of Education**

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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), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

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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 Schools (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, school districts, and educational service agencies continuously improve.

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

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

2) Engage in continuous improvement. School districts and their schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose that the school district is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school and district 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. School districts and schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, school districts host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the school district improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school district and a written report detailing the team's required actions. The school district acts on the team's required actions and submits a progress report two years following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school district community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help school districts and their schools maximize student success and improve organizational effectiveness

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

1. Evaluate the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and policies.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and required actions to improve the district and its schools.
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 district is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

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

Summary of Team Activities. The Quality Assurance Review Team is led by an AdvancED certified District Lead Evaluator and comprised of professionals from outside the school district. The team reviews the findings of the school district's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school district, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school district'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 district and its schools 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 district. The report contains commendations and required actions for improvement.

Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions. The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the required actions. Following the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, the school district must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress it has made on the team's required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district is addressing the required actions.

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 district following action from the commission.

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI Alabama State Office (SACS-CASI-AL), a division of AdvancED, visited St. Clair County Board of Education on 10/24/2010 - 10/27/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 39 administrators, 85 teachers, 15 support staff, 78 parents and business partners, 74 students, and 6 Board of Education members for a total of 297 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 8 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documenting and Using Results
5. Resource and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems with a school district 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 district, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school district and its schools function as a whole and embody the practices and characteristics of a quality school district.

Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

The Quality Assurance Review Team also examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team's findings in this area can be found following the standard reports.

The team used the standard reports and quality assurance findings to identify common themes, significant accomplishments, and pressing needs facing the district. These became the basis for the overall commendations and required actions that are provided below. The commendations and required actions should serve as the focus for the district as it acts on the team's findings. They represent the areas that the team believes will have the greatest impact in helping the district further its improvement efforts. The standard reports and quality assurance findings can be used to help reinforce and enrich the district's understanding of the commendations and required actions.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the St. Clair County Board of Education 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.

- **Despite budgetary cuts linked to proration, the district has successfully written grants and obtained funding from legislators to maintain programs and to upgrade technology.**

Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team interviews documented that more than \$500,000 was obtained from state legislators to upgrade technology. Successful grant proposals have resulted in technology enhancements. The Head Start program and a wellness initiative have also received funding that has been used to replace proration and local funding cuts.

The district has focused on offering 21st Century and current technology and is better able to maintain this by acquiring funds to replace proration cuts.

- **The district offers an array of programs tailored to meet the needs of students who pursue post-graduate, vocational, armed services, or workforce opportunities.**

The QAR team noted that the district has a career tech center, distance education, a credit recovery program, Army Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC), and numerous other programs that can meet the needs and the interest of its students. Stakeholders expressed extreme satisfaction with a partnership with the juvenile services agencies that had minimal recidivism and that gave some students an opportunity to matriculate with their classes.

Dual enrollment and tuition-free courses are also available to students, as reported to the QAR team. Stakeholder interviews revealed satisfaction with the curriculum and opportunities for students.

The district has a goal of reducing its dropout rate and offering a variety of programs tailored to meet the needs of students. Varied and high quality programs provide effective vehicles for achieving the stated goals.

- **District leadership and staff provide effective internal and external communication and are described by stakeholder groups as being "accessible" and "willing to address problems."**

Stakeholder interviews, artifact review, and observations revealed that both district and school websites and social media such as Twitter and Facebook are used to further extend lines of communication. A superintendent's newsletter is disseminated weekly and each school has a three member parent group that serves as an advisory council to the district leadership.

Strong and effective communication allows stakeholders to become better informed regarding the goals and initiatives undertaken by the district.

Required Actions

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions

for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall effectiveness of the school district. The St. Clair County Board of Education will be held accountable for making progress on each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the required actions.

- **Design and implement an electronic delivery system to provide ready access of student performance data that enables teachers to design appropriate instruction.**

Teacher interviews revealed that administrators have access to group, class, and individual student assessment and performance data; however, teachers indicated that they do not have this access. Rather than using paper documents, teachers expressed an interest in having electronic access so that the information would be more readily accessible.

Teachers' having access to individual, class, and group assessment data will allow teachers better opportunity to monitor instruction and to better inform instructional changes.

- **Develop curriculum maps and pacing guides to provide continuity and alignment of curriculum.**

Interviews with teachers and both school and district leadership indicated that the district has begun to implement some revised curriculum; however, full development and implementation of pacing guides is needed. Teacher interviews indicated support for this process and validated the need to accelerate the work.

Fully-developed and implemented curriculum and pacing guides will better align instruction both vertically and horizontally.

- **Develop a comprehensive, research-based, multi-year strategic plan for continuous district improvement.**

Interviews with district staff revealed that the district plans to transition from one-year plan strategic planning to a five-year format. District leadership also indicated that this will allow more long range vision and better identification of needs with capital improvements, financial and human resources, special education, and other programs.

A multi-year strategic plan will better align all functions with district expectations and will serve as the basis to direct school and departmental planning.

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools: The team reviewed the district's adherence to each of the AdvancED standards. The findings from this review are provided in the next section of this report.

Next Steps

The school district should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.

3. Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.
5. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork, provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help school districts and their schools with continuous improvement.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for review and action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school district. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school district should celebrate its achievement with the community. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and other related items can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school district, its schools, and community in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the commendations and address the required actions noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school district to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

The Quality Assurance Review Team divided into standard teams to review each standard and prepare a standards report summarizing the team's findings. These standard reports, along with the quality assurance findings that follow these reports, provided the basis for the team's identification of over-arching commendations and required actions presented earlier in this report. The reports submitted by each team are provided on the following pages for the district's review and use. Each report reflects its respective team's unique voice, perspective, and deliberations. The reports can be used to help enrich and deepen the district's understanding of the overall commendations and required actions.

Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

Standard: The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

Description:

The St. Clair County School District has developed a district vision, mission, and beliefs in collaboration with its stakeholders that is reviewed annually. The QAR team noted artifacts of meeting agendas and surveys soliciting feedback from parents, students, and staff were reviewed. The vision, slogan, beliefs, and mission are communicated and visible throughout the district office and are posted on the web site and throughout the schools. Additionally, district handbooks and superintendent newsletters include the vision and mission. Stakeholders and students affirmed that they were knowledgeable of the slogan and vision of the system and felt that the district achieves its mission.

The district has identified the need to develop a Comprehensive Strategic District Improvement Plan, as evident in the Standards Assessment Report (SAR) and in the superintendent's report to the QAR Team. Interviews with members of the St. Clair County School System central office indicated that the central office determines the targeted areas for the district that guides the school development of the Continuous School Improvement Planning (CIP) process. Interviews with stakeholders and leadership teams indicated confusion related to these targeted areas. The QAR team reviewed the system improvement plan (LIP) which is compiled from the CIP of the schools.

A current accurate profile of the district, its students, and the community is maintained.. Profile data on students are collected and regularly updated to guide student instruction and allocation of financial resources. The district annual report sent to the state and documented in the SAR report were reviewed as evidence of the system profile data. The superintendent's PowerPoint indicated profile data such as that the population growth during the last ten years of more than twenty six percent. Student assessment data are discussed at administrators retreats, CIP teams at the schools, in professional development, data meetings at the schools, and in collaboration with central office staff and school principals as evidenced in the SAR report and supported in stakeholder interviews.

The QAR team found through stakeholders interviews a strong focus to provide quality instruction as stated in the mission. The district is using multiple resources and research based programs to achieve this mission including the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), Alabama Math, Science, Technology Initiative (AMSTI), career technical programs, iCademy, and dual enrollment in college and community college courses.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The QAR team found varied methods of communicating vision, mission, and beliefs throughout the district.
- Stakeholders indicated strong pride and support of the district's mission of quality education for all students.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a collaborative ongoing process for comprehensive, multi-year district strategic improvement that is aligned with the system vision, purpose, profile, and expectations and serves as basis for direct school and departmental planning.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the St. Clair County Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

Standard: The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

Description:

The St. Clair County School District slogan is "Preparing Tomorrow's Leader's Today." This slogan serves as the call to action to spur district achievement. Interviews with parents and staff indicate that the district effectively communicates its vision and purpose. To help every student to succeed after graduation, the district offers vocational, workforce, and college preparatory programs. Interviews with stakeholders affirmed that the district programs are a source of pride.

District policy manuals are available in the individual school offices and media centers as well as the district office. The policies and procedures provide for the operation of the district. Policies and procedures recognize that the superintendent is the administrative leader who manages the day-to-day operation of the district.

The district fully complies with all applicable state, federal, and local policies and laws. The St. Clair County Schools have a seven member school board. Five are elected by districts and two members are at-large. All members serve six year terms. Board members undergo training provided by the Alabama School Boards Association and per state law. Along with the superintendent, the board manages a 78 million dollar budget comprised of 59% state, 15% federal, 23% local, and 3% other funding sources. The school board has contracted legal counsel services and has insurance that provides coverage that protects the financial stability of the district. The superintendent is elected and serves a four year term.

Proration cuts have reduced funding by more than \$26,000 monthly. A review of the district artifacts indicated that the district will be able to absorb these cuts until December 2011, when it is projected that all reserve funds will be depleted.

Annual retreats are scheduled for both leadership and classified personnel and all staff have input in budgetary decision-making. During retreats, administrators review assessment data and the process of identifying goals is initiated. Survey result feedback is monitored and used to guide the decision-making process for resource allocation. Proration has negatively impacted the district and cuts the previous two years have resulted in the loss of teachers and programs. Additionally, cuts have depleted funding for technology. To offset these cuts, the district has successfully written grants and has received more than \$500,000 from state legislators to enhance technology. Successful grant writing has also provided funds to supplement the Head Start program. To further assist schools who do not have enrollments necessary to earn a state-funded assistant principal, the district absorbs the salary locally and provides the support.

All personnel have at least an annual evaluation conducted and district and school-level administration conduct Look For and Breakthroughs to monitor progress on the district goals. Stakeholder interviews indicate that sufficient personnel are employed to meet the needs of the district. Strong relations with the Pell City Schools, Jefferson State Community College, the St. Clair Economic Development Council, and partnerships with local businesses and agencies are maintained.

Through interviews, the QAR team learned that the district has utilized one-year strategic planning process. The leadership found that because of increasing enrollment and classroom space needs, this process was not effective. Presently, the district is making a transition to a multi-year strategic plan that it feels will provide a more comprehensive road map to the future. To preserve the level of stakeholder support, the district must ensure that stakeholder participation is solicited and maintained.

Consistently throughout interviews, stakeholders voiced support of the school-level and district administration. Words such as "approachable" and "accessible" were heard numerous times. The QAR team also noted that administrators were heavily involved in community activities and organizations and were also considered highly visible.

Each school has a state-mandated Advisory Council comprised of three parents who meet with district leadership. Numerous other opportunities for leadership and service are available throughout the district for teachers and students. Within some communities, parent-teacher organizations have been formed for grades K-12. The QAR team noted that stakeholder involvement is encouraged..

Surveys are used to gauge stakeholder satisfaction and the district has enjoyed a high return rate. Stakeholders expressed their satisfaction with the district operations during QAR team interviews. All stakeholder groups felt that the administration has an open door policy and that all are accessible and willing to address problems and concerns.

The district plans to transition from a year-to-year strategic planning process to a multi-year plan. The administration feels that this will allow them to better address continuing needs such as additional classroom space due to increasing enrollment.

Interviews with teachers and central office staff revealed that the district has sought teacher buy-in prior to the full implementation of revised curriculum guides. Both groups indicated that there are more curriculum maps and pacing guides needed before all grade levels have the materials available.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district has strong leadership and staff who are committed to realization of the mission and vision.
- Administrative and staff retreats provide opportunities for planning, data disaggregation to guide instructional decision-making, and sharing of best practices.
- Successful grant writing proposals have been utilized to acquire additional laptops and to provide funding for the Head Start program.
- Stakeholders describe both school and district leadership as approachable and persons who are willing to address problems.
- Internal and external communication is strong.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Accelerate the development of curriculum maps and pacing guides to better align the teaching and learning process district-wide.
- Incorporate long range planning into the development of the strategic plan.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the St. Clair County Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

Standard: The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Description:

The St. Clair County School District provides differentiated curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate student achievement. All curricula are based on the standards set in the Alabama Student Courses of Study. The district ensures that system-wide curricular and instructional decisions are based on data and research at all levels. Curriculum guides have been created using the Harcourt Reading series and Scott Foresman math pacing guides are aligned with the state course of study. According to interviews, the curriculum guides are used consistently in the elementary grades throughout the district and some pacing guides are developed in upper grades. Implementation of the curriculum is documented in lesson plans and walk-through observations. The curriculum defines the expectations for learning and has appropriate rigor embedded.

The QAR team observed that all schools maintains a system-wide climate that supports student learning. The positive climate contributes to the low teacher turnover. Highly qualified teaching staff establish high expectations and support student engagement in the learning process. A strong sense of collaboration among teachers in sharing, borrowing, and providing professional learning for each other was evident during teacher interviews. As noted in interviews with parents and community stakeholders, teachers provide a nurturing learning environment and feedback on the progress of their students on a regular basis. Parents report great satisfaction with the teaching and learning environment and the communication received at the school level.

Teachers, administrators, and district staff reported that data are used to guide instruction and ensure that the needs of all students are met. The use of the data ensures that assessment results are being reviewed

and used by teachers and administrators. Data and instruction are discussed at departmental, grade-level, principals' meetings, and system retreats. Instruction across the district is research-based and reflective of best practices. Classroom visits and interviews verify active learning, student engagement, and the use of data to improve instructional practices and to increase student learning. The use of technology as an instructional tool is found throughout the district. The Career Technology Center uses computer technology for APEX, a distance education program offering. Parents were proud that students were able to take courses as juniors and seniors and enter college as sophomores.

Classroom instructional time is sacred and maximized across the district. The St. Clair County Schools allocate and protect instructional time to support student learning. Elementary schools provide uninterrupted reading for 110 minutes and mathematics instruction for 60 minutes. Middle schools follow a six or seven period schedule, and high schools follow a standard block schedule.

Stakeholders, teachers, and administrators stated throughout the interviews that all students are to excel either on the college track or career readiness. All district staff support the implementation of doing whatever it takes to help students meet expectations for learning. The Army ROTC program, dual enrollment, and career tech are strengths and opportunities for students, as initial projections were the accommodation of 20 students. The program currently enrolls 125 students. During interviews, stakeholders consistently indicated that the district has employed dedicated and accessible administrators. Schools that do not have the required enrollments to earn a state-funded assistant principal have been assigned a locally-funded position.

The curriculum is reviewed and revised at regular intervals. This evidence was found in the interviews with the central office personnel and the principals. During school visits, the QAR team observed that teachers and administrators value the data sheets and used them in to give individual attention to students. Data were shared with parents and stakeholders. Curriculum and instructional decisions are based on data and research and data drives instruction.

The district supports a curriculum that challenges and meets the needs of each student, reflects a commitment to equity, and demonstrates an appreciation of diversity. The district has implemented programs to address the needs of the at-risk students as well as high-achievers. The pre-kindergarten program serves approximately 72 children. A Three-Tier instructional design identifies students who are at-risk and provides a second and a third tier if needed so that students will meet grade-level standards in reading. Implementation of this program is being carried over to math as well. A six-week migrant education program is offered to students during the summer. The migrant students return to the district after leaving Florida and the QAR team noted that the district displays genuine concern for the welfare of these students, most who are sure to return annually.

Response To Instruction (RTI) is used at the each school to help students recover class credit. Each school has a Positive Support Team (PST) that receives referrals for students not experiencing academic success. Teacher interviews and observations of the three-tier instruction showed that all staff members in a school take responsibility for student learning to help make sure all children get the best education and are able to succeed. As teachers stated, "We do whatever it takes to help that child." Another teacher stated "Everyone in the school helps out and works with children." This supports the implementation of interventions to help students meet expectations for student learning.

Parents applauded the district for its outstanding leadership and commitment to offering post-secondary opportunities geared toward the needs of all students. Administrators are deemed accessible and highly visible.

Technology services are delivered through the technology department at the central office. The central office contracts with one employee at each school to serve as the school's technology contact. This contact person helps the system ensure that all students and staff have access to comprehensive information, instructional technology and materials needed for effective instruction. The technology specialist is responsible for working with teachers to incorporate technological opportunities for instruction. Students have daily access to computers and other technology.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district communicates effectively with parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders.
- An open, positive, inviting teaching and learning culture exists throughout the district.
- Highly qualified certified staffs are committed to serving students.
- Collaboration and cooperation among teachers are evident among schools.
- Data and research are used to guide instructional decisions at all levels.
- Leadership is a strength throughout the district.
- Stakeholders are highly satisfied with the district curriculum.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop tools such as curriculum maps and pacing guides for all academic subjects across all grade levels to ensure continuity of curricular applications.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the St. Clair County Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

Standard: The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

Description:

The St. Clair County School District is committed to the review, analysis, and use of assessment data for continuous improvement. Comprehensive assessments include the following: Alabama Alternate Assessment (AAA), Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State, (ACCESS) for English Learners(EL), the Stanford Achievement Test -10th Edition (SAT 10), the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT), Alabama High School Graduation Exam (ALAHSGE), Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing(ADAW), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills(DIBELS), the Alabama Science Assessment, the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test, and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In addition to the state mandated assessments, student evaluations include teacher-made tests and surveys which are used periodically to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional programs. A calendar of assessment activities is developed and disseminated to students, parents, and stakeholders. When interviewed, each group was familiar and knowledgeable about the assessment schedule and the purpose of multiple assessments given within the system.

Assessment data are disseminated in a timely manner to administrators, principals, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders. These data are reviewed and analyzed for district and schools to promote continuous improvement in student achievement. There is a comprehensive data driven continuous

improvement process and data are extensively used. Interviews with district and school personnel, board members, students, parents, and stakeholders strongly indicated not only are they given data, but that all are well-versed in how it is used for data-driven instruction.

The district is aware of and uses data driven discussions at elementary and secondary levels to address the challenges of the achievement gap, graduation rate, and dropout rate. Agendas, minutes, and newsletters reviewed by the QAR team demonstrate a great desire to communicate effectively to all stakeholders for use in common dialogue when viewing, evaluating, and implementing change for more effective teaching and learning. The district plans to develop intervention plans with student needs as the primary focus. Benchmarked strategies in a comprehensive continuous improvement plan are in place to monitor progress and guide future direction in planning efforts for school improvement. Storage and retrieval of physical and electronic data is monitored and managed according to state standards.

A tiered RTI program aides the district in identifying students who need additional assistance. QAR team interviews revealed that this program has been beneficial in meeting the needs of students.

Interviews and a review of artifacts indicated that the district has a multitude of formative and summative data to help inform instructional decision-making. Data are disaggregated and discussed at both the school and district levels on a consistent basis. Teachers expressed a desire to have access to data electronically as a time-saving measure.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Dissemination of test data is done in a timely manner.
- Data meetings and discussions use current results as the evaluative tools to monitor student progress.
- Longitudinal student assessment data are available to all schools.
- Collaborative dialogue has been established among the central office administrators, board members, principals, teachers, students, parents, and community.
- Tiered instruction uses data to create a plan of action to promote the closing of academic gaps.
- Disaggregated data are used by the district to implement necessary curriculum changes.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a system that allows teachers to access assessment data electronically in order to better inform instructional decision-making.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the St. Clair County Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

Standard: The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Description:

The St. Clair County School District complies with applicable regulations and allocates sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to support its educational programs and improve student achievement. Stakeholder interviews reveal that an effective recruitment process is in place to recruit and employ highly qualified teachers. The district's human resources staff attends recruitment fairs across the state and uses the TEACH in Alabama application service to identify and obtain the brightest candidates. Additionally, a concerted effort is made by the district to partner with area colleges and universities to develop internship opportunities for pre-service teachers. Attention is paid to attributes and skills that would ensure that new prospects fit into the St. Clair County culture.

The district employs qualified professional and support staff in sufficient numbers and makes assignments based on their qualifications and professional preparation. Interviews at the district and school level provide evidence of the district's teacher induction and retention efforts, which include providing orientation for new hires, conducting training sessions on policies and procedures, classroom management, effective best practices, and new district initiatives. Many teachers expressed that once they are employed in the St. Clair School District, they remain. In addition to the training provided by the district, new employees are assigned a highly qualified mentor from their home school. Elementary schools are provided reading coaches to model best practices in reading/language arts.

Classroom teachers are evaluated regularly using the EDUCATE/Alabama model. Budget allocations, calendars, and other documents confirm that a continuous program of professional development is in place. The district is providing the impetus, oversight, and coordination of professional learning in the schools. Subsequently, the learning opportunities are aligned with the district and school improvement plans. Interviews with teachers reveal that although the district provides professional learning opportunities for teachers, schools could benefit from additional professional development opportunities that address the specific academic needs of individual schools.

The chief financial officer coordinates the long-range budgetary planning and quarterly budget meetings. Interviews with leadership teams, principals, board members, and an examination of evidence and artifacts affirm that input from district and school administrators, and other management personnel are in place to ensure funds support educational programs and support the mission and beliefs of the district. The system-wide budget is shared with the public during a board meeting scheduled for public comments and questions. The budget is then submitted to the school board for approval. The district budgets sufficient financial resources to support its programs and improvement efforts. Further, the district utilizes recognized accounting procedures as well as commissions an annual financial audit. The support staff expressed pride in the school and district's outstanding auditing system. For the past 2 years, the audits have found no exceptions.

Maintenance of the sites, facilities, and equipment provides a safe and orderly environment for each school. Interviews with teachers, staff, and parents revealed that students and teachers feel safe. District survey results revealed that 84% feel safe in the school environment. The QAR team noted written security and crisis intervention plans, which each school is required to submit to the central office. Staff,

student, and stakeholder interviews indicated that school safety is both a priority and a strength district-wide.

Stakeholders revealed satisfaction with the services provided through the special education, gifted, and counseling programs. The special education director oversees the implementation of accommodations/modifications needed by special needs and gifted students. Gifted students are given multiple opportunities to excel academically using pullout services, advanced curriculum compacting, differentiated curriculum, and consultative services. Additionally, students are given opportunities to participate in programs such as college career planning, dual enrollment, career technical training, distance learning, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which are viewed as strengths. A total of twenty-one counselors respond to students' needs.

As documented in the SAR report, the Ruben Yancey Alternative School program is available for students who violate the Code of Student Conduct. Because of the strong and supportive staff at the alternative school, 80% of the students matriculate back to their home school and graduate. Additionally, the career tech program serves as a source of pride.

Stakeholder interviews revealed that varieties of programs are readily available to develop students' nutritional, physical, mental and academic needs. A Wellness Plan was developed to focus on the dietary and nutritional needs of students. The district was awarded the Safe Schools Healthy Students and Drug Testing Grant. Through these awards, school resource officers, mental health workers, and drug prevention programs were added to assist students in need of these services. Additionally, the district benefits from a Promoting a Lifetime of Activity for Youth (PEP) grant that promotes physical education and physical fitness for all students. Students in the district are provided multiple and diverse opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities in a safe and drug free environment. Stakeholders indicated that activities including archery, track, golf, tennis, soccer, wrestling, band, chorus, fine arts, and dramatic arts are offered throughout the district to develop well-rounded students. Elementary teachers indicated that reading support teachers have positively affected reading achievement. Middle school teachers expressed a desire for the district to consider sharing the reading support teachers or employing additional staff. Stakeholders expressed that the career tech program has reduced the dropout rate and has prepared students for the workforce. Additionally, stakeholders feel that the dual enrollment program with Jefferson State College is a strength. The program offers students a tuition-free opportunity to attain an Associate of Arts degree upon graduation. The program is a cooperative effort between Jefferson State College, the county's community development authority, and the district.

The district engages a broad array of agencies and organizations in a variety of meaningful partnerships in support of student learning. Interviews with administration, staff, and community stakeholders confirm that active business partners work with every school in the district to promote student achievement. Numerous local businesses and agencies support the district, including the Alabama Cooperative Extension, Boys and Girls Clubs, City Councils, Emergency Management Agency, Community Chamber of Commerce, County Commission, the Juvenile Probation Office, and faith-based community organizations.

The district has been awarded numerous technology grants. A technology integration specialist and technology director were employed through one of the technology grants to work with teachers and promote the utilization of technology to enhance instruction. The technology department confirmed that the district experienced a 60% growth in teachers' use of technology as a result of this initiative. Although the district provides sufficient technology infrastructure and equipment to accomplish the system's goals, additional funding for further instructional technology, when available, will allow accessibility to all students in support of instructional goals. The superintendent expressed a need for additional computers

and technology equipment in the classrooms.

New schools have opened as the county experiences enrollment growth. The district has identified classroom space as a continuing need. School visits affirmed that facilities are well-maintained and that the district is including capital projects in its long-term strategic planning.

The district indicated a commitment to offer modern technology to its users. During the past 3 years, additional technology staff have been added and this has resulted in equipment becoming more operational. Staff indicated that the e-mail system has been operational for the past 3 years and that usage has grown from 20% to 80% during this time period.

Numerous professional learning opportunities are available for staff members. Teachers expressed satisfaction with professional development offerings, but some indicated that they would prefer more school-based offerings in the future.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district employs, mentors, and retains highly qualified teachers to ensure the success of all students.
- The district partners successfully with local universities and offers college-ready courses for high school students in preparation for post-secondary successes.
- Teachers' usage of instructional technology grew from 20% to 80% during a three year period.
- The district collaborates and utilizes agencies, organizations, and faith-based churches in the community to provide support for all students.
- Grant writing has proven successful in replacing funding lost by proration..
- A modern, well-equipped career technical center prepares students for technical careers in numerous areas.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Design and implement strategies to provide additional reading support at the middle/junior high level.
- Extend professional development opportunities that are specifically aligned with identified school academic needs.
- Pursue additional grant opportunities to support student learning.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the St. Clair County Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

Standard: The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Description:

The St. Clair County School District upholds a commitment to stakeholders and maintains open lines of communication. The district seeks input from stakeholder to collaboratively develop the vision and mission. On-line surveys are used to collect input from parents, business partners, and governmental entities. Results of the surveys are made available on the school district website. Stakeholders indicate a belief that the system is child-centered and provides an opportunity for rigorous curriculum. Additionally, stakeholders and district-level administration focus on the goal of students being career or college ready at the time for graduation. Evidence indicates that this change in mind set has evolved over the past three years.

Through the district-level access of Share Point, an electronic bulletin board, stakeholders may post and/or retrieve student data, common assessments, teaching materials, and lesson plans. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to post best practice teaching materials and ideas that will enhance the work of the system.

Interviews with parents, teachers, administrators and community partners affirmed a high expectation for student learning. The district's mission to have students career and college ready by graduation was evident in academic goals set at all grade levels. Parents and business partners were keenly aware of programs to prepare for accelerated high school and early college admission. Successful partnerships and relations with state legislators have enabled the district to acquire more than \$500,000 in funding that has been used to enhance technology. A partnership with Jefferson State College has offered students a tuition-free opportunity to earn a two-year degree upon graduation.

The St. Clair County schools participate in the Early Warning Program to reduce truancy and drop-out rates. The district collaboratively works with the judicial system including the probate judge and juvenile probation officers to increase attendance and graduation rates by encouraging consistent attendance and positive learning skills.

QAR team interviews revealed that strong internal and external communication exist. A three member Advisory Council at each school meets with district leadership and has an opportunity to give feedback to district leadership. Additionally, parents can serve on PTO's and have other opportunities for leadership. At the school level, students and teachers also have opportunities to become leaders.

Volunteers log many hours in support of the district, as evidenced in community days for individual towns such as Ashville. The district has maintained open communication with all stakeholder groups and uses surveys to gauge satisfaction with programs and initiatives. Newsletters, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and various other media are used to communicate with all stakeholder groups. A Parent Involvement Coordinator has been employed to further strengthen relations with community agencies and parents.

Through interviews, the QAR team noted that the district has implemented an annual strategic plan. As a result of the increasing enrollment and the need for additional classroom space, the district plans to transition to a multi-year plan. To ensure transparency and to sustain the parental support, the district must

ensure that all stakeholder groups are involved in the development.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Internal and external communication within the district is strong.
- A positive relationship with elected officials is maintained and this has resulted in more than \$500,000 in additional funds.
- There are multiple opportunities for stakeholder input such as Parent Teacher Organizations and Advisory Councils.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Solicit input from all stakeholder groups in the development of a robust, multi-year strategic plan.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the St. Clair County Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Standard: The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

Description:

The St. Clair County School District LEA Improvement Plan (LIP) is a collaborative effort with school continuous improvement plans (CIP) and guides decision-making for the district. The superintendent's goal of providing students with a quality education that will facilitate success at the collegiate, vocational, or workforce level is evident through the daily work that is carried out by the district and as noted with artifact reviews and interviews conducted by the QAR team.. The SAR and subsequent interviews provided to the QAR Team provide evidence and artifacts of a system profile, a plan for improvement, and the use of results to inform and revise future planning efforts.

Additionally, each school has created a CIP that is reviewed, approved, and used to monitor school progress at the district level. Allocation of resources is aligned with documented needs that are referenced in the school improvement plan.

School level improvement plans have goals that complement goals identified by the district. Stakeholder interviews revealed an awareness of the school and district goals and that parents are informed of academic progress. The district has made a concerted effort to address achievement gaps and has allocated resources to support programs such as credit recovery, distance learning, and migrant education.

Interviews revealed that a transition from an annual strategic plan to a multi-year plan has begun. The future plan will be comprehensive, as it combines programs such as capital improvements and technology. The plan will also include information such as a profile of the district .

QAR team interviews affirmed that the district offers multiple opportunities for professional learning. At the school level, professional learning is job-embedded. The QAR team noted that teachers feel that there should be more emphasis on professional development opportunities correlated to needs identified

by individual schools.

Schools within the county meet in community groups to collaborate both horizontally and vertically. Data are disaggregated during these meetings and used to inform instruction. These meetings can also be used to determine strategies to address the achievement gaps among subgroups.

A review of artifacts and interviews revealed that proration has reduced funding allocations for acquiring and maintaining technology. The district has aggressively written grants successfully to enhance technology and has received funding from state legislators as well. The district has made providing current technology for both students and staff a strong consideration, as it recognizes the importance of having students who are technology-literate and who are able to meet the district improvement goals. As proration is likely to continue, the district must sustain its efforts to provide hardware, software, and the infrastructure to enhance technology.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Each school implements a form of vertical articulation and implementation of goals, initiatives, and activities.
- The central office and schools communicate and collaborate with the community throughout the school improvement process.
- There has been an intensive effort to expand the use of technology to facilitate continuous improvement at the district and school level.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Conduct extensive research in the area of strategic planning at the district level to ensure an ongoing, global, and data-driven process that employs best practices to facilitate continuous improvement (5-year strategic plan).
- Select specific goals/initiatives and ensure that school-based improvement plans are aligned with district goals.
- Ensure that both district and school level plans address specific ways of closing the gaps between current and expected student performance levels for subgroups.
- Define the outcomes of strategic plan initiatives in measurable terms.
- Evaluate progress in terms of student and staff performance and engage in reflection to facilitate further improvement.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the St. Clair County Board of Education has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

Quality Assurance Findings

The Quality Assurance Review Team examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team provides the following findings in this area.

Description

The QAR team found that the district has developed and implemented quality assurance practices. Various processes are being implemented to assist the system in its efforts to monitor, document, and communicate improvement. Based upon data results, the district identifies target areas of concern during the summer. Each school uses the information received and develops goals using research-based strategies to increase student achievement. The schools complete an annual Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) that includes a detailed data summary and needs assessment which gives an evaluation report of summative data collected. The district has formative assessments such as teacher-made tests and benchmark assessments to monitor student progress.

QAR team interviews and a review of artifacts indicated that principals monitor the implementation and progress of the CIP at the school level. Monitoring is accomplished through walkthroughs conducted by a variety of personnel, both district and school-based. District personnel visit five assigned schools twice annually. The data collected are recorded on a template and are reviewed and disseminated to the schools by the principals. At the school level, administrators, CIP team members, and reading coaches conduct walkthroughs each month. The information is analyzed at data meetings. Annually, the principals meet with members of the board to report the findings.

The district strategic plan is correlated and cross-referenced to the AdvancED Standards for Quality Systems. System personnel work with schools to ensure adherence to the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools.

The district vision is well-communicated and accepted by all stakeholder groups. The QAR team consistently saw evidence that staff are committed to realization of the vision and goals. As the district transitions to a multi-year strategic plan development, teachers felt that electronic access to assessment data will be a time-saving measure. Teachers and administrators indicated the need to complete the development of pacing guides to enhance instruction.

Strengths

- The district has a meaningful and shared vision that provides a collaborative effort to assure students success beyond graduation.
- District personnel and school administrators perform walkthroughs and Look Fors to ensure that CIPs are being implemented.

Opportunities

- Develop a long term strategic plan.
- Provide teachers electronic access to assessment data to facilitate monitoring of progress.
- Accelerate the development of pacing guides for all grade levels.

Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the St. Clair County Board of Education on 10/24/2010 - 10/27/2010.

Springville High School	8295 U. S. Hwy 11	Springville	Alabama	35146
Ashville Elementary School	33225 U.S. Highway 231	Ashville	Alabama	35953
Moody Middle School	1010 H. L. Blocker Circle	Moody	Alabama	35004
Saint Clair County High School	16700 U. S. Highway 411	Odenville	Alabama	35120
Odenville Elementary School	420 Alabama Street	Odenville	Alabama	35120
Ashville Middle School	P.O. Box 340	Ashville	Alabama	35953
Moody Elementary School	1006 H.L. Blocker Circle	Moody	Alabama	35004
Margaret Elementary School	200 Mustang Drive	Odenville	Alabama	35120

Conclusion

The commendations and required actions in this report are designed to focus the school district on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and system effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and required actions only have meaning when acted upon by the school district and its schools. The strength of this report lies in the school district's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school district is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified required actions for improvement that the school district will need to address. Following this review, the school district will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's required actions.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the district leadership, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the district and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS-CASI-AL accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Jay Wansley, Chair (GA SACS CASI)
- Dr. Nancy Golson, Vice Chair (Red Crayon Associates)
- Mr. Danny Berry, Team Member (Chambers County Board of Education)
- Mr. Bobby Kelley, Team Member (Opelika City Schools)
- Dr. Judy Stiefel, Team Member (Calhoun County Schools)
- Ms. Margaret Gilmore, Team Member (Shelby County Schools System)
- Ms. Renee Conner, Team Member (DeKalb County School System)
- Mrs. Elizabeth Knighton, Team Member (Randolph Clay High School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

The AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As school districts reach higher levels of implementation of the standards, they will have a greater capacity to support ever-increasing student performance and organizational effectiveness. Each of the seven standards listed below has corresponding indicators and impact statements which can be accessed at www.advanc-ed.org.

Vision and Purpose

The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

Governance and Leadership

The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

Teaching and Learning

The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Documenting and Using Results

The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

Resource and Support Systems

The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.