

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Huntsville School District**

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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 NCA CASI Arkansas State Office (NCA-CASI-AR), a division of AdvancED, visited Huntsville School District on 02/20/2011 - 02/23/2011.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 16 administrators, 43 teachers, 9 support staff, 14 parents and business partners, 20 students, and 7 Board of Education members for a total of 109 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 4 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 Huntsville School District 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.

- **The Monday Morning District Leadership Team meetings provide transparent operational strategies and effective communication among building and district administrators, teachers, and support staff.**

The District Leadership Team is assembled each Monday morning to collectively discuss and prioritize activities and other issues for the week. The team consists of all district- and school-level administrators, a teacher representative from each school, and all district supervisors (i.e. transportation, maintenance, food service). Each meeting includes placing a list of all the school activities for the week and are placed on a large calendar board on the wall. Each member of the team is able to determine any responsibilities he/she might have regarding each. The remaining time of the meeting is spent with each participant sharing issues, making recommendations, recognizing successes, etc.

This form of organizational transparency is a major reason for the level of trust and respect for the leadership that exists throughout the district.

- **The Board of Education recognized the value of the staff by adjusting the salary schedule to remain competitive in NW Arkansas.**

Even in times of economic distress, the board recognized the necessity of retaining its highly qualified staff by increasing the salary schedule for 2011-2012 by 3%. In addition, a bonus of \$1000 was given to every employee in December 2010. This action has kept HSD competitive with even the larger, more lucrative districts in NW Arkansas. The reactions of staff have been very positive. They appreciate this effort especially because they are aware of how difficult this was to accomplish.

Being able to increase salaries even a modest amount will pay many dividends in the improvement of staff morale.

- **Teaching and learning are consistently supported through the allocation of resources.**

During the tenure of the current administration, a financially distressed school district has become solvent. This very rural, geographically immense district with one of the lowest tax bases in the state must struggle to provide the necessary resources to meet student and staff needs. However, they are not only able to provide those resources, every staff member interviewed made it very clear that they are not in need of anything the district has not provided.

When the necessary human, material, and fiscal resources have been provided, the most difficult barriers to accomplishing goals have been lifted. The way is then open for students to be successful.

- **The leadership ability and communication skills of the superintendent are recognized and appreciated by all stakeholders.**

The members of the board could not speak more highly of their support for the superintendent. He has been in the district for 28 years and has been the superintendent for the past three and a half years. His leadership style is very open with all constituents. The open forum type of district leadership team meetings every week are testimony to the level of transparency to which the superintendent subscribes. In all the interviews and meetings with stakeholders at every level, not a single negative remark was made about either the leadership or the district.

When there is a strong, positive relationship among all the stakeholders of a school district, the students cannot help but be the beneficiaries.

- **There is strong, unified support of all stakeholders for the Board of Education and the district leadership.**

During every conversation the QAR team had with stakeholders, overwhelmingly positive comments were made about the level of trust, respect, and support for the board and administration. There was considerable evidence presented about the strong relationship between the board and the superintendent. It was also very evident that the only personal agenda the members of the board have is for the improvement of instruction.

If there is any guarantee that a school district will be successful, it will be largely based upon the strong, positive relationships among the board of education, the district leadership, and the community's support.

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 Huntsville School District 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.

- **Reassess and realign administrative responsibilities at the district level to establish the position of curriculum specialist who is empowered to enforce decisions to align and implement an effective curriculum throughout the district.**

The district utilizes vertically aligned curricula developed by the Northwest Arkansas Education Services Cooperative (NAESC) as its local curriculum for the core courses (English, mathematics, science, and social studies). Supported by the Arkansas state courses of study in the respective areas, the district uses both guides to matriculate students through each grade level course. All schools in the district are Title I schools and are required to have an Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) for each school. The district has assumed that reliance upon the regional and state curriculum guides is sufficient to guide instructional decisions and establish expectations for student learning. A very real concern exists about the Common Core State Standards that are scheduled to be implemented in grades K-2 for the next school year. No evidence was found that this is being addressed with a district-wide, proactive plan of action. A curriculum coordinator can provide the leadership needed to develop a plan to make the implementation effective.

The establishment and coordination of a district curriculum that is systemic across all schools, grade levels,

and throughout every classroom is an imperative for sustaining student improvement.

- **Develop and administer a unified, written, district-wide professional development plan that clearly identifies specific offerings that address student data and improvement goals.**

Faculty and staff participate in a variety of professional development opportunities designed to address effective student learning. With few exceptions, these opportunities are developed at the school level at the request of teachers to address a perceived need at the school or with a targeted population. However, a clearly written district-wide professional development plan that incorporates the need for teacher learning for all schools, across grade levels, in order to more accurately meet the needs for student learning is not evident.

With the advent of the Common Core State Standards beginning next year, it is critical that a district professional development plan is in place to address the many issues that will surface as a result.

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 mission statement for the district is: "To provide the most efficient and effective learning opportunities for all students within the District. Learning opportunities will focus on improving student achievement, academic and character growth, and the development of continuous learning skills in a rapidly changing world." According to the SAR (Standards Assessment Report), the mission was developed approximately 11 years ago under the auspices of a former superintendent. A committee of stakeholders that included teachers, community members, and parents was instrumental in its development.

The mission is broadly displayed throughout the district. It is published in the student/parent handbook of the elementary, intermediate, and middle schools, posted in all school buildings and at the district office in the board room, distributed to parents through handouts, and posted on the district LED board. Teachers, parents, board members, and administrators with whom the team met were able to describe the essence of the mission and many quoted it verbatim. Parents and teachers cited examples of how the mission guides decisions. A parent noted she had witnessed the support an autistic student received to guide his development. Teachers identified a plethora of services provided to ensure opportunities for all students, e.g., peer- and after-school tutoring, one-on-one assistance, individual learning plans, and instructional aides. A district administrator noted, "Our ultimate goal is to deliver instruction as effectively and efficiently as possible."

In addition to the district mission, the elementary, intermediate, and middle level schools have developed a school-specific mission that builds on the district mission. These, like the district mission, are published in the parent/student handbooks and disseminated at various parent meetings and other school-sponsored gatherings.

When board members were asked if they reviewed the mission statement annually, they indicated while a formal review process was not in place, their consistent referral to the mission as they make decisions for

the district confirms its validity. They support the mission and feel it is appropriate as published to guide the district's decisions. The mission serves as the basis for the development of the Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) and, as such, it is informally reviewed on an annual basis as the plan is developed.

A number of years ago, 13 goals that include such items as "improve student achievement," "align the curriculum K-12," "develop an overall transportation program," "create an alternative learning program," were identified by central office personnel. These goals are prominently displayed in a large framed poster in the board room. The superintendent as well as several board members indicated it is referred to frequently. It was noted that quite a number of the goals have been accomplished. The list has not been revised since its initial development.

Current profile data are maintained and published as a component of the district facilities master plan that is required by the Arkansas Department of Facilities and Transportation. This document includes enrollment projections and a district profile. The "Huntsville School District Annual Report to the Public" includes specific information about each of the schools, state and federal programs, and faculty as well as school-specific assessment results.

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

- All stakeholders are knowledgeable about the mission statement and refer to it as they discuss services and programs for students.
- The mission guides the allocation of time and human, material, and fiscal resources.
- Profile data are current and up-to-date.

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

- Incorporate a formal process to review the mission statement on an annual basis.
- Implement a process whereby district goals in support of the mission are developed, revised, and monitored on an annual basis to validate the accomplishment of the goals.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Huntsville School District 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 district leadership comprised of the superintendent, district-level leaders, and the board of education establishes and communicates policies and procedures that ensure compliance with applicable laws and standards. The board, through its financial disbursement process, allocates its resources in support of teaching and learning, thus providing effective operation of the system. A typical comment from a teacher, “support is amazing; anything I need, I get.” reflects that practice.

The seven member board meets monthly for the purpose of addressing district issues. Communication and understanding of the agenda items are ensured by the fact that the superintendent meets with each board member individually prior to the regular meeting and answers questions related to the business to be addressed.

Procedures are in place to ensure that board members receive proper orientation and training. New members receive a minimum of nine hours of board in-service and existing members receive a minimum of six hours of training each year. Some members take advantage of more than the minimum hours required. The board is a member of the Arkansas State School Board Association that provides liability insurance and legal help. Private legal assistance is obtained as necessary. Insurance to protect the financial stability of the facilities is obtained through the Arkansas Insurance Department.

The team approach to administration is evidenced by the communication practices in place. The District Leadership Team is assembled each Monday morning to collectively discuss and prioritize activities and other issues for the week. The QAR team found this organizational approach to be very unique. The team consists of all district- and school-level administrators, a teacher representative from each school, and all district supervisors (i.e. transportation, maintenance, food service). The superintendent begins each meeting with some agenda items he has noted since the previous meeting. These include a list of all the school activities for the week. These activities, including athletic events, meetings, etc., are placed on a large calendar board on the wall. As a result, each member of the team is able to determine any responsibilities he/she might have regarding each. One example cited of the value of this exercise was that the transportation supervisor can determine whether he has enough buses available to cover each activity. And in the event he does not, the solution to the problem can be found immediately. Following the superintendent’s agenda, the remaining time of the meeting is spent with each participant sharing issues, making recommendations, recognizing successes, etc. This form of organizational transparency is a major reason for the level of trust and respect for the leadership that exists throughout the district.

Interviews with board members, district officials, building administrators, and teachers all reveal an overwhelming respect and support for the superintendent. Interview comments reinforce this fact: “Everyone knows his/her role,” “My job is to keep the problems at my level.” All stakeholders recognize the superintendent as the administrative head of the system.

The administration, under the leadership of the superintendent, displays an uncompromising passion for the students. This passion provides a valid basis for public confidence and support and places the district in a position to secure local resources sufficient to effectively operate the district. Evidence of a plan to replace key administrative personnel to ensure a smooth transition when retirements occur was not

presented.

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

- The weekly leadership team meetings ensure a transparent and well-organized administrative structure.
- All stakeholders recognize and appreciate the leadership of the superintendent.
- Communication between the board members and the superintendent is ensured through individual monthly conferences with each board member.
- Support from all stakeholders for the board and district leadership is unlimited.
- District resources are allocated in support of the teaching learning process.

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

- Implement a plan to replace key administrators and district leaders as they near retirement.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Huntsville School District 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 Huntsville School District provides a positive, supportive environment for student learning. Students desire to come to school and learn. Teachers are passionate about teaching and care deeply for the students. A parent shared that her son represented his school in an academic competition and the next day received a hand written note from his teacher congratulating him on a job well done. Many other heartfelt stories were shared by parents and students noting how much teachers care about the students and their learning. It is evident that many factors are in place for this environment to be realized. The superintendent sets the tone for teaching and learning. The board is committed to an education for all students that is efficiently and effectively provided. The commitment to hire the best person for every position, provide school-level staff development, and bring online current technology for the classrooms (i.e., interactive boards, document cameras, wireless connectivity) as stated in the Huntsville School District Goals is evident throughout the district.

In grades K-12 the district utilizes vertically aligned curricula developed by the Northwest Arkansas Education Services Cooperative (NAESC) as its local curriculum for the core courses (English, mathematics, science, and social studies). Supported by the Arkansas state courses of study in the respective areas, the district uses both guides to matriculate students through each grade level course. This educational practice assures student learning incorporates essential knowledge and skills with expected outcomes. All schools in the district are Title I schools and are required to have an Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) for each school. The ACSIP is used as the school's local plan to

establish student expectations via benchmark and end-of-year assessments. These individual local plans are then compiled into a district plan, but no evidence was found of an assimilation of these local ACSIP plans or any other form of local plans into one district-wide plan. Local curriculum guides with vertical alignments are not evident. The district assumes that reliance upon the aforementioned regional and state curriculum guides is sufficient to guide instructional decisions and establish expectations for student learning. When teachers were asked, “What are your students expected to know when they exit your classroom?” several answered, “how to be a good citizen,” “become a thinker or problem solver,” or they provided a list of educational products used with their instruction. All are noble answers but they did not articulate the curricular content and expected student learning of the grade or subject area. This, by no means, reflects a lack of curricular knowledge on the part of teachers, but rather, a disconnect with a district-wide curriculum and how each subject and grade level builds a foundation for the next level of student learning.

Interviews with teachers, district leadership, and board members indicate a very real concern for the Common Core State Standards that are scheduled to be implemented in grades K-2 for the next school year. No evidence was found that this is being addressed with a district-wide, proactive plan of action. The QAR team believes the district should reassess and realign administrative responsibilities at the district level to provide for a curriculum specialist who is empowered to develop, articulate, and coordinate a district-wide curriculum and instructional plan. A curriculum coordinator can provide the leadership needed to develop a plan to make the implementation effective.

Throughout the district there are five literacy and three math coaches who are very knowledgeable about research-based instruction and instructional strategies. These coaches are well received by their respective principals and faculties. They are afforded many opportunities to provide successful teacher training and modeling, as well as, small group student instruction. The coaches work closely with the principals and district leadership team to serve as a liaison with the teachers regarding curriculum decisions. Although they meet with district leaders, coordination of their work collectively as academic facilitators is only emerging at the district level.

Various records of staff development indicate faculty and staff participate in a variety of professional development opportunities designed to address effective student learning. From the offerings of the NAESC to local district offerings certified personnel can readily attain the Arkansas 60-hour annual requirement for professional development. The board provides embedded professional development for the teachers via the literacy and mathematic coaches who have informal meetings with individuals and small groups of teachers. In this forum coaches share and clarify instructional practices for more efficient and effective student learning. Likewise, opportunities are afforded teachers at the beginning of the school year to discuss vertical alignment of the curriculum in their respective areas. A clearly written district-wide professional development plan that incorporates the need for teacher learning in order to more accurately meet the needs for student learning is not evident. A district professional development plan would support the successful implementation of the district-wide curriculum.

Teachers consistently shared that they have sufficient resources needed to support classroom instruction. This is evident through interviews and classroom walk-throughs. With the purchase of consultative services for schools seeking relief from a multi-year No Child Left Behind (NCLB) school improvement designation the board provides effective resources for teachers and students to successfully exit this classification and to move to more rigorous course offerings for all students. These services provide specific instructional strategies needed to address identified areas of need in student learning, as well as provide intervening assessments which more accurately reflect progress measured in smaller increments.

Stakeholders point with pride to the acceptance of some graduates to prestigious universities (e.g.,

Stanford, Massachusetts Institute of Technology). A series of successful academic competitions indicate a rich academic experience can be found in the district. The district has won nine State Quiz Bowl Championships over the past twenty years. Expectations for higher order thinking skills are scattered throughout the curricula but are not consistently nor vertically aligned. Both high schools offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses. These AP courses are taught face-to-face by an in-house teacher or through facilitated distance learning opportunities. An array of research-based instruction is evident throughout the district, but consistent use of a common series or overarching common practice of instruction is not. The delivery of a district-wide curriculum that is challenging yet reflects an appreciation for the diverse needs of all students was not consistently evident. Upon review of the artifacts and interviews with stakeholders the curriculum does not reflect regular reviews by the administrative team and stakeholders for the purpose of revisions and updates that assure students are receiving a competitively academic education.

Overall, the district provides a research-based curriculum as established by the Arkansas State Department of Education and the NAESC. Through various modes of professional development offered, teachers have learned to utilize research-based instructional methods to facilitate learning in order to achieve established expectations. The components of a strong curriculum that meets the need for diverse student learning are not consistently found throughout the district. District-level coordination of the curriculum and instruction and its successful implementation for all students is not in place.

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

- The faculty and staff are passionate about teaching and care about successful student learning.
- District curricula for core courses K-12 are developed and aligned by NAESC.
- A variety of interventions (e.g., after-school tutoring, peer tutoring, individual assistance from literacy/math coaches) is provided to help students meet expectations for learning.
- District supervisors work cooperatively to coordinate services for all students.

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

- Reassess and realign administrative responsibilities at the district level to provide for a curriculum specialist who is empowered to develop, articulate, and coordinate a district-wide curriculum and instructional plan.
- Develop a district-wide plan or curriculum guide to fully align the components of the academic offerings.
- Formalize professional development activities and processes into a district-wide professional development plan to assure achievement of improvement goals and support assessment results.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Huntsville School District 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 district fully implements the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) that includes benchmark and end-of-course tests across selected grade levels. It utilizes these results to establish expectations for student learning. With assistance from the Northwest Arkansas Education Services Cooperative (NAESC), additional standardized testing is conducted in the primary grades with the use of norm-referenced tests and with disaggregated populations of students (i.e., English Speakers of Other Languages, special education). AP tests are administered for appropriate high school courses. For schools in school improvement consultative services have been purchased that chunk the literacy and math curricula into modules. Within each module student learning is assessed in smaller increments to provide more immediate feedback to the student and teacher.

NAESC provides a very detailed analysis of the district's state assessments results. District leadership receives multiple reports that reflect Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) at the district and school levels. The results also disaggregate subgroups of students as required by NCLB for AYP determination. Finally, the reports give detailed analysis of each student's strengths and weaknesses in literacy and mathematics. Once all of the reports are received by the district, the superintendent and his leadership team conduct a thorough analysis of the results and prepare reports for the board, local schools, and parents. It is very evident that all stakeholders are aware of the results and the significance they have for schools collectively and students individually. The HIVE website is used to create graphs and charts to report data in a format that is easily understood by all stakeholders. It compares the Huntsville School District with comparable school districts as well as shows growth over a three-year period. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and used as professional development indicators for teachers and academic coaching facilitators.

Student reports are mailed home to the parents. The local newspaper prints the district and school results for the community stakeholders. These results are shared, reviewed, and interpreted at the quarterly community gatherings of LetsTalk Kids. The board has a clear understanding of the district's test results and its significance for each school. Interviews with board members and parents revealed an understanding of assessment growth charts and a pride in the district's results of continual improvement. As one parent voiced, "The board is continually striving to do better and it shows in our test scores." Even elementary students articulated a working knowledge of the benchmark assessments and its meaning for them. A student explained, "When we are behind, teachers push us. The school has tutoring to push us harder." Another student wanted us to know, "This school is like a second family. It helps you to pass and be successful!" Schools provide after-school tutoring on a regular basis for those students with identified weaknesses in their student learning. Due to inordinately long bus routes, however, buses are not available to transport "after-school" students. Only students with alternate methods of going home from school are able to participate.

Teachers and principals repeatedly shared that the district test coordinators are very instrumental in their analysis and interpretation of test data. Their coordination of test data and relevant training for coaching facilitators and teachers provides an effective support system to improve student and system performance. Teachers report they are comfortable with using disaggregated data to drive their instruction. A goal was established to close the gap between the literacy achievement of boys and girls. Targeted instruction was provided and this past school year student assessment data indicated the gap was closed. Data are reviewed on a regular basis to make decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Student records are maintained in a secure, accurate and complete manner in accordance with state and federal regulations.

Facilitate all students in need of after school tutoring to be able to receive the assistance needed to improve student learning for all.

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

- The board is very knowledgeable of the district test results and their significance for each school.
- The district test coordinators are instrumental in providing analysis and interpretation of test data that assist schools in targeting areas of improvement for student and system performance.
- The board has purchased additional consultative services and web programs which enhance and provide greater depth to their data analysis.

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

- Facilitate all students in need of after-school tutoring to be able to receive the assistance needed to improve learning.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Huntsville School District 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:

Huntsville School District has a strong, stable, and highly qualified staff, and makes every effort to retain them. Among the initiatives to retain staff are: providing a \$1000 bonus in December 2010 to all employees and raising the district salary schedule 3% for the 2011-2012 year. The allocation of professional staff members is based upon system needs and their qualifications and certification. Staffing is sufficient to meet the purpose of the schools and to meet federal and state regulations.

There are numerous opportunities available for professional development, primarily at the individual school level. As teachers identify an area in which additional in-service is needed, the resources are usually provided. The team found this to be the case in every school. There is a document labeled Huntsville Professional Development Plan. However, this is primarily a description of the process(s) by which a professional development activity may be approved, the rules for participation, and the expectations for fulfilling the required number of hours for continued certification. The QAR team did not find a district Professional Development Plan which outlined the system-level areas of focus for which in-service opportunities are approved and available.

The leadership refers to itself as “fiscal conservatives” in a system with “no frills and no waste.” While this has come as a result of near financial collapse several years ago, the current administration has made significant efforts to bring HSD into financial solvency. All of this is coupled with the fact that the system has been, and continues to be, under-funded and operates on 32 mil tax rate (one of the lowest in the state). While this administration is an excellent steward of the financial resources, teachers and administrators are highly accepting of the allocation of the budget dollars. Asked whether they believed they had enough resources to do their jobs, every stakeholder responded in the affirmative. Several teachers also noted that when a program, project, or professional development opportunity arose that supported their goals for improving instruction, “The resources are out there.”

All finances are handled through approved budgetary procedures and are appropriately audited. The most recent audit available is for 2009. The 2010 audit has not been received as of this report.

The facilities are well-maintained by a committed staff. There is a plan in place for the replacement of equipment on a schedule that ensures the necessary equipment is available and in good working order. The maintenance staff takes great pride in being able provide the services necessary to keep the system operating smoothly. A safe, orderly, and healthy environment is provided.

A complete Disaster Recovery Plan is in place as are crisis and emergency management plans. The Facilities Master Plan was reviewed by the team. It is noted that the plan was updated and submitted in January, 2011.

A major emphasis on technology has provided every school with up-to-date resources for classrooms. Schools are being equipped with SamrtBoards and the training necessary to employ them effectively. Digital cameras and overhead LCD projectors are evident in most classrooms. Computer labs are evident in all schools.

Every effort has been made to ensure that students have the services of counselors and additional health professionals as needed. The food service department is justifiably proud of the initiatives begun to bring

nutritional and healthy foods to students.

Due to the size of the district (757 sq. miles), most of which is rural, a major emphasis and concern is centered on the ability to provide transportation to all students who need it. This is an area over which there is no solution. Many students must ride the bus one and a half hours each way.

Numerous support services are available to students. The high school provides a special program for pregnant teens and teen mothers, especially emphasizing parenting skills. One community organization partners with the district that specializes in under-age drinking issues and drug usage, etc.

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

- Considerable efforts have been made to successfully bring the district into financial solvency.
- Many opportunities are available at the school level for professional development.
- Resources are made available to teachers for initiatives they believe will improve student achievement.

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

- Develop a written district-level Professional Development Plan which outlines the system-level areas of focus for which in-service opportunities are approved and available.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Huntsville School District 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:

Communication and stakeholder relationships are a priority, and interviews with stakeholders reflect that the board, staff, parents, and community members recognize and appreciate the leadership/communication abilities of the superintendent. These efforts by the district leadership foster community support for student learning and ensure positive relationships with all stakeholders.

The "Let's Talk Kids" project provides a system-wide strategy to listen to and communicate with parents about student learning. Open house, school events, and parent conferences are used to solicit knowledge and skills of stakeholders. The "Bridging the Gap" survey encourages parent feedback and gives the district an opportunity to hear from stakeholders.

District leadership meetings each Monday are used to communicate expectations for student learning and

to discuss goals for improving relationships with all stakeholders. Relationships among stakeholders are strong and respectful, and in general, communication across a very large district is positive.

Parent involvement and communication are evidenced by the utilization of such tools as newsletters, the website, open houses, LED board, Career Action Plan (CAP) conferences with 100% attendance, the local newspaper, and extra-curricular activities. These communication resources foster discussion regarding student expectations and improvement goals. One stakeholder said, "Lots of communication is important because school is the most important thing in the community." Another quote by a parent reflects appreciation of the small-town culture: "I want someone else in my kid's business."

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

- All stakeholders—board, staff, parents, and community members—recognize and appreciate the leadership and communication skills of the superintendent.
- Communication meetings are held weekly with district leaders.
- Effective methods are in place to receive feedback from the community.

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

- Explore ways to ensure communication is consistent and regular across all communities and regions within the district.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Huntsville School District 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 district is committed to continuous improvement. An improvement plan for each school and the district is developed annually in accordance with Arkansas law and the ACSIP guidelines. The major improvement goals are prescribed by the state (i.e., academic goals in literacy and mathematics and wellness). The process begins at each school with the formation of a committee to develop school-specific interventions that address each goal. Arkansas law requires that these interventions be research-based. These interventions are reviewed at the school level, transferred to the ACSIP template, and forwarded to the district. A district ACSIP coordinator compiles the district plan and ensures its accuracy before submission to the state. When the state assessment results are received, each building as well as the district, studies the results, determines whether interventions have produced expected changes, and evaluates overall improvement. First and foremost, the goal is to improve student performance.

The results of assessment data are disaggregated to identify learning gaps, and strategies are developed to close those gaps. For example, at the elementary level, a gap between male and female literacy scores was identified. Interventions to address that gap, e.g., purchase of books and materials that appeal to young boys, were implemented. Assessment results indicated that the gap had closed. Student-specific data are also available. When areas of weakness are identified for an individual student, appropriate interventions are identified and implemented. For example, if a student needs assistance in word meanings, the literacy coach will provide individual instruction in that area; teachers adjust instruction to meet the identified needs of one student or a group of students.

Stakeholders are invited to participate in improvement activities. Building level and district improvement committees include parent members. Board members are also invited to serve on these committees. The ACSIP plan is published on the district website and accessible to all stakeholders. A variety of district- and school-sponsored activities (e.g., Parent Involvement Nights, Let's Talk Kids forums) provide a platform for discussion of improvement activities and results. The superintendent stated, "Power is in our people." A district-wide survey, "Bridging the Gap," has been conducted on an annual basis since 1998. Response rate is high (500 to 600 per year), and the results are utilized to effect district and school improvements.

The district ensures that all staff is provided opportunities for professional development. Some opportunities are provided for all staff under district sponsorship, and staff is encouraged to select from a variety of options to meet individual needs. A review of the professional development procedures demonstrates many opportunities are available and encouraged; however, a formal, written plan that includes a focused emphasis on achieving the improvement goals is not in place.

Continuous improvement is supported by the district through allocation of resources focused on goals and interventions identified in the ACSIP plan. Resources are allocated to provide such services and materials as professional development, technology upgrades, regular maintenance, district-wide literacy and math coaches, purchase of materials to support interventions, instructional aides. A variety of outside audits has been commissioned (e.g., safety, transportation) to support continuous improvement in all district operations.

Based on assessment results, student performance has steadily improved. The results of improvement efforts are communicated to all stakeholders through the annual report, parent/teacher conferences, mailings of benchmark results to each parent, newspaper articles, and community meetings.

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

- School improvement plans are developed and evaluated annually.
- All teachers and administrators are involved in the development of the ACSIP.

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

- Develop a formal, written district-wide professional development plan that supports the improvement goals.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Huntsville School District 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

When the current district administration took office, the Huntsville School District was on the verge of financial collapse, and the infrastructure was in serious disrepair. For the past three and a half years the emphasis has been on bringing the district into fiscal solvency and the schools into a well-maintained condition. The entire community of stakeholders recognized that these were priorities and that they have been successfully met.

Because HSD is such a small district, the leadership relied on the NAESC and the Arkansas Consolidated School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) to provide its curriculum needs during these difficult years. This educational practice assured student learning by incorporating essential knowledge and skills with expected outcomes. All schools are designated Title I and are required to have an ACSIP for each school. The ACSIP is used as the school's local plan to establish student expectations via benchmark and end-of-year assessments. The district clearly relies on the ACSIP as their total curriculum. Local curriculum guides with vertical alignments are not evident. Along with this is the fact that there is no one in the district with curricular responsibility or authority. As a result, the only monitoring of what is being taught, how well it is being taught, and whether the strategies employed are being successful is within each school. Each school has developed its own monitoring procedures, collecting, disaggregating, and analyzing test data. With the assistance of literacy and math coaches, these strategies have proven to be quite successful. However, because the district has had very limited input into curriculum decisions, there are no systematic, systemic, or sustainable processes in place to ensure each subject and grade level builds a foundation for the next level of learning.

Staff participates in a variety of professional development opportunities designed to address effective learning. The literacy and math coaches are often the lead facilitators for staff development within each school. There is no district-wide Professional Development Plan. A clearly written district-wide Professional Development Plan that incorporates the need for teacher learning in order to more accurately meet the needs for student learning is needed. Such a Professional Development Plan would support the successful implementation of the district-wide curriculum.

For district accreditation to be effective, it is imperative that major focus is placed on developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a district-wide curriculum, and that a strong Professional Development Plan provide the training and skills to ensure continued success for students.

Develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate a district-wide curriculum.

Design and implement a written Professional Development Plan for all staff that will support the newly constructed and aligned district curriculum.

Strengths

- A strong, fiscally solvent district is in place.
- Each school has developed its own monitoring and evaluation procedures, making adjustments as needed to improve student performance.

Opportunities

- Develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate a district-wide curriculum.
- Design and implement a written Professional Development Plan for all staff that will support the newly constructed and aligned district curriculum.

Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Huntsville School District on 02/20/2011 - 02/23/2011.

Huntsville Middle School	133 School Drive	Huntsville	Arkansas	72740
Huntsville High School	594 S Harris St	Huntsville	Arkansas	72740-8946
Saint Paul Elementary	176 4th Street	St. Paul	Arkansas	72760
Saint Paul High	232 4th Street	St. Paul	Arkansas	72760

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 NCA-CASI-AR accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Mr. Dave Stipe, CHAIR
- Mr. Ed Sellers, MEMBER (Vilonia School District)
- Mrs. Rebecca Fearon, MEMBER (Jacksonville City Board of Education)
- Ms. Catherine Baird, MEMBER

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.