

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Pike County Public Schools**

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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 by the 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 Georgia State Office (SACS-CASI-GA), a division of AdvancED, visited Pike County Public Schools on 03/04/2012 - 03/07/2012.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 23 administrators, 101 teachers, 3 support staff, 79 parents and business partners, 45 students, and 6 Board of Education members for a total of 257 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 Pike County Public Schools 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.

Commendation 1

Commendation Statement:

The district effectively utilizes the district mission and vision to guide the teaching and learning processes throughout the district.

Evidence:

The vision is constantly before district and school stakeholders as deliberations are conducted in making decisions regarding school improvement initiatives.

Rationale:

Vision and mission statements that are effectively utilized to guide and focus the work of a district and its schools enhance student performance and the achievement of targeted goals.

Commendation 2

Commendation Statement:

The district has created a healthy organizational culture which guides and supports the work of dedicated, committed, and focused professional educators.

Evidence:

District and school level groups during interviews consistently articulated the shared responsibility for district and school achievements and shortcomings. Principals and teachers in Pike County Schools have direct access to support from district personnel. District personnel are regularly seen in the schools. The QAR team observed supportive and professional working relationships among teachers and administrators and the district and schools. The same level of support, concern, and mutual respect was observed in professional staff interactions with students. Parents also commented about the "family feeling" in the schools as a major source of satisfaction for them.

Rationale:

A healthy organizational culture is a key ingredient in achieving systemic continuous improvement.

Commendation 3

Commendation Statement:

A positive, cooperative relationship has been developed between the school board and the superintendent with a clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities.

Evidence:

A chain of command is respected and honored in dealing with the operations of the district. The school board and

the superintendent form an effective governance team. Stakeholders view the team as highly committed to and supportive of the district's vision and purpose. School board members, the superintendent, and stakeholders indicate the governance team embraces the vision and work cooperatively to ensure that the district is governed efficiently and effectively. Stakeholders express confidence in the leadership's ability to govern and lead the district forward as the district copes with ongoing financial difficulties.

Rationale:

It is essential for the governing body and superintendent to work cooperatively in order to maintain the current focus on achieving the vision, mission, and goals.

Commendation 4

Commendation Statement:

The district provides fiscal stewardship and optimizes resources to maintain and support student learning opportunities which result in high student performance in a time of very limited resources.

Evidence:

The current down turn in state and local economies has been effectively managed by district administrators to minimize the direct impact on students and student learning. By establishing well-reasoned priorities and screens for forced budget reductions, the district has avoided a decrease in student achievement. Parents and other stakeholders interviewed express confidence in the district's board of education, administrators, and teachers as they make tough decisions to conserve programs and people.

Rationale:

Processes implemented through collaborative relationships and efforts assist the district as it addresses future fiscal challenges.

Commendation 5

Commendation Statement:

A climate of trust has been established that promotes strong community support for schools.

Evidence:

The district has a high level of stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process for Pike County Schools. The planning efforts and results of student performance are communicated through multiple formats. The district has an open door policy that is valued by stakeholders.

Rationale:

The focus on student-centered decision-making through open, honest, and transparent practices promotes respect and trust between and among stakeholders.

Commendation 6

Commendation Statement:

The district administration promotes leadership capacity by providing staff members, parents, and community members meaningful roles in the decision-making process.

Evidence:

Organizational structures are designed to increase participation of stakeholders on both the district and school levels. Parent and student groups, school improvement teams, booster organizations, advisory councils, focus groups, and committees are in place to promote communication and seek input. Interviews with parents and a variety of community stakeholders verified the effectiveness of this collaborative approach to decision-making.

Rationale:

Engaging stakeholders in meaningful roles regarding decision-making promotes ownership and support for the school district.

Commendation 7

Commendation Statement:

The district demonstrates a leadership style that fosters a commitment to being visible, accessible, and receptive to shared decision-making.

Evidence:

Interviews with stakeholders indicate that district central office staff are accessible and consistently in the schools. An open door policy is in place that allows two-way communication to flow between central office, schools, and the stakeholders in the community.

Rationale:

An open, collaborative leadership approach promotes the mutual trust between the school district and community stakeholders and also provides a more accessible means for stakeholders to meet with school personnel.

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 Pike County Public Schools 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.

Required Action 1

Required Action:

Update and implement a comprehensive technology plan that supports the teaching and learning process in order for the district to achieve its designated goals.

Evidence:

Interviews with stakeholders reveal that the availability and use of technology is inconsistent with the vision and mission of the Pike County School District. Schools in the district have not been upgraded and equipped with current technology to provide an up-to-date learning environment. Additional technology resources are needed for the classroom in order to maximize the effectiveness of instruction that will enhance student learning.

Rationale:

The use of current technology in the classroom ensures that students are prepared to function in the 21st century.

Required Action 2

Required Action:

Implement and monitor a comprehensive plan with definitive processes for consistently maintaining and improving educational facilities to ensure safe and healthy environments that are conducive for student learning.

Evidence:

Interviews and observations during visits to the district office and schools reveal the need to consistently maintain and upgrade the district's buildings. The middle school that is only three years old has maintenance and structural cracks. The ceilings in the gym at the primary school have many tears which could possibly cause materials to drop down on students who are in the gym.

Rationale:

A consistently implemented and monitored plan for maintenance, repair, and upgrades will promote a more conducive learning environment for students as they prepare to succeed in the 21st Century.

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.

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:

Pike County Schools has established a vision and mission in collaboration with its superintendent and members of the board of education by prioritizing the district's shared values and beliefs. The vision of Pike County Schools (PCS) is "to be the highest academically performing small school district in the state of Georgia." To that end, the mission of PCS as stated is "to produce students that are academically successful, graduate on time, and achieve their post-secondary goals." The vision and mission are communicated to the stakeholders through policy and procedure handbooks, the district's webpage, school newsletters, automated call out system, and signage at the board of education office and in individual schools. Interviews and observations indicate that the leadership of the superintendent, who is an exemplary instructional leader, enforces the district's vision and mission. The district leadership guides teaching and learning as the district makes student improvement the highest priority within the district. The number one goal for the district is that it will have a 90% high school graduation rate with 90% of all students meeting or exceeding state achievement benchmarks. As the district moves forward with strategies to achieve its goals, a wider range of stakeholders involved in the review and revision of the vision and mission would enhance the process.

Individual schools revise and update school improvement plans quarterly to align their goals and strategies with the district's vision and mission. The superintendent and deputy superintendent meet with school staff every three months to review hard evidence regarding progress in achieving the goals. The Balanced Scorecard provides a means of communication to the district and community stakeholders about information that profoundly impacts student achievement and performance.

Student information and assessment from PowerSchool and SemsTracker provide a system profile for multiple forms of student data. These tools are available to all district personnel as appropriate and provide a means for data sharing among schools and departments. Additionally, PowerSchool allows parents to access grades and attendance data.

All stakeholders agree that student learning is the district's main priority. The superintendent and central office staff are highly visible in the schools and support the efforts of the schools. Interviews, improvement plans, and observations confirm the district-wide effort to identify causes affecting student learning. Planning and improvement teams at the district and school levels are vertically aligned and attentive to improved student performance. Professional Learning Communities, Better Seeking Teams, School Leadership Teams, district summer retreats, and quarterly reviews at individual schools allow opportunities to meet and plan for student improvement. Data-based decisions are made regarding quality instruction based on the district's beliefs in high standards, student performance, and researched based practices.

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

- The vision and mission of the school district are advanced by the superintendent and board of education who are committed to excellence and success.
- Stakeholders throughout the district appear to embrace the vision and mission statements and their potential to impact decisions related to improve teaching and learning.
- The mission is communicated and publicized through a variety of mediums and communicated to all stakeholders.

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

- Involve a wider range of stakeholders in the review and revision of the vision and mission in order to enhance the continuous improvement process.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Pike County Public Schools 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 Pike County School District is governed by a six member board of education. The board's goal is for Pike County Schools to exemplify a quality system that is respected for high standards, outstanding performance, and excellence in student achievement. The board and superintendent state unequivocally their joint vision of being "the highest achieving small district in the state of Georgia" and obtaining their 90-90 goal (90% high school graduation and 90% of all students meet or exceed state achievement benchmarks).

Through the use of legal counsel provided by Harbin, Hartley and Hawkins, the board is assured that the district is compliant with applicable local, state and federal laws, maintains adequate insurance to protect its financial stability, and is readily advised about legal requirements and obligations. The board has established policies and procedures and communicates these policies through their public website to provide for the effective operation of the school district. Board policies are made available to all school personnel and are used consistently by the board as the basis for its actions. As a practice, the board of

education, on a two-year cycle, reviews all board policies and posts them on the district website for public comment.

Adhering to their policies and procedures for a governing board, the board attends annual training provided by the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) to meet their mandatory training requirements. In addition, the board attends training provided by RESA (Regional Educational Service Agency) in nearby Griffin, Georgia. As curricular changes are made implementing the Common Core Standards, updated training would be beneficial to help the district achieve its 90-90 goal. Interviews with the board, the district leadership, parents, and students verify that the district's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities.

The district is under the leadership of a board appointed superintendent who is assisted by a deputy superintendent. Based upon interviews with board members, district and school leadership, and a review of the district's organizational chart, the board recognizes and preserves the executive and leadership authority of the superintendent. Interviews with the district staff, parents, and community members make it clear that they are provided roles that promote a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership. They collectively agree with the statement that the school board and district leadership promote a culture that is collaborative, caring, positive, and student centered. The board and superintendent work collaboratively to accomplish their mission which is for the Pike County Public School District to constantly seek to “be the highest achieving small district in Georgia” by ensuring that all students will receive the necessary support to graduate with the skills to be successful in society. District and school leaders provide direction and allocate limited resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for learning on state mandated high stakes achievement tests. However, interviews with stakeholders reveal that in a struggling economy financial constraints have presented challenges for district and school leadership to consistently provide for updated technology necessary for students and teachers to have access to tools that will enable them to compete in a global society. In addition, financial constraints have presented the district with challenges to maintain facilities and their functionality at the highest level.

Leaders function with clearly defined authority and responsibility and encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for district and school improvement among stakeholders. The districts policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for students in need of additional services in critical areas. Summer retreats, winter board retreats, Superintendent Advisory Team meetings, Town Hall meetings, Quarterly Action Plans, and curriculum mapping across the district ensures continuity in district implementation of plans. To enhance data-driven decision making and promote continual school improvement, selected school personnel are provided opportunities for professional develop in areas of identified focus. In addition, high performing staff members provide professional development for colleagues at faculty meetings. Schools do vertical planning in May to target areas of need for the following year as students’ progress through the system.

Data is used effectively and consistently to guide instruction. The RTI process is utilized effectively to provide support for students and guidance for teachers and administrators to schedule students effectively and consistently. Analysis of the Early Intervention Program (EIP) led to funding an additional teacher through Title One funds in select classrooms to “push-in” and provide additional support for EIP students. As a result, the number of EIP students meeting standards increased from 28% to 71% from 2009 to 2011. The percentage of EIP students meeting standards in reading increased from 42% to 82%, in math the percentage meeting standards increased from 14% to 67%. Through interviews with stakeholders it was confirmed that school and district leadership have an “Open Door” policy and is open to input that will support student learning. The district measures community expectations and stakeholder satisfaction on a regular basis. This is accomplished through the use of the Balanced Scorecard and the results of regularly

conducted community satisfaction surveys. The district uses these surveys as a way to get all parents involved in the education of their children; however, they continue to struggle with the issue of inadequate parental involvement in some areas of the district.

Pike County implements GTEP (Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program), an evaluation system designed to support teachers as they strive for improvement, accountability, and innovative teaching strategies. The teacher performance appraisal process has been developed to support teachers' work in standards-based classrooms using the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) to improve student learning.

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

- The superintendent is an exemplary instructional leader who is an advocate for the vision and instructional improvement efforts in the district.
- The superintendent and board work collaboratively to embed the district's vision and mission within the school community to guide performance.
- The board, superintendent, and school leadership teams have developed a culture of caring, visibility, and accessibility amongst stakeholders and are receptive to ideas for shared decision-making.
- The district and school leaders provide direction and guide data-directed decisions on a quarterly basis to enhance student performance.

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

- Update and consistently implement a comprehensive technology plan in all areas to ensure the optimal use of technology in the teaching and learning process.
- Implement and monitor a comprehensive facility maintenance and improvement plan to maintain facilities at the highest level of functionality.
- Encourage all board members to take advantage of trainings to keep abreast of best practices that would help the district in its quest to reach the 90-90 goal.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Pike County Public Schools 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 district curriculum is developed and aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards. The vision and mission of the district is in the forefront of all decisions regarding instruction and issues regarding students. The district has worked diligently to see that all students receive a high quality education in a safe and nurturing environment. Pike County School District serves 3,467 students from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Of these, approximately 772 pre-kindergarten through second grade students attend Pike County Primary School; 783 third through fifth grade students attend Pike County Elementary School; 855 sixth through eighth grade students are served at Pike County Middle School; and 1057 students in grades nine through twelve attend Pike County High School. Currently 87% of the students

enrolled in the system are White, 9 % are Black, and 4% are comprised of Hispanic or other students. Students with disabilities make up 6.9% of the student population. Based on household incomes, 43% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches. Student enrollment has increased by more than 300 for the last five years. However, the growth has not resulted in significant change in the percentage of students within identified subpopulations.

The district is committed to continuous improvement. The district's comprehensive continuous improvement plan is used to develop data-driven performance goals with measurable objectives. The goals are constantly monitored by the school board, district leadership, and school personnel to meet the needs of all students. Interviews with administrators, instructional support staff, and teachers reveal that the district currently utilizes an effective process to develop, implement, and monitor district and building level school improvement plans which include targets based on student performance indicators.

Once data is disaggregated targets and action steps are developed during the system-wide summer retreat. During interviews stakeholders communicated that a high degree of vertical and horizontal communication is accomplished during this process as representatives from each schools Leadership Team are involved. Annual winter board retreats are utilized to process current information and guide future decisions that will impact future growth. Updates and revisions are made to the school based improvement plans as quarterly reviews are held with district and building level administrators. For the past few years curriculum has been a district priority. Teams of teachers representing grade levels (PreK-12) meet to revise and update the district curriculum. They continue to concentrate on aligning curriculum with assessment. Interviews indicated that the system is gearing up for the Common Core Standards, new initiatives, and preparing for the changes in testing. In addition, the district provides transitional support to acclimate students to the next grade level. The data-driven culture allows curriculum revision at regular intervals as indicated by student success markers. Every school has a data room and state assessment results are studied to determine strengths, weaknesses, and root causes. The district uses technology to support curriculum and inform decision making. However, interviews with stakeholders revealed that in a struggling economy financial constraints have presented challenges for district and school leadership to consistently provide for updated technology necessary for students and teachers to have access to tools that will enable them to compete in a global society.

As evidenced in interviews and review of plans, the district is committed to developing a rigorous curriculum and instructional strategies through professional practice, research-based initiatives, and interventions designed to positively impact and improve teaching and learning. As indicated in interviews students are frequently assessed on their learning of the standards. The QAR team learned through interviews with stakeholders that the district effectively identifies and implements research based interventions through Response to Intervention (RTI) to positively impact student achievement. This is evidenced by a decrease from 10.1 % to 6.9% of students qualifying for Special Education services from 2006-2011. Small class sizes at the secondary level enable teachers to individualize and assess student progress in a timely manner and provide the appropriate curriculum and instruction. Emphasis on student learning and resources contributed to the graduation rate increasing from 63% to 88% since 2004. Although the graduation rate has improved dramatically, closing the achievement gaps in learning for some students remains problematic. In addition, interviews with stakeholders do indicate a need to develop, implement and monitor strategies to close the achievement gap between identified sub group populations.

Professional Learning Communities have been established and meet to discuss research-based strategies, innovations, and activities to facilitate achievement for all students, including higher order thinking skills and applying learning to real world situations. Multiple data collection sources are utilized to determine the success of instruction and learning. Some include teacher evaluations, formative and summative

evaluations, and district and school walk-through activities. Instructional time is protected at all schools to support student learning.

Students are given many opportunities in academics as well as extra-curricular activities. These include but are not limited to: technology club, art club, drama club, chorus, FFA, Pen and Sword, Environmental Club, Y-club, running club, and multiple sports teams at the secondary level. The district provides transportation for activities and sports.

Topics for professional development are identified through data analysis and aligned with goals from the strategic plan. In addition, quarterly reviews are utilized to help personnel achieve improvement goals. School-based activities reflect specific needs of the school community in addition to district level perspectives that address more global improvement goals. To enhance data-directed decision making and promote continual school improvement selected school personnel are provided opportunities for professional development in identified areas of need. Research-based professional development is aligned to instructional strategic objectives of the district, such as differentiated instruction and performance task initiatives and is a priority for 2011-2012.

Turnover in academic positions is low district-wide. District officials participate in regional job fairs to plan for and solicit prospective employees. At the orientation, site-based staff members provide timely information for new hires, introduce their mentors, and review policies and procedures. Interviews with district officials and review of teacher demographic data indicate a need to increase the percentage of minority teachers within the Pike County School System and that district officials acknowledge that need.

District leadership ensures that the allocation of limited financial resources is supportive of the district's vision, programs, services, and its plans for continuous improvement. The Quality Assurance Team heard from all stakeholders that financial constraints have presented challenges for district and school leadership to consistently provide for updated technology necessary for students and teachers to have access to tools that will enable them to compete in a global society. QAR team members learned through interviews that site based personnel have been proactive in acquiring additional funding through grant opportunities.

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

- The superintendent and district leadership team provide excellent instructional leadership and facilitate opportunities for growth and meaningful input from stakeholders.
- The district, school leadership, and teacher teams are committed to utilizing updated student data to drive instruction.
- Quarterly reviews to address school improvement goals based on student performance data is highly commendable.
- A collaborative spirit in the educational community amongst all stakeholders is encouraged and evident.

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

- Construct and utilize a plan to increase the percentage of minority teachers within the Pike County School System.
- Update and consistently implement a comprehensive technology plan across the district to ensure the optimal use of technology in the teaching and learning process.
- Coordinate and monitor other strategies to close the achievement gap between identified subgroup populations.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall

assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Pike County Public Schools 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 has demonstrated a solid commitment to a data-driven culture which drives continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Efforts have been strategically aligned with the mission, vision, and goals of the district to achieve their mission of being the best small district in the State of Georgia. Information shared during interviews and observed during school visits indicate that stakeholders, district leadership, personnel, support staff, and students make instructional decisions for student progress based on the analysis of regularly collected data.

The district has established a comprehensive assessment system by utilizing an extensive list of evaluation tools to guide decisions that positively impact student achievement. Teaching staff, intervention specialists, and special education staff frequently monitor and adjust instruction based on multiple data points including academics, behavior, and special education information. The list includes screening, benchmarking, formative, and summative assessments that are reliable, valid, and bias free. Once administered and analyzed, results are compiled for determination of which interventions, enrichments, and additional learning opportunities will be implemented for student growth. The district is committed to disaggregating data in many ways to determine instructional and organizational effectiveness. Data rooms are used to facilitate the collection, analysis, and use of data. At this time, a lot of this disaggregation is completed manually. As the district continues to use data to make informed decisions regarding student learning and organizational effectiveness, a technology software program that disaggregates the data would enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

The Plan-Do-Check-Act process is clearly articulated as a consistent method to analyze and adjust instruction. During interviews, district administrators and instructional staff shared that this process has been successful in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. The Pike County Strategic Plan poster that communicates the improvement process to staff, parents, and community members is carefully placed throughout buildings as a visual reminder of the process.

Staff training, intentional implementation, and consistent documentation of Response to Intervention (RtI) for identified students has provided a steady increase in student results. A common message from all school personnel, including administration, was the high impact this has had on improved student outcomes.

All levels of the organization demonstrate a strong commitment to collaboration in their Professional Learning Communities that meet regularly to discuss student results, check for mastery, and strategies for remediation and enrichment. Teams have several opportunities during the school year to enhance their efforts by vertically teaming with the grade level below to explain and discuss the knowledge and skills students should know and be able to do at that grade level. This communication informs teachers regarding target mastery that is needed at their respective grade levels.

The Balanced Score Card is updated frequently on the district website to provide information for stakeholders about student progress and data comparisons for Pike County and other Georgia districts with similar demographics. Powerschool is a highly successful communication opportunity for parents to immediately access their student's records. All parents indicate appreciation and support of the efforts on the part of the district to communicate through this effective parent portal.

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

- The district has demonstrated its commitment to use trend data to evaluate student performance and system effectiveness.
- Quarterly plan reviews are used to monitor data regarding student achievement.
- Data rooms are used to facilitate the collection, analysis, and use of data.
- The district has developed a balanced score card to assist in the evaluation of the results with all stakeholders.

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

Utilize a technology software program that disaggregates data in order to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of data analysis for making informed decisions regarding student learning and organizational effectiveness.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Pike County Public Schools 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 Pike County School District has created commendable efficiencies in teaching and learning with increasingly limited resources. The district has implemented processes to hire and retain qualified staff. Staff retention data indicates that mentoring procedures are in place to build a positive and nurturing working environment. Recruitment strategies to hire diverse staff in order to meet the needs of a growing diverse student population are being addressed. Select staff and community members will attend job fairs in order to encourage diverse staff to work for Pike County Schools. Further strategies and a detailed plan will improve these opportunities for hiring and retaining a diverse teaching staff.

Due to reduced staff development funding, learning opportunities from outside experts have been reduced. The staff has collaboratively built improved skill and capacity by conducting classroom visits, integrating team planning, and video taping to learn from each other as a means to address targeted areas of need. The district utilized the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Process to annually evaluate certified staff members. Student/staffing ratios are within the Georgia State guidelines.

Stakeholder interviews reinforce that many systems are in place to support learning. However, gaps in performance of some subgroups still exist which hinder the vision, mission, and goals from becoming a reality. The need for a detailed technology plan to provide adequate infrastructure and equipment

maintenance and replacement is vital to the education of Pike County students.

Security plans that incorporate crisis management plans are written and in place for all sites. Mock emergency preparedness drills have been incorporated into the high school to train and prepare staff and students for emergency situations. A long range building facilities plan that is consistently implemented to provide a safe and healthy learning environment is a needed focus area for the future due to construction and structural concerns.

The annual operating budget is developed on a program basis and is focused on student achievement. Seventy-five percent of the budget is allocated for direct classroom instruction and necessary classroom support. Pike County carefully utilizes state funding formulas to maximize efficiencies for specific class weights in the areas of gifted, support classes, and secondary classroom formulas.

The district provides social workers, school counselors, graduation coaches, psychologists, and school nurses to offer specific and generalized student support services. A strong Special Education Program is in place that utilizes a collaborative model to assure that special education students achieve improved success. Interviews with staff indicate that home visits and parent feedback are strong components of the Special Education Program.

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

- The school district has ensured that resources support a curriculum that enables students to achieve at high levels in spite of budget constraint.,
- District stakeholders exhibit a high degree of professionalism and care for all students.
- The district has a commitment to provide high quality district/school level personnel to ensure support for teaching and learning.

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

- Develop a comprehensive plan for maintaining proper facilities and equipment to ensure student achievement.
- Commit to improving the capacity for increasing technology for the district.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Pike County Public Schools 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:

Pike County Schools have done an excellent job of communicating the district vision, mission, and goals to all stakeholders as indicated in interviews with members of the community, school board, parents, staff and students. From the superintendent to classroom teachers, each group express confidence and trust in district staff. Stakeholders describe staff as transparent, honest, and always focused on what is in the best interest of students.

Throughout interviews, all stakeholders express a strong focus on student learning and share the district vision and mission without hesitation. Parents and community members clearly articulate that the superintendent, principals, and teachers are all very accessible when needed to discuss issues. Stakeholders refer to the “open door policy” of all staff and reiterate they are treated with respect. Parents indicate they receive timely responses and are frequently informed through a variety of sources about personal student issues, upcoming events, and achievement data. The district consistently communicates via classroom and building newsletters, teacher websites, progress reports, texts, twitter, Facebook, “one call” telephone system, and PowerSchool. The district webpage is updated on a regular basis and contains a component strictly for parent and community member use. Items that frequently appear on the webpage to keep constituents informed are meeting agendas, stakeholder survey data, district policies and procedures, and calendars of events. As the district moves forward in implementing strategies to achieve identified goals, there is a need to communicate a clear and concise plan of how Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds will be utilized to impact student achievement.

Curriculum and CRCT Parent Nights are very well received and parents feel they are extremely beneficial as a learning tool to better understand what they can do to support their child’s education and the school district in general. When asked if they know about what is happening in schools, the phone system is frequently mentioned as a communication tool that keeps them up-to-date on school events. Opportunities for stakeholder decision-making are available through the superintendent’s advisory council or individual building councils. Volunteer procedures have been put into practice to encourage parents to be actively involved in the schools. In all cases, it is clear that the schools and district offices demonstrate the commitment to a safe and welcoming school culture for students, staff, parents, and the community. Although, Pike County Schools have achieved a commendable level of success in communications and relationships, in the future the district should create a plan to ensure a more diverse representation of all stakeholder groups.

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

- The district’s mission, vision, and cultural expectations have been effectively communicated to all stakeholders.
- Stakeholder input has been used to support student learning.
- District leadership is highly visible and interactive throughout the schools and community.
- Relationships between the district and the external stakeholders have led to community partnerships supporting opportunities for student learning.

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

- Create a plan to ensure a more diverse representation of all stakeholder groups.
- Communicate a clear and concise plan of how SPLOST funds will be used and the impact on student achievement.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Pike County Public Schools 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 Pike County School District engages in and is committed to a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and mission of the district. Initially the superintendent and the board members developed the vision and mission for the district. The vision and mission has been shared with stakeholders who have embraced and supported the district in striving to become the "highest achieving small school district in Georgia." The overall district goal of achieving a 90% graduation rate and 90% of students meet or exceed achievement on standardized assessments reflect high expectations for both district personnel and the students they serve. As the vision and mission are reviewed and revised to reflect future goals and objectives more stakeholder participation is needed in the planning phase.

Data analysis is used to make informed decisions on best practice. Student performance data are collected and analyzed, along with stakeholder perception data, and information from focus groups and advisory councils on an on-going basis. The results are utilized to identify trends over time and to plan for the future. The process is a collaborative effort between the district and schools. Student learning and systems effectiveness is monitored through the use of district, department, and school level Balanced Scorecards (BSC). The board of education and district leadership sets goals for the division and these goals serve as the foundation for the school goals. An alignment between division goals and school goals is clearly evident. The schools develop their own school improvement plans based on the goals and objectives outlined in the District Strategic Plan and their own data analysis of need which includes a focus on performance tasks and differentiation. The superintendent and deputy superintendent provide oversight for monitoring district, school, and department BSCs. They meet quarterly and annually with school leaders and semi-annually and annually with department directors to analyze data. The district systematically uses the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle in the development of the district and school level plans that are implemented through Quarterly Action Plans. These plans are reviewed by the superintendent and deputy superintendent during the quarterly reviews. Building level school improvement teams meet monthly to construct action plans, monitor results of strategies implemented, and review benchmark data. Teachers meet weekly by grade/content area to discuss standardized test, benchmark, and common assessment data. The impact of the district's continuous improvement efforts is evident in the high student achievement results.

As a component of continuous improvement, Pike County Schools systemically engages in processes to ensure that improvement goals reflect student learning needs and are aligned with the vision and mission. Because the mission of the district is to "produce students who are academically successful, graduate on time, and achieve their post-secondary goals," teachers have worked in teams to develop common instructional units with quality performance tasks. The district not only uses its processes to identify and meet the needs of under-performing students but align and maximize their efforts in order achieve their vision of becoming "the highest academically performing small school system in Georgia." District and school leaders understand the role high achieving students play in making this vision a reality. Therefore, the schools have created opportunities for students to participate in courses with increased rigor.

Professional development is provided based on data analysis and continuous improvement efforts. A collaborative process is in place to determine professional development needs. Currently the focus of

professional development is on standards-based instruction, differentiation of instructional practices, and performance tasks. School improvement plans reflect these initiatives. Due to funding, most professional development is imbedded using focus groups and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs); however, stakeholders indicate their needs are met and the district finds ways to provide the needed professional development identified. The implementation of the initiatives is monitored through peer and administration observations, constructive critical discussions, and self-reflection. Resources from the Griffin RESA, instructional experts, and internal stakeholder expertise provide assistance in this process.

Time is protected for planning and engaging in improvement efforts. A routine meeting schedule for departmental meetings, principal meetings, board meetings, advisory councils, and school improvement teams is established. The board schedules an annual planning retreat, and school and district administrators participate in an annual summer retreat. The process of continuous improvement is evident at all levels. A high level of trust in the leadership and improvement process at the school level is evident.

Stakeholder groups consistently praise the division for positive open door communication. They identify multiple opportunities for stakeholders to be involved in the goal setting process. Involvement opportunities are communicated informally by word of mouth, formally through electronic means, such as the website and email, and through traditional methods, such as newsletters. The district engages stakeholders in the overall process of continuous improvement which promotes transparency. The district monitors and communicates the results of improvement efforts by various means. Parent-Teacher conferences, newsletters, brochures, and the website are only a few of the methods used to convey information.

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

- A well-defined process for continuous improvement has been established and is supported by the stakeholders.
- The concept of continuous improvement is an important and essential part of the district culture.
- Stakeholder groups are actively involved in the process for continuous improvement.

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

- Expand stakeholder involvement in the review and revision process for the vision and mission as the district continues its on-going improvement initiatives,

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Pike County Public Schools 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 Pike County School District has established a systems approach to continuous improvement efforts. All stakeholders interviewed demonstrate an understanding of the district accreditation process. A strong commitment to continuous improvement and academic excellence exists as evidenced in the vision and mission statement. The school board and superintendent have a positive relationship that reflects trust and demonstrates a commitment to provide the best educational opportunities for all students. Administrators throughout the district believe in and support the district's vision and initiatives as they continue to work collaboratively to develop the necessary processes, alignment, and measures needed to meet the AdvancED standards. The district personnel monitor, document, and communicate improvement efforts to all stakeholders. Informal and external audits have been used to ascertain strengths and challenges, identify strategies for addressing areas of improvement across the district, and provide job-embedded professional development for district personnel.

The District Strategic Plan provides the foundation for the school improvement process in which schools then plan and document their respective continuous improvement efforts. A Plan-Do-Check-Act process is in place to monitor the district and school initiatives. A District Advisory Council which includes parents and community stakeholders provides input on curriculum matters, strategic planning, and data which is then communicated to district and school-based leadership. Other avenues of communicating information to stakeholders include school and district websites containing pertinent information, email access, newsletters, handbooks with policy and procedures, media publications, regular parent/teacher conferences, Parent-Teacher Associations, an automated telephone communication system, parent nights, district information, and copies of students' assessment results. Staff members across the district have an understanding of the importance in using data for making informed decisions that impact teaching and learning in the classroom. Data is used to identify areas for improvement, strategies needed to address issues, and to monitor the progress of improvement efforts.

Strengths

- District stakeholders have created a meaningful vision that provides a strong foundation for planning continuous improvement initiatives.
- The district's leadership is perceived as effective in supporting the district's vision and ensuring alignment between school and district initiatives, priorities, and improvement goals.

Opportunities

- Expand efforts to identify strategies that will enhance the achievement of all at-risk students in order to continue to close the achievement gap among subgroups and move the district closer to the goal of having a 90% graduation rate with 90% of students achieving identified benchmarks.

Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Pike County Public Schools on 03/04/2012 - 03/07/2012.

Pike County Middle School	406 Hughley Rd	Zebulon	Georgia	30295-6689
Pike County Elementary School	607 Pirate Dr	Zebulon	Georgia	30295-3375
Pike County Primary School	7218 Highway 19 S	Zebulon	Georgia	30295-3597
Pike County High School	331 Pirate Dr	Zebulon	Georgia	30295-3378

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-GA accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Patricia S. Golding, Chair/Lead Evaluator (Associate Director Virginia, SACS CASI)
- Mr. Derick Austin, Vice Chair (Lamar County High School)
- Mr. Joseph S. Rawlings, Team Member (New Smyrna Beach Middle School)
- Dr. Marcy Hunt-Harris, Team Member (Monroe County Achievement Center)
- Ms. Jane E. Drennan, Team Member (Bibb County Schools)

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.