

Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for Putnam County School System

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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 team chair and comprised of professionals from outside the school district. The team reviews the findings of the school district's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school district, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school district's adherence to the standards for accreditation. The team provides an oral exit report and prepares a written Quality Assurance Review Team Report designed to help the school district and its schools improve.

The Quality Assurance Review Team Report. Following the visit, the review team completes the Quality Assurance Review report. After review by a nationally-trained reader, the report is submitted to the district. The report contains commendations and required actions for improvement.

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

Accreditation Recommendation. The Quality Assurance Review team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed at the state level and by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school district following action from the commission.

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI Georgia State Office (SACS-CASI-GA), a division of AdvancED, visited Putnam County School System on 02/21/2010 - 02/24/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 21 administrators, 80 teachers, 14 support staff, 52 parents and business partners, 55 students, and 3 Board of Education members for a total of 225 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 Putnam County School System 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 school system has wisely and effectively utilized limited fiscal resources to build new and renovate existing buildings in order to provide state-of-the-art facilities to complement instructional programs that are also state-of-the-art.**

School system facilities and equipment are well maintained and provide a safe and orderly environment at all grade levels. All grade levels in the system have been affected in the move over the last year to occupy the newly-built high school and to move lower grades into renovated facilities to effectively house existing programs and current students. Students, parents and other internal and external stakeholders are positive about the school system facilities and the ability to enhance student learning in state-of-the-art facilities.

The way students feel about where they attend school has been proven to affect their daily academic performance. Providing a positive climate conducive to learning is critical to the success of a school and a school system, and the Putnam County School System has created such a climate in their school facilities.

- **The school board has developed and adopted five goals as part of an accountability process to inform and direct the decision making efforts of the school system.**

The board's five goals are: to ensure high levels of performance for all students in Putnam County; to align financial expenditures and human resources with improved student performance; to develop leadership capacity in all staff; to provide educationally appropriate facilities, nutrition program and transportation system supportive of learning; to actively engage parents and community in the educational process.

These measurable goals are strategic components that drive all educational decisions of the school system, i.e., professional training, resource funding, student services, and hiring of system staff. All internal stakeholders have a thorough understanding of and commitment to the goals and how they are integrated into all components of the system's educational services.

These five board goals are effectively communicated to all stakeholder groups, both internal and external, throughout the school system. The goals inform every decision related to the educational process and provide a common set of standards with which to judge the merits of any educational decision under consideration.

- **The school system employs academic and graduation coaches at the middle and high school levels to assist and support teachers and to design interventions to enhance student performance and teacher effectiveness.**

The system uses its academic and graduation coaches to provide ongoing, job-embedded professional development for all school-based staff to enhance their instructional effectiveness. Support for struggling learners with peer tutoring offered through the Math and Science Academy, co-teaching (inclusion) classroom situations and various other interventions under the direction of the academic and graduation coaches serve to prepare students for a successful future in the workforce or post-secondary education.

These academically oriented coaches provide needed training, support and interventions between the building administrators and classroom teachers to improve the essential knowledge and skills needed by students to be successful upon graduation from high school.

- **The school system makes use of multiple assessments at all grade levels to ensure student learning and effectively uses assessment data to inform and drive instruction.**

The school system employs a multi-faceted assessment system with clearly defined performance objectives which involves the use of formative, summative, pretest/posttest and benchmark assessment tools. Various software packages used in the system assess student performance on the multiple assessments, identify achievement gaps among various subgroups of students whenever and wherever they exist and evaluate the effectiveness of system approved curriculum frameworks and instructional strategies. These packages also identify various interventions used to target improvement for individual students and student subgroups.

This comprehensive assessment system targets and verifies growth at each school as well as at the school system level. The use of this system allows school and system leaders to make instructional decisions that are both research-based and data driven.

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 Putnam County School System 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.

- **Seek to improve technology resources to effectively and consistently communicate school and system plans and accomplishments to stakeholders.**

A system for timely and effective communication with parents and external stakeholders will enhance parental support and involvement. Web based portals accessed by parents with unique passwords communicate student data relative to academic performance, attendance, and school calendar events among other pieces of information. This technology infrastructure will provide timely and effective communication to parents and encourage their increased involvement in their children's education.

A comprehensive technology plan utilizing the system website and appropriate parent portals will effectively communicate changing needs of students to parents and community stakeholders and will, in turn, increase involvement of parents and community in school activities.

- **Develop and implement school-based and system-wide strategies to improve parental involvement and external stakeholder communication.**

The five school board goals are widely understood by all internal and external stakeholders, but the system's vision and mission have not been as clearly communicated or understood by all system stakeholders. Community perception is that effective communication originates from the school level, but consistent communication from the system administrative office and school board needs to be significantly

improved. Parental involvement has long been known to be strongly correlated with effective schools and school systems.

Strategies to improve two-way communication between the school system and its stakeholders and to increase parental involvement, especially in the upper grades have shown themselves to increase student learning and student success.

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 Putnam County School System staff and stakeholders strive to prepare students for a future in an ever-changing world. Their vision is to create a school system in which students, staff and community learn, grow and work together to embrace the future. The system's mission is to assist all students in acquiring knowledge, fostering aspirations and developing life skills that will empower them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of a global society. These vision and mission statements were developed with considerable feedback from parents and community members. The district leadership team reviewed the feedback and revised the vision and mission to reflect parent and community perceptions relative to the current educational needs of students in preparing them for their future. While the vision and mission were finalized at the district level, they have not effectively filtered down through the school system to parents and community stakeholders.

The school board has developed and adopted five goals as part of an accountability process to inform and direct the decision making efforts of the system. The board's five goals are: to ensure high levels of performance for all students in Putnam County; to align financial expenditures and human resources with improved student performance; to develop leadership capacity in all staff; to provide educationally appropriate facilities, nutrition program and transportation system supportive of learning; and, to actively engage parents and community in the educational process.

These measurable goals are strategic components that drive all educational decisions of the school system, i.e., professional training, resource funding, student services, and hiring of system staff. All internal stakeholders have a thorough understanding of and commitment to the goals and how they are integrated into the system's educational services. The five goals have been communicated to all system staff and to community stakeholders through newsletters, eBoard, and community meetings.

The district has developed a profile that includes student demographic and academic data as well as

community data relative to education levels, economic status and disaggregated population data. The student population is approximately 45% African-American and 45% Caucasian with small percentages of Asians, Hispanics and others. However, the overwhelming majority of teachers are Caucasian.

Throughout the year leadership meetings are held to review data and re-align board goals and objectives with identified changes in the demographics of the system. All stakeholders are invited to attend and have input during these meetings.

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

- The Putnam County School System has five clearly defined school board goals that guide all decisions of the school system.
- There is broad-based understanding of and commitment to the five board goals among the stakeholders.

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

- Communicate the system's vision and mission to all stakeholders, both internal and external, to the same degree that the goals have been communicated.
- Ensure that the system's vision and mission drive teaching and learning as well as all avenues of the school system's decision making process.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Putnam County School System 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 system has leaders who are advocates for the school's vision and improvement efforts. The five-member board of education understands its role in establishing, adopting, and maintaining policy for the benefit of its students, personnel and community. It further supports the chain of command protocol that is in place recognizing the citizens of Putnam County as being at the top of the organizational chart, followed by the school board, and then the superintendent. In addition, the superintendent has spent several years holding chain of command training sessions with the various stakeholder groups. There is great trust between the school board and the district leadership team. This trust has led to the collaborative development of five major system goals that drive each and every major decision that relates to system improvement.

Policies and procedures that provide for the effective operation of the school system are established and communicated to the citizens of Putnam County. System policies and procedures provide for compliance with appropriate local, state and federal laws and regulations. In 2006-2007, all policies were reviewed and revised to reduce the number of redundant and outdated policies. After the policies were updated they were loaded to eBoard for central location access and communication to stakeholders. The Putnam County Board of Education is a member of the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA), and as such,

members attend annual training conferences to stay abreast of their roles and responsibilities as school board members. The school system maintains access to legal counsel to advise or obtain information about legal requirements on an as needed basis. Protection of system finances and resources is insured by appropriate insurance policies through GSBA and local sources as well.

For the past four years the system's Instructional Focus Team has held monthly meetings to review assessment data and anecdotal data to evaluate programs, services and resources used to address student achievement. These meetings continue to result in the acquisition and use of software, hardware and other resources which have demonstrated a positive impact on student achievement. These meetings also take a systems approach to all areas of student achievement allowing teachers to see students' strengths and weaknesses in academic endeavors.

All schools in the system have hosted a formal Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) analysis visit. A process of systematic analysis and review of student performance and school effectiveness is evident throughout the district, including surveys given annually to stakeholders for the purpose of evaluating district effectiveness.

The system has a Federal Advisory Council that meets every other month. These meetings address topics such as assessment data, budget, school improvement plans, instructional programs and resources. The system maintains and implements a comprehensive personnel performance appraisal system for the purpose of improving employee performance.

It is the intention of the leadership team, through the use of a charter system, if approved, to empower School Governing Authorities which will be established through the charter to create an environment where innovation can flourish.

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

- The Putnam County Board of Education has a comprehensive understanding of its role in the school governance process.
- The work of the Instructional Leadership Team is clearly recognized by both internal and external stakeholders as being effective and beneficial to the schools.
- The system's five goals developed by the school board drive all decisions related to student achievement and the improvement process.
- There is a feeling of trust between the board of education and the district leadership team.

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

- Continue to expand technology personnel to expand community access to technology to better communicate system goals and accomplishments to stakeholders.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Putnam County School System 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 Putnam County School System supports student achievement through professional learning for all staff members. Training in Georgia Performance Standards, differentiation of instruction, pyramid of intervention, pre- and post-assessments and disaggregation of data has been targeted. A Teacher Professional Growth Assessment Instrument to improve teacher instruction, in a similar manner that the pyramid of intervention is designed to improve student achievement has been implemented.

The system provides a strong overall teaching and learning program including curriculum/pacing guides based on the Georgia Performance Standards and researched-based instructional methods. Pre- and post-testing (ThinkGate) is administered throughout the system, and data from the tests is analyzed on an on-going basis by district personnel, building level administrators, academic coaches and teachers. Results of this data analysis lead to a Response to Intervention program in each of the schools. Research-based programs such as Study Island, Accelerated Reader, Accelerated Math and Reading 180 also provide reinforcement and remediation of critical skills. Pull-out programs for one-on-one tutoring or small group tutoring and after school programs are also employed.

The high school has seen a significant increase in the graduation rate of students in the last few years. The graduation rate has increased from 48% in 2004 to 76% in 2009. This can be attributed to both the hiring of graduation coaches at the middle and high school levels and the school system recognizing the need for equity in the learning opportunities. These opportunities include the Early College program at the middle school level, dual enrollment through the two local technical colleges at the high school level, a math and science academy, fine arts programs and career and technical programs. The extensive extra-curricular programs supported by community volunteers as well as the school organizations are to be commended as they provide opportunities for students to pursue individual interests and apply their learning. There is also support to the struggling learner with peer tutoring offered by students in the math and science academy, co-teaching (inclusion) and interventions directed by the graduation coaches. Interviews with all stakeholders indicated students were being prepared for the future in the workforce and/or post-secondary education.

Interviews with stakeholders revealed a clear understanding of essential knowledge and skills articulated by the classroom teacher on a daily basis as evidenced by classroom observations, parent-teacher conferences and email communications between parents or students and teachers. The movement of students from the private school to the public school shows increased trust in the public school system to provide quality education for its students. It was also noted by parents that teachers have a sincere regard for the diversity of their students needs and abilities and a willingness to make necessary class changes or modifications to better fit the academic and behavioral needs of the students.

Building stakeholders perceive school administrators as having an earnest desire to protect instructional time and also think instructional interruptions are kept to a minimum. Classroom walkthroughs found most students on task but not highly engaged in learning. Academic coaches support teachers with research-based instruction reflective of best practices, but evidence of these instructional practices remains in need of improvement.

The system is committed to having current technology equipment in most classrooms and throughout the buildings thus providing teachers with instructional tools to engage students and provide students with tools necessary for the future. Teachers are actively trained in using this technology for instruction and for communicating with parents and students via email and other media avenues.

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

- The school system has strong community support through volunteerism providing students with activities that focus on their interests as well as activities for community involvement.
- The pre- and post-testing of students at all grade levels on a quarterly basis aids teachers in providing the needed data for appropriate instructional strategies and interventions.

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

- Expand the human resources necessary to install and sustain the technology resources and training of teachers and other instructional facilitators.
- Expand student-centered technology to actively engage student learning, e.g., student response systems, student interactive slates and amplification systems.
- Continue to provide quality professional learning opportunities to develop best practices and teacher accountability in their implementation.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Putnam County School System 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 Putnam County School System uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures that are aligned with the system's expectations for student learning. The school system maintains comprehensive student performance data at each grade level, at each school, and at the system level. The TestGate software assessment system using Insight is used to assess student performance on student learning expectations, identify achievement gaps and evaluate the effectiveness of the system-approved curriculum frameworks and instructional processes.

The comprehensive assessment system is also used to determine the effectiveness of intervention programs designed by the school system to positively impact student performance. Administrators at both system and school levels, teachers and external stakeholders understand the importance of using and communicating assessment data to drive instructional decisions and to allocate resources for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. The comprehensive assessment system yields timely and accurate information used to verify growth in student performance at both the system and school level. Student performance data is regularly shared with parents. This information is also used to compare and establish trend data to evaluate student performance and system effectiveness.

However, among the various constituent groups of educators and community stakeholders, there appears to be some uncertainty about whether an actual achievement gap exists within the school system. If one does exist, there are also questions as to where the achievement gap can be identified. Some perceive the achievement gap is between males and females, and others believe it is between black and white males, while some believe there is no achievement gap between any of the various student subgroups.

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

- The system effectively uses formative, summative, pre- and post-test and benchmark assessment tools to make instructionally focused decisions.
- Weekly progress reports on student achievement are sent home to parents.

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

- Develop a system for timely and effective communication with the system's external stakeholders.
- Develop agreement about whether an achievement gap exists and, if it does, between which subgroups of students.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Putnam County School System 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 Putnam County School System is successful in meeting this standard because the human, material, and fiscal resources are allocated to implement an instructional program that allows students to attain appropriate skills, meets students' special needs, and complies with applicable state and federal regulations. The system employs sufficient administrative staff, classroom teachers, and academic and graduation coaches who are highly qualified to meet their assigned responsibilities. The school system employs effective recruitment, orientation, induction, retention, and mentoring strategies which allow both experienced and novice teachers to more than adequately fulfill assigned roles and responsibilities. The system employs academic and graduation coaches to provide ongoing professional development for all school based staff to enhance their instructional effectiveness. The school system employs staff in sufficient numbers to ensure it meets its established vision, mission and board goals.

Annual planning and operating budgets are in place and safeguarded through appropriate fiscal procedures to provide sufficient resources to implement the school system's educational programs and to ensure continuous improvement throughout the system. School facilities and equipment are well maintained providing for a safe and nurturing environment in which student learning is maximized. Because of the restructuring of school sites, the technology infrastructure and equipment are not sufficient at this time to accomplish the system's goals, but a comprehensive plan to upgrade and install state-of-the-art technology is in place and on a fast track toward completion. Student support services, e.g., ESOL and inclusion classes, are available to meet the needs of the students with disabilities as well as regular

education students. Programs to promote appropriate health, nutrition, safety, transportation and counseling services for students are in place and working for the benefit of the school system's students, employees, and other stakeholders. The system ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations.

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

- The system has effectively utilized their academic and graduation coaches to enhance teaching and learning.
- The school system's Human Resource Department actively recruits, mentors, and provides an effective induction program for new teachers.
- Human, material, and fiscal resources are always directly aligned with the board goals and are allocated according to the priorities established by the five board goals.

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

- Develop a technology infrastructure to facilitate communicating effective and timely information to the parents and community at large.

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

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

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

Description:

The Putnam County School System fosters collaboration with community stakeholders to support student learning by hosting monthly Community Conversations to share information and communicate with its various stakeholder groups. Parents and community members are invited to attend and share their views on which opportunities students should be offered to help support the wider community.

The school system has established strong partnerships with a variety of businesses and organizations. Parents and community members say they feel welcome in the schools and are encouraged to participate and volunteer in school activities. The school system solicits the knowledge and skills of various stakeholders and effectively uses these skill sets to make the school system more effective in providing a quality, comprehensive education for all of its students. Community members are consistently encouraged to participate in the process of providing for an educated citizenry in Putnam County. Stakeholders contribute to student recognition activities and actively support the development of student interests in a range of areas including both practical arts and the visual and performing arts. Community partners include the Plaza Art Center, 4-H, Master Gardeners, Kiwanis Club, The Eatonton Messenger, Georgia Power, Mothers Against Crime, Horton Homes, Rotary Club, Pilot Club, and the Eatonton Putnam Arts Foundation.

The system provides information that is meaningful and useful to stakeholders through the local newspaper, call out communication system, school web pages, e-Board, and weekly communications between teachers and parents.

Although efforts are being made to communicate with all stakeholders, the community feels that information from the administrative office and the board of education is not effectively and consistently communicated to all system patrons. To continue supportive relationships with the community, consistent communication with all stakeholders including parents in the three population centers—the town of Eatonton, north Putnam County, and south Putnam County—is imperative.

Primary, elementary, and middle school parents praise the efforts of school administrators and teachers to keep them informed of student progress and school events. Parents of students in the high school feel a need for improved communication of student progress. It is reported by the technology department that implementation of a web-based portal that would allow parents to access student information including grades is in the developmental stages. The implementation of this web-based portal will significantly enhance communication to high school parents especially.

Surveys are used for tracking stakeholder satisfaction. To promote the input of students, schools also sponsor student body organizations which include student advisory councils.

The Putnam County School System is sensitive to the needs of its growing English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) population and provides opportunities for parent workshops. To effectively involve parents from all subgroups of students, it is important that language barriers be eliminated in both oral and written communications with parents. Although school-based parent communication efforts are in place, parental involvement in the schools is sporadic, gradually decreasing as students progress upward through the grades.

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

- Relationships between the system and external stakeholders have led to multiple community partnerships supporting student academic and enrichment activities.
- Schools communicate frequently with parents through the use of communication folders, student agendas, phone calls, school and teacher newsletters, websites, PTC, email and parent conferences.

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

- Address and improve effective two-way communication between the administrative office and board of education and all stakeholder groups.
- Implement system-wide and school-based strategies to improve parental involvement.
- Develop a plan to ensure that the system's website and communication materials reflect the needs of changing student demographics, including all ESOL stakeholders (i.e., parents, guardians and community members).

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Putnam County School System 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 Putnam County School System engages in a continuous improvement process that promotes the vision and mission of the system and maintains a comprehensive data base of student profiles, student performance and system effectiveness. The school system has developed goals and objectives to meet the system's vision and mission to enhance student performance. It effectively utilizes data to drive decisions and documents results of those decisions to further inform the next level of decision making. Test data and other information acquired through student profiles and assessments are continually updated and reviewed.

Interviews and review of documentation provide evidence that the system, school administrators, academic coaches and teachers work together to implement a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement of student learning. Parents and external stakeholders are the final link in this process. Providing parents access to rich data collected by the school system enables them to become integral parts of the continuous improvement cycle. This is achieved by providing training opportunities for parents which include computer classes, homework help classes, and parenting skill classes.

The Putnam County School System's leadership team coordinates with the school level leadership teams to ensure that each school's plan for continuous improvement is aligned with the system's vision and expectations for student learning. The school system relies upon data-based decision making to guide instructional practices and professional development. Strategic planning processes also require a commitment to continuous analysis of student performance data at all levels. Following school-level analyses of pre- and post-assessment data, instructional focus meetings of system-level personnel, academic coaches and media specialists compile and disseminate disaggregated data for use by school administrators and teachers. In an effort to close existing achievement gaps, results are used to differentiate instruction to meet individual learner needs. Results of improvement efforts are shared with teachers, students and parents. Progress is reviewed and goals for improvement are set.

The Putnam County School System allocates and protects time for planning and engaging in continuous improvement efforts system-wide. Teachers meet regularly to evaluate student performance on a variety of assessments. Assessment results are shared with academic coaches. The school system provides direction and assistance to its schools and operational units to support their continuous improvement efforts. By working together system-level personnel, school-level academic coaches, and teachers determine which researched-based professional development opportunities will help achieve improvement goals. Professional learning opportunities are determined as needed to support innovative and school-based reform efforts. Teachers integrate personalized professional learning needs into individual Professional Growth Profiles. The profiles are then evaluated to determine if they meet system goals and objectives.

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

- Data is used to determine possible gaps in student achievement, to drive instruction and to identify professional development needs.
- Stakeholders voice a feeling of pride and satisfaction with the progress that has been made in the system and school improvement process.

- System-level personnel work with school staff to determine professional learning needs for teachers which will increase student achievement.

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

- Create and implement plans to sustain current practices that are effective as well as review methods used to insure continuous improvement.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Putnam County School System 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 Putnam County School System has a comprehensive process for monitoring and documenting improvement that provides meaningful feedback across the district. The effectiveness of this planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment is evidenced through several sources including the Comprehensive Local Improvement Plan, system improvement plan, individual school improvement plans, accountability planning and review schedule and technology plan. The Georgia Assessment of Performance of School Standards (GAPSS) analysis promotes the annual evaluation of teacher effectiveness with teaching standards. The schools are on a three year rotation of hosting the GAPSS analysis while annually reviewing the previous year's recommendations for improvement. Student achievement is a major focus of the system.

A data base is built that tracks five years of assessment data and uses TestGate as a formative means to assess student achievement and school improvement. School improvement data is kept on a spread sheet along with a summary assessment of school programs and shared with system and school leadership teams, instructional leaders and school board. The work of the Instructional Focus Team is paramount while they monitor data at monthly and yearly meetings to evaluate and revise programs and services. Information from these meetings as well as information on how schools are meeting the board goals is reported on an annual basis. Quality assurance checklists are used throughout the system to evaluate the effectiveness of services. Assessment data is distributed to schools through the system leadership team and instructional focus team on a monthly basis. The system is in the process of updating their data communication through the use of the eBoard strategic planning module.

The Putnam County Board of Education has adopted five goals which drive all decisions related to instruction, finances, facilities and human resources. The school system will continue the process in which each school will have two AdvancED standard team members who work within the school and system to communicate and evaluate the implementation of the AdvancED standards. The standards will be integrated into the system and school improvement plans to ensure that standards are met.

The school system collects data from state assessments, pre- and post-assessments and surveys to develop a profile of Putnam County student achievement. This profile is regularly reported to administrators, instructional leaders, teachers, parents, community and board of education and will be communicated through the eBoard strategic planning module on an annual basis.

Strengths

- Effective quality assurance measures are evidenced in the Putnam County School System through various means including the Comprehensive Local Improvement Plan, school improvement plans, GAPSS analysis process, accountability planning and review schedule and technology plan.
- Quality assurance checklists are used throughout the school system to evaluate the effectiveness of the multitude of school system services.
- The five goals of the Putnam County Board of Education drive decisions in all areas for system improvement.

Opportunities

- Create more opportunities for parents and community stakeholders to be involved in decisions to maximize student learning and better ensure student success.

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. Bruce Daniels, Chair
- Dr. Curtis Grier, Vice Chair (DeKalb County School System)
- Mrs. Carol Goings, Team Member (Midway Elementary)
- Mr. Rickey Brown, Team Member (Dawson County High School)
- Mrs. Suzanne Kenner, Team Member (Blytheville High School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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