

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Chickamauga City School System  
402 Cove Road  
Chickamauga, Georgia, United States 30707-1614**

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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 AdvancedED.*

## Quality Assurance Review Report

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# About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI 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 Chickamauga City School System on 01/29/2012 - 02/01/2012.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 11 administrators, 47 teachers, 8 support staff, 30 parents and business partners, 44 students, and 5 Board of Education members for a total of 145 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 3 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 Chickamauga City 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.

### Commendation 1

#### Commendation Statement:

The superintendent and district staff have garnered the overwhelming support of the entire community through exemplary leadership.

#### Evidence:

There was a preponderance of evidence presented throughout the QAR visit of the respect, trust, and confidence the entire community has placed in the district leadership. The superintendent is actively present in the schools almost daily. She is an active member of the community, having served as president of the Chamber of Commerce. The district staff is highly visible in the schools, at virtually all evening events, and throughout the community. One high school student referred to the superintendent as "awesome" when asked about her. All of the students know her, and having been superintendent for 11 years, she knows most of them. The community stakeholders are actively involved in the schools in all manner of ways. This collaborative relationship was defined by one stakeholder as, the schools are "the hub of our community."

#### Rationale:

A strong supportive and collaborative relationship between the school district and its community are vital components in the quest for student excellence.

### Commendation 2

#### Commendation Statement:

A great deal of pride is exhibited throughout the district for the quality and condition of the aging facilities as a result of the highly effective maintenance and facility staff.

#### Evidence:

Having visited classrooms in all three schools, the QAR team was very impressed with their cleanliness and upkeep. Central office is housed in the original school built in 1914. The high school was built in the early 1930's. Every building is immaculate, not a scrap of trash could be seen on the entire campus. The students take exceptional pride in their schools, and all espouse the mantra, "Don't walk on the grass!" The fact is, no one walks on the grass. When asked about the cleanliness of their school, elementary students were quick to point out the "bathrooms smell good." They literally burst into applause in support of their custodial staff.

#### Rationale:

Clean, healthy, and well-maintained schools and classrooms are major factors in how well students learn.

### Commendation 3

#### Commendation Statement:



A culture of high expectations for all students to succeed is embodied in the district vision of inspiring students to maximize their potential, become lifelong learners, and empowering them to become respectful, productive, and successful.

**Evidence:**

It was clear that "System Pride" and a "Tradition of Excellence" permeates the entire district and community. It was made clear to the QAR team through interviews and observations that teaching and learning are geared toward high expectations for student achievement. The students made it clear to the team that they have high expectations for themselves as well.

**Rationale:**

Because the district, teachers, students, parents, and community share high expectations for their schools to be successful and demonstrate that with their full support, the learning experience for students is greatly enhanced and the chances for failure are greatly reduced.

**Commendation 4****Commendation Statement:**

Excellent stewardship of human, material, and financial resources is being provided in a time of extreme economic challenge.

**Evidence:**

In spite of the fact that the state continues to reduce its level of funding, and has for the past three years, the staff has been able to creatively provide for the needs of the schools and students. The advent of the Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) has provided additional funds for some much needed projects and programs. Because the support from the community is so strong, the voters continue to provide this additional resource. The strength, however, is centered in how well the resources are being managed. Teachers were quick to state that they have everything they need, and that if there are additional requests, the district makes every effort to fulfill them.

**Rationale:**

The effective management of the resources in the school district in ways that include maintaining acceptable class sizes, providing essential materials and support for teachers, and doing these things in an attractive, well-maintained environment all contribute to the excellent success level of the district.

## **Required Actions**

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall effectiveness of the school district. The Chickamauga City 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.

**Required Action 1**



**Required Action:**

Develop and implement a District Improvement Plan involving a wide spectrum of school and community stakeholders that will provide the direction and expectations for student performance and system effectiveness.

**Evidence:**

The current Strategic Plan was approved in 2007 before the initial District Accreditation visit. It was developed by the superintendent and the district leadership team which was made up of school and district administrators and a teacher from each school. The first three goals are the state of Georgia's goals, with the remaining two being local goals. The leadership team helped develop the objectives for each goal, along with some input from the teachers and staff members at the schools. School improvement plans are supposed to be aligned with the district goals. While some are aligned, the district plan has remained essentially unchanged in the past six years, while school plans must, of necessity, be revisited each year. Because of the limited number of stakeholders who were involved in the original planning process, and because the leadership team that originally developed that plan are no longer in the same positions, it is incumbent upon the district to engage the entire community in a new District Improvement Process. By involving the entire school and community in the planning process, there will be complete buy-in by all parties to the direction the district is heading and how its goals will be accomplished. The alignment of school goals to district goals will become a natural evolutionary process.

**Rationale:**

By involving a wide range of all stakeholders in the planning process for a District Improvement Plan, holding public forums throughout the community to seek input and to discuss the direction the district is going, the strong community support that already exists will become even greater.

**Required Action 2****Required Action:**

Readdress the READY REFERENCE CHART for Emergency Procedures to include specific training and practice exercises for staff and students.

**Evidence:**

Everyone the QAR team interviewed declared their perception that their schools are safe places, and this perception is substantiated by the fact that for many years, they have been free of serious incidents involving school safety. However, the team believes that there is an illusion of safety that permeates the entire community. Currently there are no security measures being utilized in any of the schools. Central office is located directly across the street from the campus. Doors are generally unlocked, and there are no security cameras, or security personnel. Because the community is so small and everybody in town considers themselves part of the school family, there are no concerns about threats of any kind. An emergency procedures flash card has been developed, and appears complete in terms of identifying the types of issues that might occur and the actions to be taken. However, according to the superintendent, there has never been a drill or practice exercise for any potential threat. The superintendent commented that in searching the web, she was able to identify a large number of registered sex offenders in the county surrounding the district.

**Rationale:**

While current policies have been successful, the growing incidence of school violence nationwide and the presence of registered offenders in the region dictates that there needs to be greater vigilance on the part of the schools and district with regard to the safety of students. The superintendent and staff have no greater responsibility.



### Required Action 3

#### Required Action:

Develop and implement a systemic, systematic Professional Development Plan, focused on providing all staff members with enhanced tools and strategies for improving student performance.

#### Evidence:

The district does not have a professional learning plan in place. However, two recent district initiatives were implemented as a result of software and hardware purchases. Study Island was provided to all three schools, and training was conducted on its use. Smartboards were installed throughout the schools and the staff was provided in-service on how to use them effectively. The QAR team observed both Study Island and the Smartboards in use during classroom observations. However, there was no evidence during these observations of the technology being used as an interactive instructional tool. There are a number of teachers who are very comfortable with, and understand, how to use both the software program and the hardware to benefit students most. Since the training there has been no monitoring of the use or effectiveness of either tool. Teachers have individually requested in-service, and in their own words, "have never been turned down." While the team learned that teachers shared their experiences with others, there has been no monitoring of effectiveness for these activities as well.

#### Rationale:

A well-conceived professional development plan, having identified the needs of teachers through surveys, would identify a cadre of teacher trainers, provide the necessary monitoring procedures, an evaluation of the training's effectiveness, and provide additional training for those who have not mastered the necessary skills. A systemic, systematic professional development plan would also embed the district expectation for the training to be put to use in the classroom. It is through this process that the district can be assured that the school goals will be aligned with the district goals.

### Required Action 4

#### Required Action:

Follow through on the implementation of formative assessments K-12 across the curriculum to monitor student achievement and to measure program effectiveness.

#### Evidence:

This was one of the recommendations provided by the QAR team during the 2007 initial district accreditation visit. There was considerable evidence of the efforts to provide formative (benchmark) assessments in the elementary grades, and some evidence in the middle school. There is currently no plan or district expectation for such assessments at the high school.

#### Rationale:

A consistent process to monitor the levels of student achievement at specific intervals during the school year is the only method for the district to ensure that the goals are being effectively addressed.

**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:

The district has a well established and meaningful vision that permeates throughout the system. "System Pride" and a "Tradition of Excellence" are the foundations for all aspects of the district. It was evident to the QAR team that there is a commitment and a passion for helping the students of Chickamauga. The team was challenged by one presenter at the onset of the review to "find the passion for education we feel." However, it was not clear whether stakeholders had involvement in the development of the vision, mission, and beliefs or that there is a process established for revision. The avenues and actions of collaboration with all stakeholders appear limited.

The district vision is communicated effectively throughout several media including newsletters, the district web site, and word of mouth. These contribute to the pervasive concept of team and family which surrounds the district. Many stakeholders could articulate specific words of the statements, but a clear, consistent, and comprehensive articulation was not evident.

There is a clear establishment of systemic goals and measures leading toward increasing student achievement to advance the mission of all students graduating with a quality education. The goals from the Strategic Plan were developed before the initial district accreditation visit in 2007. It was evident to the team that the goals were established with input and collaboration from a very limited number of stakeholders. In addition, some school improvement goals do not appear to align with system goals.

The district maintains a profile of the community and the system, and effectively communicates the profile by use of the district web site. Stakeholders are familiar with the makeup of the system, how it relates to their community, and the challenges that exist.

Teaching and learning are driven by the vision, mission, and beliefs and are geared toward student success, high student achievement, and safe learning environments. The pride in the success of the system



encompasses all facets of the school community and drives all toward maintaining and continuing the "Tradition of Excellence." It was stated in interviews that "We believe in what we do" and "Everybody believes in the vision and purpose."

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

- A commitment exists to students and student success shared by all stakeholders.
- There is a passion for the Tradition of Excellence established within the district and community.
- Strong parent and community support is evident.
- The district and community is steeped in a rich history and tradition.
- The district has high expectations for students, staff, and parents.

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

- Schedule an annual review of the vision, mission, and beliefs statements in conjunction with a more structured process for strategic and school improvement planning.
- Include all stakeholders in the district improvement planning process, including revision of the vision and setting of goals.
- Develop three to five district goals that serve as the foundation for the schools to work under, ensuring that the goals address the entire organization including: academic achievement, operational effectiveness, communication, professional learning, and safe learning environments.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Chickamauga City 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:**

It was clear to the team that goals are developed from a periodic analysis of student performance data by the superintendent and members of the current leadership team. The system, led by the superintendent, is definitely data driven and focused on academic improvement. However, the goal development process and opportunity for input appears to be isolated to members of the current leadership team. In addition, systemic goals do not address organizational and operational effectiveness completely. Goals regarding facilities and maintenance, school nutrition, safety, communication, and stakeholder engagement are not clearly evident.

Stakeholders from across the district expressed their satisfaction with the governance of the system and were clear on the direction the leadership was moving. Stakeholders articulated they could talk and share input and concerns with board members, the superintendent, district leaders, and school administrators easily and at any time. However, evidence revealed a limited structure and limited opportunity for stakeholders to serve in leadership roles and to collaborate with district leaders. Opportunities revealed were school council, PTA, booster clubs, and alumni associations.



The governance of the district is exceptional at leading the system and allocating resources in order for students to excel. There is a preponderance of evidence that system leaders are focused on providing assistance to the teachers and helping students achieve by allocation of resources and providing for safe learning environments.

The QAR team noted the district is involved in the CLASS Keys evaluation system, the evaluation instrument required by the state of Georgia. The team was advised the district is not fully required to use CLASS Keys and has been given permission to use a hybrid of the old Georgia Teacher Evaluation Instrument and the new CLASS Keys. This coincides with the observed level of implementation and monitoring of effective standards-based instructional strategies residing at the emerging level. It was clear to the QAR team from interviews that the evaluation system in place and utilization of the instrument for professional growth was not a top priority. In addition, it was also revealed that no evaluation instrument exists for non-certified, classified personnel and that no district employee handbook exists. The team was advised movement is being made for implementation of the new Teacher Keys Evaluation instrument as soon as it is produced by the state.

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

- Leadership of the board, superintendent, district level, and school level is strong.
- The community trusts and has confidence in the leadership and governance of the district.
- The leadership is an exceptional steward of resources.
- Use of data drives creation of district goals.

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

- Implement an all inclusive District Improvement planning process involving all stakeholders.
- Develop three to five district goals that serve as the umbrella for all schools to work under.
- Develop a professional learning plan utilizing the CLASS keys process including self-assessment, professional growth plans, pre-evaluation conference, student achievement goals, informal and formal observations, and a monitoring and evaluation instrument.
- Develop and implement evaluation instruments for classified staff.
- Create and employee handbook for the district.
- Utilize other modules on the Eboard web site.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Chickamauga City 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 QAR team recognizes that one of Chickamauga's greatest strengths is the pervasive culture of high expectations that exists in this community and school district. The importance of teaching and learning is readily identified by all stakeholders as the main focus and greatest source of pride in the community. This culture not only drives student learning and success, it helps to create a highly motivated student



population that contributes to the overall success of the district and community.

Chickamauga City schools are, as one staff member points out, “in the process of” adopting in every school, the Georgia Performance Standards as the basis for the curriculum utilized in the district. The Georgia Performance Standards define the essential knowledge and skills expected of all Georgia students and artifacts such as training and curriculum guides. Observations confirm that these standards are the cornerstone of the district’s curriculum and instruction. These standards also provide the Georgia Instructional Frameworks which are the research-based curriculum guides, pacing guides, and curriculum maps used to support the standards based instructional model mandated by the state. In every school, the team saw evidence that these standards and processes are utilized to define expectations and develop, articulate, and coordinate curriculum and curriculum development. But the team also witnessed that the use of a true standards-based curriculum and instructional frameworks was not evident in some areas, some schools, and some classrooms.

Through interviews and observations, the team recognized that the district and community have established high expectations for student learning and encourage their schools and teachers to utilize techniques that foster the application and use of higher order thinking skills and ways for students to apply their learning. Artifacts demonstrate that there has been training on differentiated instruction, the use of thinking maps, and the use of Advanced Placement (A.P.) course work to meet these indicators. However, observations also revealed that these varied forms of “best practice” instructional techniques were not evident in the actual classrooms in some areas and some schools. The team also noted the low number of A.P. students who were able to take advantage of the benefits of the A.P. exam system.

Through observations, artifacts, and interviews with teachers and administrators, it was clear that the district’s use of curriculum and its instructional decisions are based on data and research. The results of summative data were posted in the data room at each school. Teachers were able to articulate how to use data to improve their instruction and student performance. These same interviews and observations revealed that the use of data and formative assessments to drive instruction and curriculum modifications is valid in some schools and the district is making efforts to ensure that valid formative assessments are utilized by all teachers across the district. The team also noted that curriculum is reviewed and revised on an annual basis district wide and at the school level. Teachers review and revise curriculum and instructional strategies regularly throughout the school year on an informal, individualized basis.

Although the team noted artifacts indicating the utilization of professional training in instructional best practice, the establishment and use of formative and benchmark testing, standards-based instruction, planning for engagement, student response and the use of Smartboards and other forms of technological training, there was no comprehensive professional learning plan designed to ensure the use of all these components by every teacher. At this time, the majority of professional learning is driven by individual interest and need rather than by a systematic, systemic plan to provide every teacher with introductory and advanced training in the instructional and curriculum objectives established by the district. The team recognizes the limitations imposed by the district’s financial realities, but noted that every teacher interviewed indicated that they had never had a request for professional learning denied.

Despite the challenges that exist, the district clearly recognizes the need for and provides individualized instruction and services for each student. Advisory classes, school counselors, the use of formative assessment to drive instruction and the exceptional commitment demonstrated by the teachers and administrators contribute to this individualized attention. However, probably as a result of its unique cultural and geographical heritage, the QAR team has noted that the district and its schools failed to demonstrate the existence of comprehensive equity and diversity training for its professional staff or as a part of its curriculum in the schools. Artifacts indicate that there has been English as a Second Language training in the district but teachers identify only two teachers that possess such training. Aside from the



state mandated curriculum in the social studies, English, the arts and humanities, there is no evidence to suggest that any attempts have been made to offer diversity education as part of the district curriculum.

The QAR team noted the strong efforts to protect instructional time to support student learning. School calendars, schedules and policies, as well as the high expectations that exist in support of instruction clearly show that the district places a premium on its instructional time.

Furthermore the QAR team recognized in some schools and areas, the use of a variety of remediation and intervention techniques based on formative and summative data, teacher observation and evaluation, and instructional best practices. These interventions and strategies include the use of Team Time, Individual Education Plans and Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies, peer-to-peer tutoring, and an in-school suspension program. Study Island software is used to create formative and summative assessments to drive instructional decisions and individualization. Before and after school one-on-one tutoring, and study skills courses and teachers are also evident. The team noted the district's expansion of efforts to identify, integrate, and evaluate new forms of interventions and remediation in all of its schools.

Based on evidence in curriculum guides and interviews, the QAR team understands that the comprehensive use and development of system-wide vertical integration processes is in progress. Interviews reveal that this process occurs but usually in an informal, unsystematic manner but has been successful thus far. Stakeholders report that Gordon Lee graduates function extremely well in the business community, better than the graduates of surrounding communities.

There was significant evidence of the efforts to integrate instructional technology, information and media services, and materials needed for effective instruction to the classrooms and schools. These components were readily identified across the district, in every classroom. The creation of an ongoing three-year replacement and upgrade plan for technology is a valuable step to ensure that the students continue to be served by up-to-date technology that will prepare them for success in the larger world they will be entering.

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

- Teachers are able to articulate how to use data to improve performance.
- Use of data and formative assessments is valid in middle school.
- Team Time is effectively used in the elementary school.
- The student population is highly motivated to succeed.
- There is pervasive culture of high expectations throughout the community.

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

- Continue the implementation of Standards-based instruction at all schools.
- Explore and define ways that will enable A.P. students to take advantage of the benefits of the A.P. exam.
- Continue the implementation of valid formative assessments to evaluate regular benchmarks throughout the academic year.
- Develop formative and benchmark testing that is valid and aligned to state standards.
- Create systematic and systemic professional learning plan targeted on standards-based instructional strategies.
- Continue to develop and implement system-wide vertical articulation processes between schools/grade levels.

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



assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Chickamauga City 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 Chickamauga City School System uses formative and summative data to report the performance of the students. Data from the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT), End of Course Tests (EOCT), Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), State Writing Test, formative assessments, summative assessments, benchmark tests in the elementary and middle schools, and pre- and post-tests in the high school are used to assess the achievement level of the students and their strengths and weaknesses. There is a systemic commitment to the use of data. The elementary school effectively uses Team Time to meet the needs of individual students based on previously obtained data.

District staff meet with the teachers during pre-planning to review summative, comparative, and school improvement data, and stakeholder surveys. The teachers take that information and plan for their own individual students and also determine "bubble kids." It is obvious that data are used to plan lessons, flexible groups, and tutoring groups. Annual surveys are not only completed by community stakeholders, but also teachers and students, and are utilized to guide program planning.

Communicating student performance and system effectiveness is done utilizing I-parent, e-mail, newsletters, the local newspaper, and student agendas. Comparison data from comparable school systems are used and reported in local newspapers as well. Balanced Scorecard is also utilized to share results with parents and stakeholders. The Balanced Scorecard includes data on state and national test scores, attendance rates, and graduation rates. Parents can check I-Parent for their child's current grades and attendance. More formal progress reports and report cards are distributed every four and a half and nine weeks. Schools also have data rooms where data can be shown to teachers, parents, and community stakeholders.

One source of data is obtained using "clickers" or student response systems. The clickers are an essential way to quickly see the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and day-to-day plan for remediation and acceleration. Study Island is also used to obtain diagnostic student data across the district. The team was informed that the formative assessment most used at the high school was pre- and post-testing.

School Max is the student record system used by Chickamauga City Schools. There are also forms used for transferring records outside of the school system, FERPA authorization forms, and school handbooks.

The assessment system utilized assesses student learning and student performance and identifies gaps between expectations for student learning and student performance.

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

- There is a systemic commitment to the use of data.
- Teachers are able to articulate how to use data to improve performance.



- Team Time is effectively used in the elementary school.

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

- Utilize more formative assessment at all schools in order to ensure students are learning the standards.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Chickamauga City 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:

Chickamauga City Schools utilizes human, financial, physical, and support resources in its day-to-day functions.

The district employs a 100% highly qualified teaching and paraprofessional staff. Leaders move teachers and administrators into positions not only based on their qualifications, but on system needs during that particular school year. Staff is sufficient in number to meet the vision and mission of the system, and when needed, the school system hires support staff. For example, one of the most recent hires was a technology specialist.

The district has an annual budget with the primary sources of local revenue from property taxes, tuition from out-of-district students, and private donations. The Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (E-SPLOST) provides extra funds for capital projects. The E-SPLOST has been voted on and passed by the community for the past four years. Interviews indicated that the teachers and students feel they have sufficient resources to support their educational programs. Proper auditing procedures are completed in the district, and all financial transactions are completed and followed by district policy and procedure.

The condition of the aging facilities was highly commendable. It was noted during the walk-throughs and interviews the cleanliness of the buildings was outstanding. The elementary school students clapped for their custodians when they were asked about the cleanliness of their building. Interviews also indicated that the "Fix-It-Fast" work order system for maintenance and technology issues was very successful.

There is a written security and crisis management plan in the district; however, appropriate training for the stakeholders on what to do in an emergency other than tornado drills was not observed by the QAR team during this visit. There is an illusion of safety in the schools.

There is a long range five-year facilities plan and improving sites and facilities is done in a priority order based on available funds.

The district has increased its amount of technology in the last five years and has equipment that is up-to-date. The classrooms are designated as 21st Technology classrooms. Technology in most classrooms includes a Smartboard, computers, and student response systems. Several computer labs and a driver's



education technology lab were observed during school walk-throughs.

Support services include health, counseling, nutrition, co-curricular activities, and meeting the special learning needs of students. There is one nurse for the whole district, and it was indicated during interviews that more nurse support would be valuable because "sometimes it is hard to find the nurse when we need her." There is a full-time counselor at the elementary and middle school. The high school counselor also is the system test coordinator. This was done out of necessity because of the lack of funding to hire more personnel. However, the system has instituted an advisor/advisee program at the middle school and high school that allows for one teacher to help a student through their scheduling plans the whole time they attend the school. The school nutrition director stated that she utilizes a healthy meal program and a group purchasing program in order to buy food at a reduced rate. Community resources such as local colleges and businesses help provide support to students. College Application Day is one such example. The district has an educational diagnostician/English Second Language coordinator to help provide support for students with special learning needs.

Even with the reduction of funding this system has incurred over the last five years, they are excellent stewards of human, financial, and material resources.

There is no system-wide Professional Development Plan. Teachers participate in professional development based on interest, and not necessarily on student or school improvement needs.

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

- The condition of aging facilities is outstanding.
- A highly effective maintenance and facilities staff use an efficient "Fix-it-Fast" work order system.
- District leaders are excellent stewards of human, financial, and material resources in a time of extreme economic challenges.

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

- Readdress the READY REFERENCE chart for Emergency Procedures to include specific training and practice exercises for staff and students.
- Develop and implement a systemic Professional Development Plan, focused on providing all staff members with enhanced tools and strategies for improving student performance.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Chickamauga City 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:

It is clear to the QAR team that community involvement in the Chickamauga schools is one of the greatest strengths of this district and community. The relationship between the community and district is supportive and collaborative and is manifested by the fact that the community's schools are, as defined by a stakeholder, "the hub of our community." It is also apparent to the QAR team that the citizen stakeholders of this district are intimately involved in supporting the students and schools of this community through the passage of local millage levies, that the schools themselves serve and support the community as a centerpiece of community life, and that the schools serve as the primary facility for both school and community activities.

The team also recognizes that stakeholder participation in the drafting of the district's strategic plan was negligible and that as the district seeks to refine and improve its plan, the district will need to put processes in place to ensure stakeholder participation and input.

The team understands that the district benefits from this community support because district-wide strategies are utilized to listen to, communicate with, and include members of the community. The district conducts a yearly survey for parents and other stakeholders to solicit opinions, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Parents are encouraged or invited to serve on several district planning committees and on parent advisory councils at each of the schools. Stakeholders are encouraged and invited to sit in on the interviews for potential district faculty.

The district and the schools themselves utilize websites, newsletters, the local newspaper, the Walker County Messenger, community announcements, and district and school parent meetings to provide information to parents and other stakeholder groups. The schools utilize I-Parent, an online information portal that enables parents to track their child's progress and communicate directly with teachers and administrators.

All three of the schools solicit parental and stakeholder involvement and as a result, students at all grade levels and the district staff benefit from the knowledge and skills of stakeholders that act as volunteers. These community members serve admirably in many ways; as school crossing guards, guest speakers, guest instructors, career path mentors, apprenticeship program hosts, and as chaperones. Community programs such as the Joint Apprenticeship Program, CHAMPS, and various civic scholarship programs also serve to directly support and nurture students. A large alumni organization actively solicits financial, material, and volunteer support for the district and its students.

The QAR team also recognizes that the culture of student success that exists is a direct result of the collaboration between the community's stakeholders and the district. Expectations for student success and student improvement are communicated to the students by the district, the schools, and the district's stakeholders. The district communicates expectations for student learning and improvement through the schools, through the use of advisory programs at the middle and high school levels, the use of academic counseling, and remediation programs.

It was evident from many artifacts and interviews that the district provides information that is both



meaningful and useful to its stakeholders. District and school websites and newsletters include: Activity calendars that include information on testing dates, extracurricular activities, school menus, notifications of impending school board meetings, enrollment and registration dates, and parent/teacher conference dates. Parent/student information packets provide school specific information about school policies, dress and behavior codes, the school calendar, testing information and requirements, daily schedules, and contact information. Press releases include information about district, individual school and student awards and success, athletic events, schedules and calendars, and school and board meetings.

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

- There is strong community support for the school district and its students.
- The community is involved in the school district.
- The district willingly embraces stakeholders as volunteers and resources throughout the district.

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

- Seek to ensure stakeholder participation in the development of, drafting, and adoption of a revised District Improvement Plan.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Chickamauga City 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 overall commitment to continuous improvement within the Chickamauga City School System is extremely evident. All stakeholders are visible daily and actively engaged on a daily basis within the schools. The QAR team experienced a permeating culture of strong positive relationships among all stakeholders. This is based on continuous improvements in all areas affecting the educational process including: maintenance/custodial, nutrition, local and business community, an overwhelming involvement of parental support, and a strong commitment of student pride.

Interviews revealed that continuous improvement was at the center of their educational process. In different settings the administrators, the staff, the parents, and the students very eloquently articulated the process used to gather student data and use it to improve student performance. The QAR team verified that some schools did have a viable benchmark process in place to guide their instruction to impact individual and group student learning. The teachers explained how they used pre- and post-test data, daily lessons, and standardized testing to plan for instruction. The students were able to articulate how they were placed in different groups based on their particular needs. The parent commitment to continuous improvement was demonstrated through their willingness to volunteer on a daily basis within the school system wherever they are needed, and parents are involved in their children's educational process to a level where there are almost no discipline issues in the school system.

When the team interviewed members of the local and business community, one of the comments from the



community members was, "This community revolves around this school." When the team inquired of elementary students about the sanitation regarding the school, one of the students stated, "Our bathrooms smell good all of the time," and the rest of the students stood up and applauded and cheered. The team also observed well-kept and extremely clean facilities.

Because all three schools share the same campus, there is a great deal of communication and sharing between and among both students and staff. As a result most of the articulation between grade levels is accomplished through informal meetings rather than a specific, planned series of activities.

Each school has a School Improvement Plan tied to the goals in the District Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan was developed several years ago and the school plans are revised annually to address the most current needs. As a result, the relationship between the two plans is not always as direct as intended. The school improvement plans include goals and objectives and generally identify processes and programs being implemented. However, they do not include specific research-based strategies focused on identified needs of targeted students. These strategies exist for the most part in lesson plans, etc. As a result, those strategies that are most effective are known to only the teacher(s) who developed them and are not necessarily shared with others.

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

- Data is used extensively to improve instruction.
- The maintenance and custodial staff are very committed.
- There is a strong level of commitment from the community and parents.

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

- Include specific successful research-based teaching strategies in school improvement plans so that they are readily available for all teachers.
- Institute a system for all schools to use data to improve performance.
- Develop planned opportunities for vertical articulation between schools and all grade levels.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Chickamauga City 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 district leadership team is comprised of the superintendent, district administrators, all school administrators, and a teacher from each of the three schools. The team meets monthly to discuss and resolve issues confronting the district. The school representatives then discuss these issues with their staff who are given an opportunity for input. School improvement plans which are supposed to be aligned with the district Strategic Plan are reviewed and approved by the district team. The Strategic Plan was developed prior to the initial district accreditation visit in 2007 and essentially remained the same since, though it has undergone reviews. However, the schools must readdress their plans annually and adjust them according to the needs of their students. As a result, the alignment of school plans to the district plan is not entirely in place.

The superintendent is a highly regarded administrator throughout the schools and the community. She is in her 11th year, and the district has made great improvements during her tenure. The district is clearly data driven from top to bottom. Analyzed data are provided to the teachers with the expectation that instruction will be adapted to reflect what the data are saying about student achievement. Numerous walk-throughs by school and district administrators provide frequent snapshots of student engagement, use of technology, lesson planning, standards-based instruction taking place, and the over-all teaching and learning environment. Because the district is so small, with all three schools on the same campus and central office located across the street, district administrators are monitoring classrooms continuously. Class Keys is used by everyone monitoring instruction, and feedback is provided teachers in a timely manner.

The district is technology rich as a result of the purchase and use of Study Island K-12, and the installation of Smartboards in virtually every classroom. Professional development was provided on the use of both initiatives. The QAR team found that Study Island was being utilized to the greatest extent at the elementary and middle schools, though there are some teachers who are not completely comfortable with all the capabilities of the software. Smartboards were observed being used in several classrooms visited. However, the team saw little or no use of this technology as an interactive instructional tool. There is currently no systemic, systematic Professional Development Plan, and as a result there is no monitoring of the level of implementation or effectiveness of the in-service that has taken place.

There is strong community support for the schools and the district leadership. Stakeholders are involved in the schools and participate in numerous ways including volunteering, being involved on school councils and PTOs, and serving as crossing guards. Communication between the district, schools, and community is considered by everyone interviewed to be outstanding.

The team was able to confirm that the AdvancED Standards are being met, both in the schools and at the district level at either an operational or highly functioning level.

### Strengths

- The leadership is highly regarded throughout the entire community as evidenced by results of interviews



and on-site observations.

- District administrators all monitor classrooms on a regular basis by using walk-throughs and observations.
- There is a strong technology presence in every classroom as evidenced by the inclusion of Smartboards and Study Island by the district.

### Opportunities

- Develop and implement a District Improvement Plan involving all stakeholders in every aspect of the process.
- Develop and implement a systemic, systematic Professional Development Plan focused on student achievement through in-service training and which includes a monitoring and evaluation process to determine program effectiveness.



## Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Chickamauga City School System on 01/29/2012 - 02/01/2012.

Gordon Lee High School	105 Lee Circle	Chickamauga	Georgia	30707
Chickamauga Elementary School	210 Crescent Avenue	Chickamauga	Georgia	30707
Gordon Lee Middle School	300 Crescent Avenue	Chickamauga	Georgia	30707



## 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

- Mr. Dave Stipe, Chair/Lead Evaluator
- Dr. Wayne Frazier, Vice Chair (Glen Hills High School)
- Dr. Jason Moore, Team Member (Cross Creek High School)
- Dr. Kimberly Bergquist, Team Member (Jefferson Academy)
- Mr. Mark Miller, Team Member (Advanced Academics, Inc.)

## 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](http://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.