

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

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

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

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI North Carolina State Office (SACS-CASI-NC), a division of AdvancED, visited Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System on 11/07/2010 - 11/10/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 327 administrators, 225 teachers, 44 support staff, 229 parents and business partners, 223 students, and 6 Board of Education members for a total of 1054 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 36 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 Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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.

- **Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools have created frameworks, developed processes and shaped a “data driven” culture to ensure that continuous improvement of student performance is the chief priority of the district.**

The Strategic Plan 2014, the School Quality Reviews, and the availability and use of qualitative and quantitative data provide the foundation for continuous improvement on a very broad scale. The level of commitment, knowledge, and positive actions taken by personnel across the district to continuously improve student achievement is truly commendable.

Improvement planning in the system is aligned to the “Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching our Way to the Top,” which includes an examination of the school system’s current reality, board of education vision and direction for the future of the organization, specific improvement goals, key strategies for implementation, and well defined measures of success. Interviews and review of artifacts consistently revealed that Strategic Plan 2014 is guiding decision making and ongoing improvement initiatives throughout the system. Nearly all of the “Areas of Focus” in the Strategic Plan 2014 relate directly to AdvancED standards and indicators.

Improvement planning is also driven by the School Quality Reviews. Interviews and documentation consistently revealed that the School Quality Reviews are a systematic approach to monitoring and communicating improvement results at the school level to all stakeholders. School and system interviews consistently indicated that the School Quality Reviews provided quality feedback on school effectiveness as well as student performance, and gave direction and focus to the school level improvement planning process.

Interviews, observations and artifacts indicate that school and district leaders have shaped a culture which embraces the routine use of data to inform decision making and improvement planning.

The ongoing success of the school system in improving student achievement depends to a large degree upon building a strong sense of ownership and accountability among all stakeholders and providing tools, frameworks, and resources to support all phases of the improvement process.

- **System leaders, including the board of education, are creating a collaborative culture, focused on student achievement, that is in evidence throughout much of the system.**

The extent to which the system has provided new frameworks, training and ongoing support for the creation of highly functional professional learning communities that meet regularly to discuss and share professional practice, examine data, create and evaluate common assessments, engage in embedded professional development, etc., is particularly commendable. Interviews at both the system and school levels consistently indicated the existence of "professional learning communities" within departments, zones, grade levels, and so forth throughout much but not all of the system.

Interviews revealed that the system has dedicated resources to ongoing training in the creation of professional learning communities and that system leaders have provided encouragement and guidance their formation. Though not implemented across the entire system, many schools were able to provide evidence of highly functional professional learning communities that routinely discuss and share professional practice, assessment results including formative assessment data, set goals, brainstorm solutions to problems, and plan instruction. Interviews further indicated the existence of professional learning communities among "alike" administrators and within school district zones.

Professional learning communities among teachers and others in the system contribute greatly to the creation of a collaborative culture in which adults routinely learn from each other. The professional learning community framework also encourages a shared sense of ownership in the overall success of organization and provides an effective structure for building school and system leadership capacity.

- **The innovative leadership that has been required to design and implement the Strategic Staffing initiative, which has benefited the system's lowest performing schools during the last two years, is highly commendable.**

The Strategic Staffing Initiative is a district turn-around school model that has proven successful in raising student achievement in some of the system's lowest performing schools during the last two school years. Interviews and artifacts indicate that the initiative provides additional support and training while offering financial incentives to assign proven outstanding principals and teachers to consistently low performing schools.

The Strategic Staff initiative advances the district's vision that all students are provided a quality education. Reassigning effective principals to low performing schools, even on a voluntary basis, has also required commitment and courage on the part of the board and administration which the QAR team also finds especially commendable.

- **CMS is commended for increasing student performance across the system during a two year fiscal crisis.**

While facing approximately 100 million dollars in budget cuts, the composite scores on the North Carolina End-of-Grade assessment for students in grades 3 through 8 in mathematics have increased by 11 percentage points since 2005, and reading composite scores have increased by 7 percentage points over the same time period. In addition to increasing academic performance for all students, the district has also decreased the gap in performance between critical subgroups in the core subjects. For students in grades 9 through 12, the composite of all North Carolina End-of-Course Assessments has increased by 12 percentage points since 2007.

This commendation is based on longitudinal trends from formative, summative, and value-added data for elementary, middle and high schools.

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 Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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.

- **Create a system to ensure the successful implementation of these four improvement strategies that have been identified in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools "Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching our Way to the Top:"**
 - 1. Align interventions strategies and support services with daily instruction and ensure that interventions are consistently applied to support struggling students. (Strategic Plan 2014, Area of Focus 3., Increasing the Graduation Rate, Key Strategy A.)**
 - 2. Expand student and staff access to instructional technology ensuring that technology resources are equitably distributed across the system in keeping with existing policies. (Strategic Plan 2014, Area of Focus 4, Teaching and Learning Through Technology, Key Strategy A., 4.)**
 - 3. Develop assessments for all subjects and grade levels to more accurately measure instructional and organizational effectiveness. (Strategic Plan 2014, Area of Focus1, Effective Teaching and Leadership, Key Strategies B., 3.)**
 - 4. Establish highly functional professional learning communities throughout the system to improve student achievement and school/system effectiveness. (Strategic Plan 2014, Area of Focus1, Effective Teaching and Leadership, Key Strategies D., 6.)**

The Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Team acknowledges that CMS recently engaged in a needs assessment and analysis process culminating in the creation of the "Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching our Way to the Top." The Strategic Plan 2014 includes an analysis of the current reality in the system, highlights the board of education's vision and direction for the future of the organization, identifies system improvement goals to advance the mission and vision, six Areas of Focus, over 80 key improvement strategies to be implemented during the upcoming four year period, as well as carefully defined measurements for defining success. The Strategic Plan 2014 is referenced throughout the QAR Team Report, was frequently cited in both school and system interviews, and is considered a central component of the system's commitment to continuous improvement planning. The QAR process had resulted in the identification of four areas for improvement all of which are identified as improvement targets in the CMS Strategic Plan 2014.

1. Interviews, observations, and artifacts revealed the existence of resources and systems to support students who do not meet learning expectations. School interviews and observations revealed that students were regrouped for instruction based on formative data in some instances; however, the team did not see evidence of an intentional, consistent or systematic approach that would ensure that research based instructional strategies for interventionis are consistently provided.
2. Interviews as well as school and classroom observations revealed that access to instructional technology is quite limited in some but certainly not all schools. In general, the QAR team observed little use of technology during the school observations. The degree to which teachers are able to utilize technology to authentically engage students, optimize student learning, personalize instruction, etc., is not apparent.
3. While the CMS continues to develop a very robust assessment and internal accountability system, interviews and review of data indicate that some areas of the curriculum and some grade levels are not

adequately monitored and student learning measured through the assessment system.

4. CMS has been very successful in establishing highly functional professional learning communities in some but not all schools. School and district interviews consistently indicated that many of these teacher learning communities had contributed significantly to building instructional capacity. School observations and interviews indicate that functional professional learning communities exist in many but not all schools.

Each of the four areas relate to research-informed accreditation standards that impact teaching and learning and are linked to improvement in student performance and school/system effectiveness.

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 vision and purpose of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has been clearly defined and thoughtfully explained in a recent publication entitled “Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top.” Stakeholder interviews consistently revealed that the vision, direction and tone for the school system, as articulated in “Strategic Plan 2014,” is widely embraced by the larger community. The superintendent, as well as other school and system leaders including some board members, are able to thoroughly explain a vision for the future of the school system that includes specific goals and measures for success. Based on interviews with Board of Education members, teachers, principals, administrators, community and business partners, as well as parents, it is clear that the district’s mission and vision represent a shared commitment to improvement of achievement among all students as well as commitment to provide equitable access to quality educational programs throughout the school system. Stakeholder interviews as well as the Standards Assessment Report indicate that the vision and mission were established by the Board of Education without significant input from external stakeholders.

The school district vision and mission have been communicated through a variety of methods. Communication methodologies include Board Policy BA – Theory of Action, public forums, school district website, the “Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top,” as well as other publications and postings throughout the district. Documentation and artifacts clearly reveal that the school system is endeavoring to build stakeholder understanding and support for the system’s vision and mission.

“Strategic Plan 2014” identifies five system-wide “areas of focus” which also include specific strategies for reaching the goals as well as distinct measurements of success. These initiatives are also included in the District Improvement Plan and most school improvement plans.

The school district develops and continuously maintains a profile of the system, its students, and the community. Comprehensive School Progress Reports detail school demographic information and student performance data in a stakeholder friendly format. School Progress Reports, and other profile data such as

the Capital Needs Assessment Reports, are readily available and widely disseminated to stakeholders.

Interviews and documentation consistently reveal that the school district ensures that the system's vision and mission guide the teaching and learning process and the strategic direction of schools, departments, and services. The vision that is articulated in "Strategic Plan 2014" establishes a clear focus, direction and tone for the system and provides a clear guide for teaching and learning. This clear sense of direction and purpose are also communicated through the District Improvement Plan, most school improvement plans and other documents including "Framework for Action with Turnaround MS and HS Challenge." Stakeholder interviews consistently revealed the extent to which the district is committed to ensuring that the vision and mission guide the teaching and learning process as well as the strategic direction of the schools and departments.

The school district reviews its vision and mission systematically and revises them when appropriate. School Board Policy Code: BA Theory of Action requires review and readopting of a Theory of Action at least every three years. The Theory of Action effectuates the district's vision, mission, core beliefs and commitments. Reviews of the vision and mission occurred most recently in 2006 and 2009.

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

Stakeholder interviews consistently revealed broad support and understanding for the systems' vision and mission.

"Strategic Plan:2014" is a thorough and comprehensive "blueprint" that establishes and communicates a compelling purpose and direction for improving student performance and system/school effectiveness. It also identifies "Key Strategies" and measurements which will determine the extent to which goals have been achieved as this new vision becomes a reality.

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

Develop opportunities for broader stakeholder participation in future reviews and revisions of the vision, purpose and mission.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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:

Stakeholder interviews as well as Board of Education meeting agenda, district staff and student handbooks, governance policy handbooks, organizational chart, as well as other documents clearly reveal that the school system has well established processes for the development of policies and procedures. Further, it is apparent that system leaders are continually endeavoring to communicate policies and procedures to stakeholders in order to ensure the effective operation of the school district. The online School District policy manual is thorough, well-organized, and easily updated. District in-house legal counsel ensures a set of properly worded policies that are up-to-date with changing local, state and federal laws. Interviews and documentation indicate that the superintendent regularly meets with board members to keep them informed of district issues. Among other strategies to communicate policies and procedures that are in place, policy updates are emailed to district leaders regularly.

While board members have received training on their role as a policy setting body, in interviews some stakeholders, including some board members, indicated that periodically board members become involved in day-to-day operations. Interviews further reveal that the system has developed a procedure for board members to register concerns about the day-to-day operation of the school system and all its schools.

Interviews and documentation indicate that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) maintains in-house legal counsel that interprets requirements to make sure the district is in compliance with local, state, and federal laws, standards, and regulations. Procedures are in place to ensure that policies are properly written and approved.

The Policy Manual as well as interviews with several board members indicates that Board members annually participate in North Carolina School Board Association trainings. Board members also indicate that they receive additional training from district leadership as well as external sources such as the Broad Foundation. Board members consistently reported that these were positive experiences.

Stakeholder interviews and documentation reveal that the system is engaged in ongoing activities to build public support for its mission and vision. The system undergoes regular financial audits and has a very well defined budgeting process both of which appear to be transparent and include opportunities for stakeholder feedback. In addition, the system has sought grant funding for various initiatives and has been successful in some of these. Finally, the system partners with various community organizations to assist in providing needed services for students and families. Several community organizations have partnered with CMS to help maintain a high level of service to students and families during a time of dwindling resources. External financial contributors include the Charlotte Bobcats, various religious organizations, the Education Committee of the Chamber of Chamber, Learning for Charlotte, and others.

Review of documentation and interviews indicate that the school district carries adequate insurance. The

system has, in fact, developed a memorandum of agreement with the city and county for insurance. Financial stability has been maintained despite significant reductions in recent budget cycles, and has developed policies and procedures for protecting its assets and financial resources.

System leadership has pursued various student performance evaluation initiatives over the last several years. These include DataWise, teacher and principal portals, and benchmark assessments to name a few. Observations, interviews with central office and building staff, viewings of teacher and principal portals on line, teacher performance evaluations, classroom walkthrough observation forms, as well as the School Quality Reviews indicate that the system is providing for a systematic analysis and review of student performance and school/system effectiveness on an ongoing basis. The system ensures that the data is collected, analyzed, communicated and, to large extent, used to guide decision making at the school and system levels. The district has a plethora of data on student performance. Artifacts and interviews indicate that CMS shares this data with internal and external stakeholders as the district continues to target achievement gaps at various levels.

Interviews with district personnel as well as external stakeholders consistently indicate that the system works to create collaborative networks of stakeholders and build understanding and support for the system through various initiatives such as Parent University and partnerships with the interfaith community.

In addition to network participation, the system provides multiple opportunities for parents and community members as well as internal stakeholders to assume leadership roles which promote a culture of participation, responsibility and ownership. Multiple opportunities exist for parents and community members to serve on advisory boards, various councils, school leadership teams, and to participate in public forums. These participatory opportunities have been well documented in the Standards Assessment Report and other documents as well as interviews. The district has also established a leadership framework to find and train aspiring principals and assistant principals through partnerships with national nonprofit New Leaders for New Schools and Leaders for Tomorrow at Winthrop University. Both the superintendent and board have established numerous committees or advisory councils to provide feedback i.e., Teachers Advisory Council, Interfaith Advisory Council, Principals' Leadership Advisory Team, and MeckED, a community education advocacy organization.

The system regularly gathers stakeholder perception data and ensures that this is utilized in reviewing school/system effectiveness.

Documents and interviews reveal that CMS uses the state mandated teacher performance instrument. Further, the superintendent and leadership team have attempted to analyze the effectiveness of the evaluation instrument in the context of a school's student performance data. This analysis basically compares the percentage of staff members who received high ratings on their evaluation to the student performance level in the school. This initiative simply asks evaluators to be completely candid in making their judgments and to ensure that the evaluation system itself is aligned to the fundamental mission of the system which is to advance student learning.

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

By aligning resources toward increased student achievement, CMS has increased achievement scores and is closing performance gaps among subpopulations, despite significant reductions in funding in the last three years.

The extent to which the school system is committed to ensuring equity of learning opportunities for all students across the community is also highly commendable. Interviews with board members, leadership staff, superintendent and others consistently revealed a commitment to providing the best education possible for all students. This commitment is manifest in the creation of specific policies targeting equity that are documented in the Standards Assessment Report including the Strategic Staffing Initiative which reassigns highly effective principals to the lowest performing schools.

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

Ensure that revisions to the personnel evaluation system are understood by all stakeholders and consistently implemented.

Ensure that new procedures for board members to register concerns about the day-to-day operation of the school system are fully understood and consistently implemented.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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:

Interviews and review of documents and artifacts reveal that the district implements a curriculum based on and aligned with the state standards. The curriculum is supported by district pacing guides and other resources which are generally available to teachers on the district's intranet. The district-wide focus on student achievement for all students and high expectations for student performance permeates the culture and climate throughout the schools in the district. In interviews and documentation, the team consistently found evidence to support the district's emphasis and focus on improvement in student learning as the primary mission of the school system.

Classroom observations and school visits, in general, revealed an inequitable availability or use of resources to support the implementation of the district's curriculum.

The Standards Assessment Report identifies "Curriculum Standards (state) and Instructional Non-negotiables (local)" for elementary, middle and high schools. These "non-negotiables" represent clear expectations for what will be taught and some guidelines about how it will be taught, i.e., daily instruction in literacy and math for elementary students, A/B alternating block scheduling for middle school students,

and freshman academy for high school students. Consistency across the system with regard to the curriculum and some instructional practices is highly desirable especially in a large school district where student transfers are quite likely over time. The extent to which systems are in place to monitor the consistent implementation of the "non-negotiables" is not clear.

There were multiple artifacts and sources of evidence to support the use of assessments as a tool to inform instruction. The team observed examples of effective instruction; however, the team did not find evidence of consistent and system-wide implementation of research-based best practices.

Classroom observations indicated a wide use of teacher directed or teacher centered lessons. The system supports the development of programs based upon research-based best practice including Sheltered Instruction, Observation Protocol, Investigations in Mathematics, Imagine-it! and the use of district generated formative assessments. The implementation of these and other instructional strategies is monitored by individual principals and through the district's student performance data system. Implementation is also supported in several schools through highly functional professional learning communities.

Documents and artifacts indicate support for the use of formative assessment data. The district uses multiple formative and diagnostic measures and end of grade assessments to inform teacher instructional decisions. The QAR team found that these assessment tools provided ongoing information for teachers to guide instructional planning and delivery.

The QAR Team found clear evidence of a district wide professional learning communities initiative in place in nearly all schools. The PLC model allows teachers to meet for the purpose of discussing student needs and sharing professional practice. In many instances, teachers write common assessments together and compare test results. The extent to which the PLC model is consistently implemented across all schools is not evident.

Observations and interviews reveal that the schools adhere to the district's curriculum guide, which is articulated across schools in the district. The extent to which the system provides for a consistent approach to vertical curriculum alignment, i.e., meetings between schools to address transitional issues and potential curricular gaps, is not clear. The district provides support for updating and aligning the curriculum at regular intervals in compliance with the state standards.

Based on review of documents, interviews and observations, the team did not find a systematic approach to providing interventions to struggling students. There was evidence that students were regrouped for instruction based on formative data in some instances; however, the team did not see evidence of an intentional and consistent approach that would ensure that research based instructional strategies for interventions are consistently provided.

Interviews and documentation reveal that CMS has systems in place to monitor school climate. The school system conducts stakeholder surveys regularly which provide one measure of school climate, and this information is included in the school data profiles which form the basis for the school improvement plan.

Classroom observations and interviews revealed that available instructional technology is not being used consistently for interactive, student-centered instruction. In general the team did not observe the use of interactive instructional technology. Classroom observations and interviews indicate that the extent to which instructional technology is readily accessible in all schools is not clear,

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

The district is committed to continuous improvement in student performance and has established high expectations for student achievement as the chief priority for the school system as well as individual schools. In addition the system continues to develop ways to measure and monitor student growth and improvement including the development of formative and summative assessments that guide teaching and learning.

The district provides rich data resources and professional development on the Data Wise framework. The data is transparent and readily available to staff, parents, and other district stakeholders through the district web site, intranet, and individual school websites.

Interviews, documentation and observations consistently revealed that teaching and learning is driven by the building principals as instructional leaders.

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

Review the extent to which inequities exist across the district in the area of access and use of instructional technology needed for effective instruction as well as adequate preparation of students for the technology they will encounter in the real world.

Develop a system to monitor and ensure consistency in the systemic implementation of district “non-negotiables” as identified in the Standards Assessment Report.

Document articulation and alignment of curriculum and the use of research-based instructional strategies through vertical and horizontal planning.

Identify and encourage the consistent use of instructional practices that will authentically engage students in their learning indulging applying learning to real world experiences.

Examine the extent to which existing systems designed to provide interventions for struggling students are able to be implemented consistently across the district.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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 Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District establishes and implements an assessment system, aligned with the system's expectations for student learning. The assessment system produces information which is reliable, valid, and bias free in most of the core content areas. Interviews consistently indicated that the school system is engaged in a process to create assessments across the entire curriculum. A variety of assessments are used to measure students' academic growth. The assessments used by the district include, but are not limited to: common school/grade assessments, North Carolina End-of-Grade (grades 3 – 8), North Carolina End-of-Course (grades 9 – 12), DIBELS (Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills), and Thinkgate Formative Assessments. These assessments are used to provide data relative to student needs and are part of a continuous monitoring program of student achievement for the district.

Interviews and documentation consistently reveal that the district's assessment instruments are clearly designed to measure student performance relative to North Carolina Standard Course of Study, identify gaps between expectations for student learning and student performance, measure growth in student achievement and determine interventions to improve student performance. In interviews, school personnel somewhat consistently indicated a strong knowledge of available data as well as the processes to be used for analysis of student performance. Interviews also revealed that a common language or consistent understanding of terminology relative to the district's assessment system was not always apparent.

Documentation and interviews consistently revealed that the district's use of Trends in Urban District Assessment (TUDA) data and other measures demonstrates the use of comparison and trend data from comparable school systems to evaluate student performance and system effectiveness.

The assessment system produces accurate and timely information that is meaningful and useful to the system, school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in understanding student performance, school and system effectiveness as well as the results of improvement efforts. Interviews consistently indicated that the district's use of NCWise student record system, as well as the transition from the iSPARTA data management system to the new principal and teacher portals will likely enhance the district's ability to manage, analyze, and communicate data in a timely and effective manner. In interviews, some teachers and staff were not able to articulate the district's plan for addressing North Carolina's roll out of online End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) testing in 2014. Some interviewees lacked a clear understanding of the formative assessment professional development portal, NC FALCON, and expressed confusion regarding some student performance data terminology. Interviews, especially at the school level, suggest that a more consistent and unified approach to professional development is needed to help ensure a successful transition to the new data management structure.

The district uses a vast array of methods to communicate student, school and system performance information to the community and stakeholders, i.e. media reports, websites, annual reports, parent newsletters, principal portals, teacher portals, Data Dashboard, Parent Assist, CMS School Progress Reports, Board of Education briefings and others.

Interviews with teachers, students, and parents, as well as district and school leaders, revealed a strong focus on the use of assessment results as well as the School Quality Review process to guide improvement efforts. Interviews also reveal that, to a considerable extent, assessment results are also used to initiate academic interventions that address individual student needs. The extent to which individual student interventions are consistently initiated based on performance data is not evident. Certainly the district implementation of the DataWise process supports and augments the use of data in guiding instructional decisions. Interviews clearly indicate the growing involvement of teachers in the use of this information to make data-driven decisions regarding instruction and instructional interventions.

The district conducts a systematic analysis of organizational effectiveness, including support systems, and uses the results to improve system performance. CMS uses surveys, safety audits, budget analyses, environmental impact studies, personnel evaluations and others sources of information to guide decision-making. In addition, ideas and suggestions from superintendent and school board advisory councils and special committees provide additional data points for evaluating effectiveness and aligning resources. The Center for Research and Evaluation, a division of the Office of Accountability, also conducts annual surveys to measure perceptions and attitudes of parents, students and teachers. The results are available on the website of the Office of Accountability web pages and included in the School Progress Reports as well as shared with executive staff, school and system leaders.

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

CMS effectively communicates student data to its stakeholders. Through school and district websites, the district provides school and system performance data to the parents and to the general public. Parents also have access to current student academic performance through Parent Assist, linked to the district's website. The district has made available a variety of measures that assess student performance and school effectiveness which allows school level professional staff to better understand and meet individual school needs.

The development of new systems and tools to manage and more effectively utilize data clearly evidences the district's commitment to further enhancing a school and system culture that embraces the collection, analysis and use of data to guide all decision making.

The focus on growth data in regards to all students is aligned with the district's strategic plan.

The extent to which CMS ensures that performance data is communicated to internal stakeholders as well as the larger community further evidences the district's commitment to transparency and to building ongoing support and understanding for the mission, focus and direction of the school system.

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

Develop and provide training that addresses the use of common language with regard to student, school,

and system performance data. Stakeholder interviews revealed an ambiguity and lack of clarity regarding terminology related to district and school developed assessments such as “common assessments,” “benchmarks,” “pacing guides,” and “value added data.”

Develop and implement training that will ensure an effective transition from the existing data assessment system to the new data assessment system. Stakeholder interviews revealed a lack of consistent understanding with regard to the district’s approach for this important transition.

Further develop the comprehensive assessment system to include all areas of the curriculum across all grade levels. Although in development, presently, there are not assessments for all academic courses. More complete and accurate information about student performance across all areas of the system is highly desirable.

Explore opportunities to work with North Carolina higher education institutions, (community college and four year institutions), to obtain data on CMS graduates’ attendance, performance and degree completion, etc., and use this data to inform planning and implementation of advisory programs, interventions and enrichment opportunities, course offerings, and other decision-making.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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:

Documents and interviews reveal that CMS has established policies to recruit, employ, retain and mentor qualified professional and support staff. Personnel policies, district staff handbooks, and other documents reveal a well defined process for employment, retention and mention for employees. Interviews also indicated the existence of programs to identify and train aspiring principals and assistant principals through the New Leaders for New Schools and Leaders for Tomorrow initiative. The district identifies future leaders and has assisted in the financing of masters degrees. The district also provides stipends for National Board Certified teachers.

CMS has an annual retention process which includes incentives for master teachers and master administrators. Interviews and documentation, such as the district’s personnel policies and staff handbook, also reveal that the system implements a staff assignment plan based on qualifications that are required by state law and regulations. A well communicated staffing process exists that provides additional human resources for schools with higher need populations which is a reflection of the system’s commitment to equity. The process also includes procedures for reduction in force and weighted staffing considerations. The district has developed a Strategic Staffing "turnaround" model for school improvement. The Strategic Staffing Initiative puts new leadership into struggling schools. This initiative allows principals to bring in teams of teachers to strengthen the leadership and instructional capacity of the schools. The initiative also provides financial incentives for teachers and principals who succeed. In addition the district provides a

flexible system allowing principals to determine how to use the staffing ratios to meet the student needs of the school. According to the State of Schools report the district gave 50 principals increased freedom and flexibility this year, so they could make decisions about how best to use resources and manage their schools.

The system has increased class sizes, or teacher - student ratios, in recent years in response to severe reductions in funding.

Teachers, principals, and staff are well aware of professional development opportunities which are linked to school and system improvement targets. Through electronic documentation and interviews, the district demonstrated that there is an online professional development system in place. The extent to which these professional development programs are monitored and evaluated is not evident, however.

Audit reports and budget information show that the district engages in long-range budgetary planning, and that the system annually budgets resources to advance its vision and mission and implement its plans for improvement. Stakeholders are generally aware of the system's budget process and the extent to which board members, administration, school and system leaders are engaged in various phases of the process culminating with approval by the board. A Project Monitoring Oversight Committee (PMOC) reviews budget requests checking for alignment to the Strategic 2014 Plan. If approved the project is submitted to the executive leadership for final approval. Interviews and documentation consistently reveal that the system ensures all financial transactions are safeguarded through proper budgetary procedures, and internal and external auditing is clearly provided. The system has developed a well defined procurement system.

The district aggressively seeks outside funding sources and has been awarded more than \$22 million in the last two years with funds coming from the U.S. Department of Education, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation and the Spangler Foundation.

Stakeholder interviews and review of documentation consistently indicate that the district is making difficult choices in order to adequately address the ongoing budget crisis and this includes increasing the student - teacher ratio in many schools.

Documentation, interviews and observations reveal that the system maintains its sites and provides a safe and orderly environment. The safety audits help assure that students, faculty, and staff are able to feel safe when they are in the school environment. Stakeholders are aware and trained in crisis management plans. Policies are in place for maintaining and improving equipment according to the district guidelines.

Interviews indicate that technology infrastructure is up-to-date in pockets across the system. Based on interviews and observations, an inequity in technological resources exists among schools. While the district has a technology plan, all stakeholders are not aware of the schedule for replacements. School observations and interviews revealed limited use as well as availability of technology resources to optimize learning.

There are an abundance of support services available in CMS including those that address health, safety, emotional as well as academic needs of students. The school system has a well established Exceptional Children department that helps to ensure services and programs are provided for disabled students. The Exceptional Children department also provides ongoing training for both disabled and general populations. Interviews and documentation indicates that considerable efforts are made to coordinate these programs within the school and community settings. There is a comprehensive transportation and child nutrition plan. The district has outreach programs in place for parents in order to

enable them to better support their children's education and reduce or eliminate barriers to education.

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

CMS has developed a clear plan for allocation of positions to schools based on the prescribed formula using population and economically disadvantaged data.

The Strategic Staffing Initiative is a highly innovative "turnaround" approach for low performing schools that has achieved some measure of success already and is consistent with the system's stated beliefs, vision and mission.

The system's Freedom and Flexibility program is a highly innovative approach operating in 50 schools that delegates decision making as well as management of resources to the school level.

Safety audits are utilized to ensure that schools have necessary written security and crisis management plans and that these plans are supported by appropriate and effective training.

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

Prioritize and monitor equity of technological resources in order to accomplish and support the system's goals.

Further examine the extent to which larger class sizes, especially at the middle and high school levels, may be impacting the overall quality of the instructional program.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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 district recognizes the importance of collaboration with community stakeholders as an imperative for supporting student learning. The Strategic Plan 2014, for example, identifies "Parent and Community Connections" as one of the five focus areas for the system for the next four years. The Parent University, a primary initiative to advance this collaboration, offers to parents courses to strengthen their ability to support their child's academic experience. There is a formalized process for developing community partnerships that specifically targets businesses, the faith-based community, and industry. To support these partnerships, the superintendent has created the Interfaith Council which meets periodically throughout the year. In addition, he avails himself of every opportunity to speak to service clubs, churches and

neighborhood associations to advance the district's commitment to improving student learning.

The district's Communications Division is specifically structured to focus on communication with external and internal partners. The organizational chart indicates district level personnel are specifically dedicated to media relations, bilingual communications, and strategic partnerships. The Communications Division is responsible for disseminating all media releases whether it is related to a breaking news item, an impending Board of Education meeting or upcoming events within the system.

While the QAR found evidence at the school level of intentional efforts to involve non-English speaking community members and parents through the use of bilingual staff members and interpreters, there is little evidence of a system effort to address language barriers at such district-level events as board of education meetings. System-level documents are translated into Spanish; nevertheless, evidence of other translations were not available.

An advisory council model is used to solicit feedback from numerous stakeholder groups. The superintendent conducts regularly scheduled meetings with the following groups: teachers, administrators, parents, and students. However, the QAR team found no evidence of meetings with representatives of the classified staff (e.g. custodians, teacher assistants, bus drivers, cafeteria staff).

Annual surveys are administered to teachers, a random sample of parents, and principals. The North Carolina Teachers Working Conditions Survey is addressed as part of each principal's yearly evaluation process. In addition, principals are expected to review the results of this survey with their respective faculties. In conversations with classified staff members, however, surveys were no longer administered to them due to budgetary constraints.

Soliciting feedback is also accomplished through Community Forums, held in conjunction with such specific district-level events as the budget process and the closing of schools. The forums are advertised through the media; flyers are disseminated at the school levels, and posters are placed in strategic community locations. Mass e-mails are used as another vehicle for stakeholder notification. However, district artifacts indicate that one Community Forum had a total of seven attendees at a meeting regarding adoption of the proposed Strategic Plan 2014.

Connect Ed, the district's telephone alert system, is used to notify stakeholders relative to district and individual school information. E-mail contact groups provide a consistent, on-going communication venue from the central office level to the school level. Another communication method is the district's web-page, the site of a two-way portal where parents and community members can submit questions, concerns, and/or comments and receive a response from a central office representative with expertise in the particular area or concern. Moreover, the superintendent issues a weekly e-mail update to all staff members and includes his calendar for the upcoming week. This level of disclosure is congruent with the superintendent's directive for total district transparency.

Business and industry partners volunteer as mentors and tutors within the schools. Schoolmates, a "School to School" partnership, promotes financial support for less affluent schools by their more affluent counterparts. Emphasis on educational volunteerism is underscored by the Volunteer Management Template that is an integral component of each School Improvement Plan.

The district's Strategic Plan 2014 clearly articulates expectations for student learning and goals for improvement, both in the actual document and in the superintendent's letter to stakeholders. The district produces a yearly Parent Handbook that delineates expectations for student learning, district rules, and grading policies. Parents and guardians receive quarterly progress reports which are clear and assist

parents in understanding their child's achievement levels and next steps in learning. The online Parent Assist module provides real-time information on each child's academic standing within the school. Both parents and students report the effectiveness of this tool in maintaining and understanding the educational progress of each child.

The district's Data Dashboard is an online information center, providing stakeholders with data relative to achievement and district functionality (e.g. transportation, purchasing information). Newsletters and mass e-mails also provide district data and other pertinent information.

Interviews and documentation consistently reveal that the district has multiple mediums for disseminating information and listening to stakeholders within the school system and larger community. As an extremely large and comprehensive organization, CMS has made significant efforts to communicate with its stakeholders. The communication department solicits information from various stakeholders. They have identified systems for key communicators at each site, and frequently use multiple media releases, newsletters, website community forums, press release as well as dissemination of information by school district zones in order to ensure information is effectively conveyed. A communication action plan is in place for communications development.

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

Interviews, observations and documentation clearly indicates that CMS values the importance of effective communications and relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Without question, the district is highly committed to communicating with stakeholders in timely and transparent ways using both print and electronic media.

Parents have instantaneous access to school performance data through the Data Dashboard and to individual student current academic performance and attendance through Parent Assist, an online module through the district's website. Both of these communications tools help to build understanding and support among parents and the larger community.

The Parent University offers stakeholders numerous classes on issues and information regarding school success, including transitioning grade spans, helping children with homework, and understanding developmental issues.

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

Develop methods for two-way communication with classified staff members that is consistent with communication techniques used with teachers, parents and administrators.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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:

Charlotte Mecklenburg School District's commitment to the continuous improvement process is articulated by stakeholders at every level and clearly communicated in Strategic Plan 2014 with clarity, content and candor. The vision of "Teaching Our Way to the Top" resounds in each individual school improvement plan as well as in sub-plans. School Improvement Sub-Plans target specific tasks for departments and grade levels. There is a plethora of documentation supported by interviews that district-wide efforts yield an increase in student performance. The school system has provided evidence to show that the achievement gap is closing at every subgroup level.

CMS creates varied opportunities for all stakeholders to engage in the continuous improvement process. Engagement occurs from "top to bottom" (from the boardroom to the classroom). "Learn and Talk" community forums, district surveys, community and business partnerships are documented evidences supporting stakeholder engagement.

Established Professional Learning Communities and the implementation of the Data Wise process lead the way in assuring alignment of individual school improvement plans to the vision of Teaching Our Way to the Top. Interviews with School Leadership Teams, principals, and district level personnel reflect the collaborative process of aligning the vision and purpose system-wide. Once plans are developed at the school level, they undergo further alignment review using the SIP checklist and SIP Feedback form.

In CMS there is a strategic focus on achievement for all students and administrators with a laser-like focus on growth in student performance measured over time. There has been a paradigm shift in the district from honoring longevity and accepting mediocrity to honoring performance and demanding excellence. The School Quality Reviews, School Improvement Plans, and Professional Learning Communities highlight the professional development efforts to achieve each school improvement agenda.

The school system has created a structure to ensure that all professional development initiatives are generated through a comprehensive needs assessment process which includes internal and external school reviews. The Performance Management Oversight Committee (PMOC) provides a mechanism by which district initiatives are supported in the schools. This committee also ensures that school level initiatives are research-based and aligned with the district's improvement efforts. With some consistency, school staffs indicated that there is an abundance of professional development opportunities available to support their school improvement initiatives. Professional growth offerings are high quality, job-embedded and are offered through diverse venues.

CMS's improvement efforts are transparent with a targeted focus on academic achievement as the business of all stakeholders. The transparency of the improvement efforts is well-articulated and communicated throughout the schools. School Quality Reviews are a systematic approach to monitoring and communicating results to all publics on the impact of improvement efforts. The result of review visits are displayed on the district's website and are available for viewing. Additional evidences include The State of the District Report, weekly superintendent media briefings, and the availability of immediate data via Portals and data Dashboards.

Schools engage in vertical and horizontal planning through the school leadership teams and their professional learning communities. In an effort to provide resources that schools and departments can use in their continuous improvement efforts, the district provides web-based tools such as Portals to drive data driven decisions. However, more direct monitoring and support is necessary to ensure high levels of access and utilization throughout the district.

CMS provides direction through the 2014 Strategic Plan and assistance to its schools through key district personnel. The organizational charts reflect various levels of support for both schools and operational units. This level of support is noteworthy given 133,664 students are served in 176 schools under the current budgetary constraints.

The district has developed the School Quality Review (SQR) process administered and conducted in each school as a part of the continuous improvement process. Interviews at the school level consistently revealed that School Quality Review process helps to guide and give energy to individual school improvement planning. The district continues to collaborate with Cambridge Education to provide these school reviews on an ongoing basis. Each school is responsible for alignment of their school improvement plan to the District Strategic 2014 plan. The SQR monitors six school effectiveness criteria – achievement, curriculum, learning and teaching, leadership and management, learning environment, and involvement of parents/guardian and community which are closely aligned to AdvancED standards.

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

The school district is highly committed to engaging multiple stakeholder groups in the processes of continuous improvement. This commitment is manifest at the system and most schools.

There is an alignment of the continuous improvement process throughout the district to promote the system's vision and expectations for student learning. Interviews and documentation consistently reveal that the improvement planning process is focused on achieving higher degrees of alignment that will yield greater results in terms of student performance as well as school and system effectiveness.

Interviews, documentation and observations consistently reveal that district leadership exhibits a willingness to be transparent about both the system's challenges and strengths and to openly engage in discussing ideas for improvement and that will advance the mission and vision of the board of education.

Without question, the district and schools are using data to inform decision making about how to improve the quality of instruction and reach improvement goals. To a considerable extent, system leaders have been successful in shaping a data driven culture that contributes significantly to the overall continuous improvement process.

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

Explore and improve processes to ensure stakeholder use of real-time data to inform decision making especially regarding instruction.

Identify and implement strategies to ensure multiple stakeholder groups are included and engaged in strategic decision making.

Ensure that goals and strategies for improvement among divisions and departments are aligned to the board's mission and vision and results of improvement efforts are communicated to stakeholders.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 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 board of education and district administrative staff have developed a very compelling vision for the future of CMS that has been well articulated in “Strategic Plan 2014- Teaching our Way to the Top.” Clearly, the core beliefs, values, goals, measures and key strategies identified in this document serve as a clear guide to system and school improvement. Without question the Strategic Plan 2014 defines how the school system intends to continue to improve student achievement for all students in CMS. Most stakeholders interviewed were able to adequately explain a good understanding of the organization’s vision and improvement priorities.

Interviews and documentation indicate that the school system has developed quality assurance procedures to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support to schools and ensure AdvancED standards are met by all schools. These processes within CMS which are regularly reviewed and monitored, contribute significantly to assuring quality: 1) School Improvement process 2) budgeting process 3) processes surrounding testing, accountability and communicating results 4)staffing process 5)communication processes.

1. The district has developed School Quality Review (SQR) process administered and conducted in each school for continuous improvement. The district collaborated with Cambridge Education to develop this system for review. Each school is trained in the review process and provided a guide. The yearly reviews are conducted by a district oversight team. Each school is responsible for alignment of their school improvement plan to the District Strategic 2014 plan. The SQR monitors six school effectiveness criteria – achievement, curriculum, learning and teaching, leadership and management, learning environment, and involvement of parents/guardian and community. Stakeholders consistently indicated that the SQR energizes and gives focus to school level improvement planning process and provides feedback to school leaders as well as system leaders. Results of the SQR are communicated to stakeholders, both internal and external. Criteria for the SQR are well aligned to the AdvancED Standards and, to a large degree, the SQR process mirrors the AdvancED QAR process. State and district data are also used in the creating the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and these plans are reviewed during the SQR conducted by the district. The school SIP’s identify targeted areas of growth based on student achievement data. SMART goals are set for each area targeted for improvement.

2. Stakeholders are generally aware of the system’s budget process and the extent to which board members, administration, school and system leaders are engaged in various phases of the process culminating with approval by the board. All budget requests have a formal review process. A Project Monitoring Oversight Committee (PMOC) reviews the request checking for alignment to the Strategic 2014 Plan. If approved the project is submitted to the executive leadership for final approval. Internal and external auditing is provided. The financial statements are audited by Dixon Hughes PLLC, independent certified public accountants.

3. The district reviews and monitors multiple types of data for assessment and accountability purposes. The assessment systems are used to measure student performance and to guide instruction. The basic level competencies for assessment are provided through the comprehensive state level testing. State assessments are

scored and returned within 72 hours to the teachers. At the elementary schools formative/ benchmark assessments are provided by the district. The district scores the assessments providing the results to the schools. Interviews revealed that some inconsistencies exist in the high schools and middle schools use of formative/benchmark assessments. Common course assessments are continually under review and development. Testing portals are available to parents, teachers and principals. The teacher portal contains testing data on each student. In addition, the district provides opportunity for students to take multiple national exams SAT, ACT and PSAT as well as AP course exams. During the 2009-2010, the district paid for all AP student exams. Two structures have been implemented to assist teachers in the use of data. The district has implemented training in Data Wise process and PLC's. PLC's are reflected at every level of the organization and effectively implemented in most but clearly not all schools. The district measures itself through analysis of state, national and district comparisons.

4. The district has clear staffing process including Reduction in Force and weighted staffing considerations. The district has developed a Strategic Staffing process for school improvement. Strategic Staffing Initiative put new leadership into seven struggling schools. This initiative allowed the seven principals to bring in teams of teachers to strengthen the leadership team at these schools. The initiative also provides financial incentives for teachers and principals who succeed. In addition the district provides a flexible system allowing principals to determine how to use the staffing ratios to meet the student needs of the school. According to the State of Schools report the district gave 50 principals increased freedom and flexibility this year, so they could make decisions about how best to use resources and manage their schools.

5. Communication Processes are systemic. The district has multiple mediums for disseminating information. As a large comprehensive organization, the district has made significant efforts to communicate. The communication department solicits information from various stakeholders. They have identified systems for key communicators at each site, multiple media releases, newsletter, website community forums, press release and zone dissemination of information. They use written and electronic forms of communication. A communication action plan is in place for communications development. The district clearly values the importance of communicating with stakeholders. They have developed a parent university academy which provides parents an opportunity to collaborate with the district and gain knowledge to assist their student's growth and achievement.

Interviews and review of documentation strongly suggest that district leadership have been instrumental in shaping a culture that is more oriented to using data to drive all decision making. The district maintains articulation among and between all levels of schooling to monitor student performance and provides a variety of programs to ensure future readiness (i.e. IB, AP, Magnet Schools). Most interviews revealed that school staff uses assessment data to adjust instruction, place students in appropriate courses, or determine interventions. The comprehensive use of assessment ensures the use of data in the continuous improvement process. The school district continues to also shape the adult work culture towards a professional learning community model, both at the school and system levels. With some consistency, interviews revealed that "alike" staff meet in PLC's to review, examine data, reflect and adjust. Among teachers this would also include modifying instructional approach based on formative assessment evidence.

The district uses performance systems to analyze effectiveness at the district level. Internal audits are conducted to assure green performance, budget efficiencies and alignment, retention staff. For example, the district audited the cost of transportation and made significant changes in the system based on the data provided.

Strengths

In interviews, many school as well as system leaders shared the value of the School Quality Review process in

assisting the leadership to establish improvement focus. The process was well defined and clearly understood by the schools. Regarded by several stakeholders as being rigorous, the process created a clear focus on school improvement and mirrors the AdvancED school accreditation process and standards.

The fidelity of the alignment of fiscal operations to student academic progress was clearly in evidence through the transparent processes established in the budgeting development and project request.

Opportunities

Ensure that quality assurance processes are consistent throughout the district. For example, create data assessment in all areas in all subjects, ensure board aligned goals and strategies for improvement are in place for divisions and departments within the school system.

Ensure that clear transition plans exist when replacing old systems with new ones, i.e., student data management system.

Ensure that the process for school and district improvement planning are focused on “results” or the extent to which the improvement planning strategy yielded the desired impact. The use of “smart” goals is certainly a step in that direction.

Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System on 11/07/2010 - 11/10/2010.

Hopewell High School	11530 Beatties Ford Road	Huntersville	North Carolina	28078
Nathaniel Alexander Elementary School	7910 Neal Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28262
Park Road Montessori Elementary School	3701 Haven Drive	Charlotte	North Carolina	28209
Marie G. Davis Middle School	3343 West Griffith Street	Charlotte	North Carolina	28203-5437
International Business and Communications Studies @ Olympic High School	4301 Sandy Porter Rd., Suite C	Charlotte	North Carolina	28273
Randolph Middle School	4400 Water Oak Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28211
Tryon Hills Pre-K	2600 Grimes Street	Charlotte	North Carolina	28206
Robert F. Kennedy Middle School	4000 Gallant Lane	Charlotte	North Carolina	28273
Albemarle Road Middle School	6900 Democracy Drive	Charlotte	North Carolina	28212
Huntersville Elementary School	200 Gilead Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28070
West Charlotte High School	2219 Senior Drive	Charlotte	North Carolina	28216-4303
Providence High School	1800 Pineville Matthew Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28270
Cotswold Elementary School	300 Greenwich Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28211
Ashley Park Elementary School	2401 Belfast Drive	Charlotte	North Carolina	28208
South Mecklenburg High School	8900 Park Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28210
J. V. Washam Elementary School	9611 Westmoreland Road	Cornelius	North Carolina	28031
Cochrane Middle School	6200 Starhaven Drive	Charlotte	North Carolina	28215
Berryhill Elementary School	10501 Windy Grove Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28278-9721
Croft Community School	4911 Hucks Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	26269
Bailey Middle School	11900 Bailey Road	Cornelius	North Carolina	28031
Morehead Elementary School	7810 Neal Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28262
Merry Oaks Elementary School	3508 Draper Avenue	Charlotte	North Carolina	28205
Providence Spring Elementary School	10045 Providence Church Lane	Charlotte	North Carolina	28277
Devonshire Elementary School	6500 Barrington Drive	Charlotte	North Carolina	28215
Lebanon Road Elementary School	7300 Lebanon Road	Charlotte	North Carolina	28227
Pinewood Elementary School	805 Seneca Place	Charlotte	North Carolina	28210

Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System

Jay M. Robinson Middle School	5925 Ballantyne Commons Parkway	Charlotte	North Carolina	28277
Albemarle Road Elementary School	7800 Riding Trail Rd	Charlotte	North Carolina	28212-4616
Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology	1430 Alleghany Street	Charlotte	North Carolina	28208
Bruns Avenue Elementary School	501 South Bruns Avenue	Charlotte	North Carolina	28208
Metro School	405 S. Davidson Street	Charlotte	North Carolina	28202
Midwood High School	1817 Central Avenue	Charlotte	North Carolina	28205
Mallard Creek High School	3825 Johnston Oehler Rd	Charlotte	North Carolina	28269
Ridge Road Middle School	7260 Highland Creek Pkwy	Charlotte	North Carolina	28269-805
River Gate Elementary School	15340 Smith Rd	Charlotte	North Carolina	28273-6842
William Amos Hough High School	12420 Bailey Rd	Cornelius	North Carolina	28031-9134

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-NC accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Mr. Thomas Jones, CHAIR (SACS CASI)
- Ms. Suzi Cabe, VICE_CHAIR
- Dr. Laura Koskela, MEMBER (Laurens County School District #56)
- Mrs. Mary Anne Hipp, MEMBER (Retired Catholic Principal)
- Mr. Trevor Putnam, MEMBER (Central Elementary School)
- Ms. Julie Spencer, MEMBER (Durham Public Schools)
- Ms. Lisa Anderson, MEMBER
- Dr. J. Hurley, MEMBER (Western Carolina University)
- Mrs. Caroline Patterson, MEMBER (Henderson County Schools)
- Ms. Sandy Carlaccini, MEMBER (Craven County Schools)
- Ms. Shawn Clemons, MEMBER (Caldwell County Schools)
- Mrs. Rebecca Pearson, MEMBER (McDowell County Schools)
- Ms. Shannon Batchelor, MEMBER (Stanly County Schools)
- Ms. Susanne Swanger, MEMBER (Buncombe County Schools)
- Ms. Beth Isenhour, MEMBER (Catawba County School System)
- Dr. William Nolte, MEMBER (Haywood County Schools)
- Dr. Harrie Buecker, MEMBER (Franklin County School District)
- Constance Dove, MEMBER (Career Academic & Technical Academy)
- Dr. Dena Dossett, MEMBER (Jefferson County Public Schools)
- Dr. Denise Birdwell, MEMBER (Higley Unified School District)
- Mr. Brian Vetrano, MEMBER (Johnston County Schools)
- Mr. Michael Ceglinski, MEMBER (McCracken County Schools)
- Ms. Amy Dennes, MEMBER (Jefferson County Public Schools)
- Dr. Matthew Wendt, MEMBER (Ankeny Community Schools)
- Ms. Kaye Mero, MEMBER (Primrose Schools)
- Mrs. Lydia Quinn, MEMBER (Lancaster High School)
- Ms. Beverly Payne, MEMBER (Cherokee Central School System)
- Ms. Stacy Stewart, MEMBER (Hoke County Schools)
- Dr. Robin McCoy, MEMBER (Chatham County School System)
- Dr. Debra Morris, MEMBER (A.L. Brown High School)
- Dr. Jan Webster, MEMBER (WRESA)
- Mr. Michael Spahr, MEMBER (Byron Center West Middle School)
- Mr. Brian Shumate, MEMBER (Jefferson County Public Schools)
- Dr. Connie Smith, MEMBER (Tennessee State Department of Education/SACS CASI)
- Mrs. Monica Sebastien-Kadie, MEMBER (Flint Community Schools)
- Mr. Kirk Hartom, MEMBER (The ASK Academy)

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.