

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Liberty County Schools**

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*North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.*

# Quality Assurance Review Report

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## About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

**Background.** Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and Schools (SACS CASI) accredit public and private schools and districts in 30 states, the Navajo Nation, Latin America, and the Department of Defense Schools worldwide.

In 2006, NCA CASI, SACS CASI, and the research and development arm of the accrediting associations, the National Study of School Evaluation, unified to form AdvancED. Dedicated to advancing excellence in education, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 23,000 schools in 65 countries, serving 15 million students.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help schools, school districts, and educational service agencies continuously improve.

**The Accreditation Process.** To earn and maintain accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, school districts and their schools must:

**1) Meet the AdvancED Standards and Policies for Quality School Systems.** School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards and policies which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.

**2) Engage in continuous improvement.** School districts and their schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose that the school district is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school and district effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results).

**3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.** School districts and schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, school districts host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the school district improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school district and a written report detailing the team's required actions. The school district acts on the team's required actions and submits a progress report two years following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school district community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help school districts and their schools maximize student success and improve organizational effectiveness

# Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

**Purpose.** The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

1. Evaluate the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and policies.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and required actions to improve the district and its schools.
4. Make an accreditation recommendation for review by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

A key aim of the Quality Assurance Review is to verify that the school district is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

**School District Preparation.** To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school district and the community complete the AdvancED Standards Assessment Report. The report engages the district in an in-depth self assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school district identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that it is meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school district examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school district effectiveness.

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

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

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

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

## Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI Georgia State Office (SACS-CASI-GA), a division of AdvancED, visited Liberty County Schools on 02/27/2011 - 03/02/2011.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 50 administrators, 87 teachers, 52 support staff, 54 parents and business partners, 60 students, and 7 Board of Education members for a total of 310 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 6 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 Liberty County Schools for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted.

- **The maintenance and operations department and grounds crew have established a systematic process for maintaining the facilities and the grounds.**

From observations and interviews, it was evident that the maintenance and operations department and grounds crew have worked vigorously to maintain the district's facilities and grounds. The team observed the impeccable condition of the buildings and grounds as well as the pride taken by students and teachers in their surroundings. The team was very complimentary of the maintenance department and grounds crew. The district has training for employees who work in these departments as well as substitute custodians. Also, a substitute list of custodial personnel is available for schools to use. These substitutes have completed the custodial training program and are qualified applicants for any resulting custodial openings.

These trainings have led to Liberty County School System (LCSS) creating a team of professionals who take pride in maintaining its buildings and grounds. The team noticed that this pride has played a critical role in the system's mission to provide clean facilities and attractive grounds. This was evident throughout the system.

- **The LCSS is to be commended for providing families and students with a quality, centralized Pre-kindergarten Program.**

LCSS serves in excess of 440 pre-kindergarten students and their families in a facility designed and dedicated to providing a safe, secure, high-quality educational experience for 4-year olds. The system has committed to preparing their youngest children for a successful education by providing early literacy learning, social skills development, fine arts, and physical development opportunities. Pre-kindergarten students are afforded technology experiences equal to that of other district students. Parents stated, "This program prepares our kids for first grade without a shadow of a doubt. Every staff member here is committed to the children, and they love what they do."

Students who participate in the LCSS's pre-kindergarten experience are prepared for success as they begin their formal education in kindergarten. LCSS is a step ahead of most school districts because of its commitment to create a centralized Pre-kindergarten Program.

- **Strong collaborative partnerships have been established among community agencies to support teaching and learning within the system.**

With 45% of district students coming from Fort Stewart families, it is essential that communications between the military installation and the district be open and effective. The Fort Stewart community, families and citizen volunteers, as well as district staff, are committed to the success of all students and seek to be well-informed and proactive in the school system. The outstanding support and high level of volunteerism with military units attached to each district school places the LCSS in an enviable position among neighboring districts. The district has also established excellent working relationships with local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce. Multiple businesses are active partners with the district and various schools, understanding the mutually beneficial and satisfying rewards attached to such partnerships.

The district has allowed the Chamber of Commerce to use its school board meeting facilities for public meetings of the Chamber. The school board meeting facilities are also available for community-based art shows and other local events.

Creating effective collaborative relationships among community agencies can act as a vehicle to support a school district in its mission to ensure that students are provided with every opportunity possible to become productive members of society and to receive crucial support to sustain programmatic functions.

- **The system has implemented numerous methods of parental communication.**

In interviews, the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team learned of a wide variety of communications efforts of both central office staff and school-based staff. These include traditional communications such as weekly newsletters, school-based websites, informational flyers, phone calls and email. However, the district has been progressive in providing parents with technology –based communication opportunities such as Parent Portal, school-based blogs, web-cam conversations and podcasts featuring classroom lessons for students to view at home. Face-to-face communication opportunities also abound through means such as school councils, availability of all staff for parent meetings, open forums at school board meetings and frequent public forums

Because of the district’s efforts to provide multiple methods to communicate with parents, the parents have developed a sense of ownership in the district’s quest to provide a high-quality education for their children. During interviews, parents shared with the members of the QAR team that the district had taken key communicative steps to ensure that they are aware of their children's success. Plus, they found these practices to be an effective progress monitoring tool for them because of their demanding work schedule.

- **LCSS has recruited and retained committed and qualified employees.**

The cornerstone of a balanced, high-quality education begins with teachers in the classroom. LCSS consistently demonstrates its commitment to academic excellence and classroom success via an aggressive national recruiting campaign, seeking the best teachers America has to offer LCSS students. High teacher retention rates serve as a testimony to teacher dedication and loyalty to their students, district and community. The QAR team consistently heard in interviews with students, parents and other stakeholders, as well as from the teachers and administrators, accolades of the high quality, commitment, and ability of the LCSS staff and school administrators.

A commitment among employees to remain in LCSS has become a key component of the quality instructional programs offered to all students. Staff members who feel valued, trusted, and have a sense of investment in the school system promotes an enthusiasm that permeates the district. Continuity provides stability.

- **A technology-rich environment supports best practices by enhancing the availability of technology for students, ensuring that technological resources are used to improve classroom instruction for success in a global society.**

During interviews with members of the QAR team, parents expressed an appreciation for opportunities provided for their children to be highly-functional digital learners and for providing parents advanced technological communication opportunities. “The use of technology in our classrooms promotes high-quality instruction and effective learning,” stated parents. Teachers are appreciative of the advanced technology available in their classrooms as well as personalized technology training offered one-to-one, in small groups, or for all staff such that technology is truly an embedded instructional and learning tool. In

addition, students have opportunities to utilize technology as tools that support exploration, research, and creativity. Interviewees also noted the rapid turn-around of technology work orders by the technology support technicians indicating that technology equipment is superbly maintained within the district. Instructional technology specialists are continually seeking new ways to support classroom teachers in their quest to maximize instruction using technological resources and to expand communication opportunities for district staff.

Having technological resources and personnel to support teaching and learning is an essential component in today's society. In addition, providing high-quality professional development and training will allow educators to stay abreast of key functions with regard to the 21st Century Classroom. The use of technology to enhance instruction is a vital element to help eliminate the achievement gap among students and afford them better opportunities to function in a technology-rich society.

- **Efficient use of system financial resources effectively promotes teaching and learning throughout the district.**

The QAR team noted from their visits and interviews with central office personnel, school administrators and staff, parents, community members, and students that LCSS has made a financial commitment to provide educators and students with the resources and professional training to meet the needs of all students in the system. Examples of financial resources that effectively promote teaching include the assignment of curriculum coordinators, parent involvement coordinators, graduation coaches and instructional coaches to support classroom teachers, students and families. Struggling students are supported in their learning with after-school tutorials and Saturday classes. The district provides certified teachers and student busing for these endeavors. Teachers are supported with high-quality professional development aligned to school improvement initiatives and district goals. The Pre-Kindergarten center has a media center to promote early literacy as well as technology equal to that at other school sites within the district.

In the current climate of limited financial resources, both the members of the school board and district leadership team have maintained adequate financial reserves to maintain high-quality teaching and learning at all district schools. Because of their actions, the students of LCSS will reap the benefits of district leaders' commitment to provide quality programs and resources throughout the district for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

- **The School Board of LCSS is commended for their commitment to provide students with quality educational programs and resources to ensure their success.**

From interviews, observations, and the review of documents, it is evident that members of the LCSS school board have sought and engaged in opportunities for professional learning regarding educational programs offered or planned for within the district. They have expressed a strong commitment to being well-informed in order to support schools most effectively. Additionally, school board members have committed local funds to enhance programs partially funded by the state, e.g., the Pre-kindergarten Program and Center. During the interviews, several board members stated, "We want what is best for the children of LCSS. Therefore, it is our first priority to put in place the needed resources and personnel to ensure our students receive a quality education here in Liberty County Schools."

Providing quality educational programs throughout the district has allowed LCSS to implement effective strategies and measures to assist in accomplishing its goal of providing students with a quality education where they will be equipped to become productive members in a global society.

## 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 Liberty County Schools will be held accountable for making progress on each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the required actions.

- **Develop a systemic quality assurance method for monitoring system-level and site-based improvement goals as a process of continuous improvement, ensuring that there are ongoing supports in place to improve student achievement and classroom instruction.**

From interviews with central office staff members and school personnel, the QAR team discovered that there was limited evidence regarding the use of quality assurance methods to progress monitor the goals and activities outlined within their improvement plans. While central office instructional staff members discussed their role in providing support when the school solicited their help, the team feels that it is very important that system instructional staff and/or the administrative team develop a process to monitor the local schools' goals and activities within their school improvement plans to ensure students' success and to provide feedback to administrators with regard to the instructional practices within their schools.

By conducting organized, focused system-level walk-throughs, the system will be able to provide a structure of meaningful support and/or professional development activities as well as constructive feedback to each school. Conducting walk-throughs will provide the system and its schools with opportunities to collect, interpret, and analyze data related to student achievement and classroom instruction, creating a data culture throughout the system. These practices can lead to system-level uniformity and consistency in the continuous improvement process. Also, it can assist the system in conducting systemic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness.

- **Expand the use of collaboratively-developed common formative assessments at all levels to support teaching and learning improvements within the system.**

During the visit, the QAR team noted that while some of the schools within the system were using common formative assessments to monitor student achievement and classroom instruction, this process had not been fully implemented across all grade-levels and/or content areas throughout each school within the system. Through interviews, it was revealed that some of the educators within the schools had begun to use common assessments while others had not. Furthermore, the team found that some of these assessments were being developed independently by educators to measure their students' success and the effectiveness of their instruction.

Having common formative assessments will allow the system and its schools to create an effective method of improving classroom instruction and student achievement. This process will also allow the system to plan and design more effective professional learning activities for staff members.

**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](http://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.

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# 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 of the LCSS is to ensure that “all students will receive a high quality education providing them the knowledge and skills to be successful, contributing members of a global society.” To that end, the mission of LCSS as stated is to provide all students an education which promotes excellence, good citizenship, and a love of learning. Supported by nine belief statements and five strategic goals, the district’s vision and mission statements serve as solid cornerstones to ensure all students are afforded opportunities to reach their optimum level of educational success. As part of the system’s strategic planning and curriculum development processes, mission and vision statements are used in the development of consolidated operating budgets and long-range financial plans and reflect active school board oversight and involvement. However, the QAR team discovered through interviews that a vast amount of members from the different stakeholder groups were unaware of the vision and mission tenets and were not afforded the opportunity to assist in the developmental process of both the vision and mission statements. Increasing the involvement of stakeholders in the developmental process of the vision and mission statements will enhance stakeholder ownership of both the vision and mission and help the district achieve its goal(s) to provide the students within LCSS with a quality education.

During interviews and discussions with stakeholders, many articulated that the superintendent, school board, business partners, support staff, parents, and other community stakeholders are supportive and involved in the development of the system’s vision and mission statements. As cited within the Standards Assessment Report (SAR), impetus for the vision included an expectation that all teachers, staff members and system personnel actively participate in cutting-edge instructional methodologies to enhance the educational success of all students. While the district is working to accomplish its vision to ensure that all of its students are able to compete in a global society, the QAR team feels that these efforts can be enhanced if the district expands its diploma offerings to include the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma. This will strengthen program offerings for students within the system, and it will heighten their college and career opportunities.

Vision and mission statements are communicated using various methods. They are included on the website, sent to stakeholders in newsletters, vocalized in community meetings and school council meetings, and posted in the district office and throughout most school sites and classrooms. However, during their observations, members of the QAR team discovered that the vision and mission statements were not posted in key areas of the district office. Plus, the team did not notice the vision and mission statements being posted throughout the Pre-K Program. Above all, interviews validated stakeholder commitment to vision and mission statements which are also periodically reviewed and updated.

Interviews with school stakeholders demonstrated very strong community support of the district's vision and purpose. Especially noteworthy is the outstanding support provided by the military community from nearby Ft. Stewart, Georgia. The district has a heavy military population with nearly 44% of all students having some connection to the military. Soldiers, parents, and community organizations are extremely proud of the work being done in the district and actively promote the school system by dedicating their time, talents, expertise and service to school sites. There is a strong perception of "high quality, effective leadership and excellence in teaching" among those interviewed. School officials work closely with parent volunteers to highlight student/school achievement and success, which lends credibility to the visioning process. In addition, the district has hired a liaison to work between the district and Fort Stewart.

Stakeholder groups were generally in agreement as to how the vision and mission were developed and shared throughout the district and its community; however, some acknowledged to members of the QAR team that they were not involved in the developmental process of the mission and vision statements.

The district has developed a data profile of its system available to the public and all stakeholders on its user-friendly website. Profile and performance data appeared current and supported determinants of the vision and purpose of the district, and it provides a clear link to assessing student performance, system and school effectiveness.

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

- The vision, mission and purpose of the school district are advanced by the superintendent and school board, who are committed to excellence and success.
- Parents, students and stakeholders were extremely complimentary and appreciative of the district's outstanding technology and web-based learning initiatives.
- Wise budgetary investment decisions and due diligence in providing financial resources to enhance learning opportunities for all students, especially the large transient student population from Ft. Stewart, is especially noteworthy.
- Dynamic, innovative and highly-motivated principals and school leaders holistically view student achievement and academic success as their number one priority. The QAR team found these actions to be very supportive of the district's vision and purpose.

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

- Employ innovative methodologies to ensure stakeholder (students, parents, educators, and community members) participation in the review/revision process of the district's vision, mission, goals and belief statements.
- Ensure that the mission and vision statements are posted throughout the entire school system. The QAR team noticed that the vision and mission statements were not prominently posted around the public areas of the District Main Office and Pre-K Center.
- Explore opportunities to expand diploma offerings to include the International Baccalaureate (IB)

Diploma – the diploma of choice in many international school settings and most top-tier universities. Given the international nature and global mission of Fort Stewart organizations and its military population, members of the QAR team believe that this will allow students to be more productive in a global society.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Liberty County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

## Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

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

### Description:

The LCSS is governed by a seven member board of education whose chair is elected countywide. However, the superintendent is appointed by the board of education, and she has begun her third year as the chief executive officer of the school district. The relationship between the board and the superintendent indicate that the roles of these two positions are well-defined with each one understanding and appreciating each other's role.

The system is effectively using the Georgia School Board Association E-Board and its resources to develop policies and to communicate with the community, stakeholders, and school system personnel. The board has also received several recognitions from the Georgia School Boards Association including a technology award, recognition as an accredited board and a Board of Distinction honor. A National School Board Award has been received for the system's use of technology. Using E-Board capabilities, the system effectively aligns the agenda items with the system goals to monitor the attainment of the goals and objectives for dissemination to the public and the system's constituents. The Georgia Accreditation Commission has also recently awarded the system with renewed accreditation.

The board has succeeded in maintaining a relatively low millage rate of 15.5 mills. The board has also created a reserve fund of approximately 40% of its general fund. On March 15, 2011, the system will ask the voters to approve the third E-SPLOST (Education Special Local Optional Sales Tax) referendum. This continued funding will help to finance repair and construction of facilities, purchase technology, and subsidize other specified and designated areas. Budgetary meetings with school personnel are routinely scheduled to calculate requested school and district needs with projected expenditures.

At the board meetings, citizens are encouraged to attend and to present concerns if needed. Student recognitions during the meetings are a vital aspect of the system's efforts to honor student achievements and accomplishments. The board considers and evaluates for funding the recommendations of school councils composed of parents, community members, and other stakeholders. The board also conducts monthly school visits to demonstrate their commitment to encourage and support the schools and their programs.

System personnel respond to schools' requests for assistance and guidance, and e-walks are being used to review and evaluate technology use. However, the team noted that a systemic program to establish

instructional walk-throughs by system personnel should be considered for implementation to monitor classroom instruction and student achievement.

Currently, a pilot program for a performance-based standards teacher evaluation is being considered by the respective schools. Data from this pilot program will be collected and reviewed to make a system decision for a revised teacher evaluation program to include a more comprehensive, performance-based evaluation.

In addition, the district leaders have approved construction of a career academy, and groundbreaking for this facility has been completed. Staff members surveyed students and collaborated with local business and higher education institutions to develop the proposed program offerings for the center. The district currently invests funds in excess of state requirements for career and technical education programs. Students are also able to participate in work-based learning programs to enhance career goals, classroom instruction and work connections. The QAR team was informed that this new program will provide additional educational opportunities and electives for the students. The academy is expected to reduce the dropout rate and increase the graduation rate. Additional post-graduate data should be collected and reviewed for use in the further development and implementation of this program.

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

- The board of education has established a reserve fund in times of budgetary austerity. Budget expenditures are systematically aligned with school system goals. Plus, the team found that responsible stewardship of public funds entrusted to the board of education has provided fiscal stability.
- The district has used the Georgia School Board Association extensively to develop board procedures and to provide high-quality professional development for board members.
- The district has established school councils at each of its schools to create collaborative relationships among stakeholders throughout the district.

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

- Increase the visibility of district personnel in the schools for planned instructional evaluations.
- Document the results of the currently piloted teacher evaluation instrument based on instructional practices and the Georgia School Keys to merge with the current Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program.
- Compile additional post-graduation data to prepare further for the career academy and other initiatives.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Liberty County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

## Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

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

### Description:

The school system implements curriculum aligned with Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) as is required of all Georgia Public School Districts. The in-depth performance standards have created a need for the district to develop curriculum guides, pacing charts, and assessment instruments to clearly outline student expectations. Teachers throughout the district are working collaboratively to align curriculum both vertically and horizontally.

Strong support, including support from the board of education, for professional learning within the district is evident. Teachers in some schools are given the freedom to write their own professional development plans. As one principal said, “Teachers know what their needs are.” The school system provides multiple levels of support for teaching and learning including a curriculum director and curriculum specialists at the district level. Every school has a building curriculum coordinator and there are four instructional coaches in the school district. However, the team noted a lack of collaboration among the various levels of support for teaching and learning. Results of the interviews indicated that the instructional coaches are limited to special education and co-teaching classrooms. The Curriculum Department at the district office works through the school-based curriculum coordinators to develop and monitor the school improvement plans, but the team noted that they are not actively involved in walk-throughs and classroom observations. Consistent collaboration among district and school-level personnel involved in teaching and learning will provide the best use of resources and facilitate horizontal and vertical alignment throughout the district.

Through interviews and classroom observations, it was quite evident that the district is supportive of the instructional program and teachers are provided numerous resources and a variety of technological tools to enhance instruction throughout all grade levels. The school system has invested in a technology-rich learning environment that includes interactive white boards, computer labs, student response systems, document cameras and technology instruction for students within the classroom. In addition to a technology-rich environment, district-level technology coaches assist teachers and administrators with integrating technology in daily instruction.

Student progress is monitored through a variety of summative assessments such as the *Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test*, *Georgia High School Graduation Test*, *End of Course Tests*, *American College Test*, and the *Stanford Achievement Test*. The system is beginning to implement formative assessments in the form of benchmark tests (constructed by teachers) and interim tests (items taken from the Georgia Online Assessment bank). The team feels that a district-wide benchmark assessment tool can provide valuable information for decision making if the results are consistently entered in the AssessTrax data system. Longitudinal data results from formative and summative assessments will show strengths and areas in need of improvement.

The district has embraced the inclusion model for exceptional students to maximize student learning. The components (intervention strategies, progress monitoring, etc.) of Response to Intervention (RtI) are utilized to meet the needs of struggling students who may otherwise be placed in exceptional student education programs. While the team noticed that RtI was being used by some schools within the district, it was unclear if it was being implemented effectively throughout all schools within the district. In addition, although the district utilizes the Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency Assessment of Student

Progress to screen students three times per year, school personnel were unable to articulate a clear and consistent RtI plan or how GRASP results are used to drive instructional decisions. However, parents, teachers, and students named the “many opportunities for students to be successful” as one of the district’s strengths.

Based on the review of documents and interviews with stakeholders, mathematics seems to be a focus for improvement throughout the district. Stakeholders, as well as teachers, expressed concerns about changes in the state mandated high school math program.

The social studies curriculum is another major issue for transient students. The district feels that the block schedule at the high schools enables students to have opportunities to meet required state standards in order to graduate on time. Also, the district maintains a positive and progressive school climate that affects students, employees, and other stakeholders. It is apparent that LCSS is committed to creating a sound environment for student learning. The system utilizes personnel resources to include, but not limited to, graduation coaches, parent involvement coordinators, instructional coaches, and curriculum coordinators to support teaching and learning. These actions are above reproach.

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

- A technology-rich environment supports the system’s vision and mission.
- District-wide support for professional learning to improve classroom instruction and to meet the needs of classroom teachers is evident.
- The district has placed great emphasis on ensuring that support personnel at both the district and school levels are used to enhance teaching and learning. From interviews and school visits, it was apparent that LCSS had worked to provide its support staff with the resources and professional development opportunities to ensure its students were receiving a quality education.

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

- Coordinate services provided by instructional coaches, curriculum coordinators, graduation coaches, and school administrators to prevent overlapping of services and possibly enhance services offered.
- Utilize a system-wide benchmark assessment and enter all formative and summative assessment results in the system’s data program(s) for a more efficient and comprehensive evaluative tool at the district-level.
- Enhance efforts to collaborate with Ft. Stewart School District leaders to close the academic achievement gap of students entering LCSS, considering the dissimilar curriculum models, especially in the areas of mathematics and science. This will lead to greater transparency and successful matriculation of students from Department of Defense (DOD)-supported schools on Fort Stewart into Liberty County School District.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Liberty County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

## Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

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

### Description:

LCSS has a comprehensive program of assessments used to determine academic needs of students. These assessment results are effectively communicated to stakeholders through school board and council meetings, newsletters, data walls, open house and Parent Teacher Association/Parent Teacher Organization meetings. A testing calendar is available on school and district websites. The assessment program includes the use of national, state, and local measures and both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests. Among the assessments used are the state-mandated tests: *Criterion Referenced Competency Tests* (CRCT), *Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test* (GHSJWT), *Georgia High School Graduation Test* (GHSJT), *American College Test* (ACT), *Georgia Alternative Assessment* (GAA), *Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills* (G-KIDS), and *End-of-Course Tests* (EOCT). The district has begun to use formative and summative assessments as well as formal and informal evaluations to measure and analyze changes in student performance. The LCSS has created benchmark assessments as well as interim assessments. Students are assessed using either the benchmark assessment in the regular classroom or interim assessment in the inclusion classrooms. The two high schools in Liberty County are in the process of creating common benchmark assessments in all core subjects. Data from the assessments will be used to monitor student performance and evaluate curriculum and instructional effectiveness. Evidence from interviews with members of the QAR team indicates that assessment results are reviewed and analyzed at multiple levels by local school administrators, teachers, and curriculum specialists. Also, during the interviews with stakeholders, it was revealed to the QAR team that staff members within the curriculum department assisted schools with the process of examining and disaggregating assessment results for all students. They meet at various times to discuss data and plan ways to meet areas of need to help schools with their goals to improve student achievement. Plus, they conducted occasional walk-throughs to monitor each school's continuous improvement efforts, but the evidence revealed that this process was not being done systematically throughout the district. From the interviews and the review of documentation, the QAR team discovered that there was little evidence to indicate that key leaders of the district administrative staff are currently involved in the process of meeting with schools to discuss data and conducting walk-throughs in schools throughout the district in a systematic process. Expanding these efforts to include other key leaders within the district is crucial to the system's providing its students with a quality educational program and affording them the opportunities to compete in a global society, which is part of the district's vision.

Currently all assessments, including benchmark results, are being incorporated into each individual school's Balanced Score Card which directly supports plans for individual or subgroups of students. The Balanced Scorecard is in the process of being created and updated by the central office to provide an analysis of performance on mandated assessments. Again, more collaboration should include senior administrators at the district level, other than the members of the curriculum department, regarding the review and analysis of student assessment results. In addition, student assessment data is used to make decisions about student learning with emphasis on identifying patterns of academic strengths and weaknesses. The major focus regarding assessment remains on the analysis of CRCT data for elementary and middle schools and GHSJT and EOCT data for the high schools. Also, the QAR team feels that the district could benefit from examining trend data of comparable districts when preparing the district profile to further evaluate student performance and district effectiveness. There was limited evidence to indicate that this process had been initiated by the district. Implementing these additional methods to effectively

utilize data should be evidenced through an increase in high stakes test scores, teacher reflection on current instructional practices, and teachers making adjustments in instruction to improve student performance.

After careful review of assessment data, observations of classroom instruction, and interviews with the Leadership Team, teachers, students, and other stakeholders, it was noted that the LCSS has an assessment system that monitors and documents student achievements and uses results to improve performance and school effectiveness. However, the team feels that this process can be enhanced with a systematic process to consistently monitor students' performance from assessments at the district-level. This process should include walk-throughs, data meetings, roundtable discussions among stakeholder, etc. at both the district and school levels. The team believes that these methods of monitoring students' success and teacher performance will strengthen the processes that the district has already implemented to improve student achievement.

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

- The system uses school board and council meetings, newsletters, data walls, open house and PTA/PTO meetings, as effective means to communicate assessment data. The system publishes a testing calendar and provides resources, reports, and data on the school and district websites.
- Data is being used to guide decision-making relative to curriculum and instruction throughout the district.

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

- Increase efforts to conduct systematic walkthroughs at the district-level in order to monitor instructional progress for academic success.
- Include trend data within the school district and from comparable districts when preparing the district profile to further evaluate student performance and district effectiveness.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Liberty County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

## Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

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

**Description:**

Liberty County School System has established and implemented processes to recruit and retain highly qualified personnel to meet the needs of the district as confirmed through interviews, observations, and documented evidence. The district hosts career fairs and participates in recruitment events throughout the state and the country. The district provides information on the website for these recruitment initiatives and for the TeachGeorgia system. An orientation is provided for all new certified employees each year and a local supplement is offered as an incentive to retain highly qualified personnel. As recommended by the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Team in 2006, the district has greatly improved its efforts to recruit leadership and other certified personnel that are reflective of the diversity in the county's population.

However, the QAR team noted that leadership positions in the central office are not yet reflective of the county's diversity in spite of the increased recruitment efforts; interviews with board members and district staff acknowledged there is more work to do on this initiative.

Interviews with board members and staff provided evidence that professional learning is supported and offered at the district office on an ongoing basis and is also embedded in the schools. It is aligned with Georgia standards and needs that are identified in School Improvement Plans. According to teachers and administrators, the district provides many opportunities for professional learning and surveys teachers annually to determine professional learning needs. The district provides additional professional learning when requested. Teachers also noted during interviews with the QAR team that professional learning communities at their schools provide opportunities for additional support and professional development. In addition, teachers acknowledged that principals support and provide professional learning as requested and/or needed.

Staffing needs are determined by program directors and district staff concurrent with the development of the budget which begins in January each year. As evidenced in interviews with the board and superintendent, funds are reserved to address needs that may become apparent after performance data is received. The budgeting of federal funds is based on input from district staff as well as the district improvement plan and school improvement plans. The loss of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds at the end of this year will result in the loss of key positions that have been instrumental in improving instruction and student achievement.

From information provided by, interviews conducted with, and observations of the Liberty County School System, the board has maintained a relatively low millage rate of 15.5 mills and has established a significant reserve fund of approximately 40%. While seemingly high, this system has established the reserve funds to offset the late receipt of federal impact aid that arrives in May of each year. The district also pays for capital projects with cash and is debt free. The reserve fund is targeted to fund the construction of the new career academy. The most recent audit (2008-2009) available indicated that the district immediately corrected the noted citations. Evidence was provided to the team that indicated the audit for the 2009-2010 year will begin during the second week of March, 2011. Observations, interviews and documents that were provided indicate the system operates a fiscally sound financial program.

The district's Maintenance and Operations Department completes over 300 work requests each month through an electronic work order system. Principals and teachers expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the response time for completing work orders. Personnel are trained in standardized procedures to maintain facilities to a high standard of cleanliness. Even students acknowledged the cleanliness of the facilities and said the custodial staff was constantly cleaning. Observation of district facilities demonstrated that the landscaping and maintenance of grounds at all facilities are evidence of pride and standards of excellence. The district maintains a facilities work plan and life-cycle maintenance plan to provide adequate, safe and appropriate facilities while protecting capital investments.

Students indicated in interviews that they feel very safe in their schools and also believe their belongings are secure. The security of the district is managed through several plans that include school safety plans developed in accordance with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency which provides technical assistance to the district. Numerous drills are conducted each year that include fire, severe weather, and intruder drills to ensure students and staff are familiar with the plans. The district has excellent working relationships with the local law enforcement agencies and these agencies provide full-time resource officers at the two high schools. Security plans were available in the schools and evacuation routes were posted in classrooms.

Liberty County School System was one of three districts in the nation recently awarded the District Salute Award by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) for outstanding efforts in technology integration. Observations and interviews provided evidence of technology-infused instruction that focuses on student achievement. With 57 servers, over 700 interactive whiteboards, 400 student response systems, 5,500 computers, fiber connection to all schools, and wireless networks in all schools, the district's technology infrastructure is commendable. The district's progressive training in technology integration for teachers includes podcasting, webpage development, and use of interactive technology for instructional delivery. The district staff provides prompt service for repair of computers and other technology devices. In addition, the district established an incentive program for teachers by recognizing a Technology Teacher of the Month. As evidenced in the district's Balanced Score Card, there is a three-year renewal plan for technology. Interviews with parents, students and staff, and classroom observations clearly demonstrated effective technology integration in the schools and remarkable student learning based on technology. Even the parents of Pre-K students exclaimed, "My child is more versed in technology than I!"

Individual student needs are met through a variety of programs. The district contracts with two private providers to provide disciplinary intervention programs for students. An alternative education program is also provided for students who are behind in academic performance by two years or more. Interviews and observations provided evidence that the district funds numerous positions to assist students with diverse needs such as graduation coaches, RtI coaches, instructional coaches, student support team coordinators, and student transition coaches. Fort Stewart, the local military base, funded an additional guidance counselor at a high school, provides a military liaison and provides military volunteers in all schools to assist students and teachers. The Response to Intervention (RtI) program is implemented in the schools. However, each school seems to have created its own plan. In addition, there seems to be a lack of collaboration between the district curriculum and student services departments. It is suggested that a district-wide plan be developed that includes ongoing collaboration between curriculum and student services since Tier 1 is based on strengthening the core curriculum for optimum student learning.

The Liberty County School System provides numerous services to support the home and community. Student Support Teams collaborate with teachers and parents to provide assistance to struggling students. Family Involvement Facilitators at the elementary and middle schools work with families in need. Partnerships have been established with the YMCA, Fort Stewart, chambers of commerce and other organizations to fill needs for children and families beyond the school day. The district funds school social workers, counselors and nurses who provide students with numerous services and support

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

- A technology-rich environment that enhances instructional practices for student learning resulted in the district earning the NSBA's District Salute Award.
- Outstanding partnerships have been established with Fort Stewart, local businesses, the YMCA and other community entities that support teachers and student learning.
- Effective use of financial resources within the system promotes teaching and learning throughout the district.

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

- Expand the efforts to recruit diversified, qualified and committed staff to the district leadership team.
- Develop a system-wide plan for Response to Intervention (RtI) that includes strong collaboration among the Student Services, Curriculum and Exceptional Education Departments and schools.

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

## Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

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

### Description:

The LCSS provides evidence indicating effective practices and procedures are in place to foster stakeholder communications and relationships. Parent survey data indicates strong collaboration to support student learning and affirms that parents are involved in district events and in the decision-making process. However, the review of artifacts indicates the data gathered through surveys does not include high school parents and community stakeholders. The QAR team feels that the LCSS should intensify its efforts to involve parent, community, and active duty military volunteers to provide direct support to the school and students. This involvement would lead to greater awareness of the district goals and continuous improvement efforts, which can assist the district in its quest to provide a high-quality education for its students. In addition, this process will allow the district to strengthen its communication efforts with the parents and personnel of the Department of Defense (DOD) Elementary Schools at Fort Stewart forming partners in education among all schools in this area working together to more closely align the curricula and school cultures benefiting both LCSS and DOD System student populations and making the transition from one school system to the other seamless.

The district has implemented a variety of methods to communicate with and strategies to listen to all stakeholders. Utilizing a variety of technological resources, schools have implemented the web-based Skype program allowing audio and video communication with parents stationed at various sites throughout the country and world-wide. This is a unique and monumental two-way communication. In addition, parents interviewed indicated e-mail is a valuable and effective mode of communication connecting parents at home or in the community to school and system employees. Many stakeholders affirm they have a variety of opportunities to be formally involved in the school system. The superintendent practices an open door policy, and it was documented that during a time of funding crisis, with the chance of possible furlough days, the superintendent spoke candidly to employees at their location. It was revealed through interviews with the members of the QAR team that there is a high comfort level when the need arises to communicate with the superintendent. Also, board members welcome public input during board meetings and provide parent forums scheduled throughout the school year. Communication between central office and the school administration is facilitated with two monthly meetings with one always scheduled after the monthly board meeting.

The school system website includes an easy to navigate section on the main page designed for parents, students and the community with an emphasis on providing quality information to school system newcomers. The LCSS uses Power School as a Student Information System, and with this software program, parents are provided the opportunity to use the very informative Parent Portal. Data gathered by the LCSS indicate stakeholders affirm their active involvement in providing expertise and that their suggestions and recommendations are acted upon. Volunteers are in the schools and governed by policy regarding volunteer involvement. As an example, the Taylor Creek Elementary School website includes a

Parent Handbook that effectively communicates student learning and volunteerism. Web-based calendars at the system and school level communicate important instructional dates, testing dates and activities to stakeholders. The LCSS website and the individual school websites are outstanding. The information is relevant and up-to-date. Navigation within each site is very user friendly. The technology used by this school system in web page development provides information that is meaningful and useful to stakeholders.

The LCSS is rapidly moving into their third publically supported Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). The success of this funding option is startling and the ongoing support of the voters indicates the school system is clearly and successfully communicating their needs. There is also a clear indication from interviews and artifacts of strong Parent Teacher Organization and/or Parent Teacher Associations (PTA/PTO) school involvement and all LCSS schools have their School Council in place. In some cases the councils are larger than required and involve more parent members than required. The local print media provides strong school news coverage.

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

- The Liberty County School System has an effective system web page providing quality information and linking the user to outstanding individual school web sites.
- The district has a variety of effective communication methods in place.

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

- Improve efforts to include parents at all grade levels and community members when using surveys to gather data regarding their input.
- Expand communication with the military looking specifically to grow dialogue between the district and the DOD elementary schools at Fort Stewart.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Liberty County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

## **Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

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

**Description:**

LCSS engages in a continuous process of improvement to promote student achievement. The Standards Assessment Review (SAR) identifies a collaborative process of data disaggregation and analysis, identification of interventions, and goal setting based on state assessment data which is used in the development of the LCSS Comprehensive Local Education Agency Improvement Plan (CLIP). The CLIP not only identifies comprehensive goals for school improvement, but also sets goals for improvement of district-level departments and divisions. Schools and departments then develop plans incorporating elements of the district plan. This process was confirmed in interviews with the superintendent, school board members, principals, support staff, parents and school councils.

School board members are to be commended for voicing a strong commitment to improve all district schools and to do “what’s best for children.” Also, parents and community members believe they have a strong voice in improving schools. Through interviews, it was obvious that stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, central office personnel, parents and community members embrace and support the continuous improvement process, but not all stakeholders were involved in the development of these plans. The district has developed systems to support annual district and school improvement planning. Systemic improvement includes the development of a “Balanced Scorecard” for the district and for each school. The “Balanced Scorecard” contains all data pertinent to district and/or school performance, e.g., academic performance on state assessments, attendance, discipline, etc. However, there is little evidence to believe that continuous improvement systems are in place as an ongoing function that is repeated over the course of the school year. Members of district instructional staff, along with selected teachers, have developed benchmark assessments that are administered three times each year, but administration of these assessments is not uniform and data disaggregation and analysis is neither systematic nor uniform. Additionally, these improvement efforts are monitored by principals but not by district staff.

According to interviews with central office personnel, ongoing monitoring and support of continuous improvement efforts are facilitated by instructional specialists who visit schools monthly to meet with site-based curriculum coordinators. Instructional specialists report to the Director of Curriculum and higher level district staff, keeping them informed of ongoing improvement efforts. However, this could not be confirmed through interviews with school personnel. An important facet of continuous improvement relies on the adage, “Inspect what you expect.” In LCSS, principals are responsible for classroom walkthroughs to support and document school improvement efforts. Both principals and instructional specialists report continuous improvement efforts to district staff. However, members of the QAR believe that senior district-level administrative staff members should increase their involvement to strengthen this process throughout the system.

The current continuous improvement model relies on annual goal setting and monitoring. While this is essential to continuous improvement, there is no evidence that a systematic ongoing progress monitoring methodology is employed. There is evidence of limited development and implementation of benchmark assessments by the curriculum department and interim assessments by the special education department. Unfortunately, these are summative in nature and are not uniformly administered across sites. It is strongly recommended that these departments work collaboratively to develop benchmark assessments that serve the needs of all students, are uniform across the district and that are both formative and summative in nature.

According to interviews and written evidence, personnel are offered professional development opportunities that are aligned to the CLIP and to School Improvement Plans. Central office staff members report that teachers may also request specific professional development opportunities and that these activities and/or training sessions are approved if they are aligned to the school’s improvement plan. This is a commendable practice as improving instruction is an important element of continuous improvement. The team discovered that the district has done an admirable job of merging AdvancED standards with district goals and expectations as evidenced in the SAR and the CLIP.

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

- Members of the board exhibit a strong commitment to improve the quality of educational programs and services within the system to ensure students’ success.
- Annual improvement plans based on state assessment data are developed by the district, central office departments and schools.

- The district is in the process of implementing a “Balanced Scorecard” for the district and each school, adding another layer of transparency of critical data.
- Professional development activities and training sessions are closely aligned to school improvement initiatives.

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

- Initiate site visits that include classroom walk-throughs by central office staff in order to support continuous improvement initiatives within the local schools.
- Create a data culture (collection, analysis, interpretation, use and appreciation of data in school improvement) that moves beyond the nature of an annual event to one of sustained, continuous improvement.
- Conduct frequent data conversations between central office leadership and site-based leadership in order to monitor implementation of ongoing progress monitoring strategies.
- Develop common formative assessments to be used across all grade levels and content areas within the district and its schools.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Liberty County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

## Quality Assurance Findings

The Quality Assurance Review Team examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team provides the following findings in this area.

### Description

LCSS develops a CLIP annually that serves as the foundation for the district's continuous improvement efforts. It is used as the vehicle to guide the improvement priorities of the district and its schools; each school develops an improvement plan that has been aligned with the district's CLIP based on the students' assessment results which include but are not limited to the following: *Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)*, *Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test (GHSJWT)*, *Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSJT)*, *American College Test (ACT)*, and other forms of summative assessment. The QAR team notes that the data gleaned from these summative assessment tools are utilized to make informed instructional decisions for planning purposes. Although analyzing summative assessment data is crucial, the team wishes to emphasize the importance of developing and utilizing formative assessment tools. While the QAR team noticed that the district has placed a substantial amount of effort on using these summative assessment tools to gather data to make informed decisions regarding student achievement, more emphasis should be placed on developing and utilizing formative assessment tools and/or resources. These tools will allow educators and other stakeholders within the district to guide instruction throughout the year and ensure that students are ready for the high-stakes tests at the end of the school year. The team also believes that these tools (data system) can assist the district to address the dropout and graduation rates and to close the achievement gaps among the student subgroups. The team also found that there was a limited amount of data being used in the lower grades to monitor students' success in the teaching and learning process. Because the lower grades are the critical foundational years, it is imperative that formative assessment tools are created and utilized to monitor the students' academic progress throughout the year. Through progress monitoring of students, teachers are empowered to intervene and provide the necessary instruction to struggling students.

The district reviews its plan regularly to determine its effectiveness and to monitor the success of goals, action steps, and research-based instructional strategies contained in this document. A review of the Standards Assessment Report (SAR) and stakeholders' interviews indicate that members of the district office administrative team meet twice a month to review information pertaining to classroom instruction, planning, staff development, and assessment contained within each school's plan. Additional meetings such as school board meetings, grade level and departmental meetings at the school level, and departmental meetings at the district level are conducted to address concerns and provide additional stakeholder input. All stakeholders then work collaboratively to resolve any major issues. Although there is evidence that the district has implemented sufficient steps to monitor the district's success, members of the QAR team believe that the effectiveness of the district and the school plans will be enhanced with the implementation of the "Balanced Score Card." In addition, the district should take a more active role in monitoring instruction at the individual school level. The team feels that implementing these quality assurance components will afford students and educators within the district more opportunities to be successful and provide the district with a framework for establishing a more effective system for monitoring student achievement.

According to interviews and the review of documents, it is evident that the AdvancED Standards play an integral role in the continuous improvement efforts of the district. Prior to 2006, all schools within the district were accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). However, in 2006, the district was

awarded District Accreditation by SACS, serving as a model for other districts working towards achieving District Accreditation. In addition, this process allowed the district and its schools to unify their improvement efforts and provided them with a clear focus on how to move the district forward in achieving its ambitious goals.

Data is collected from various sources (Adequate Yearly Progress Reports, Title I Reports, benchmark assessments, surveys, Test Trax, Power School, etc.) to develop annual improvement plans. The data is then analyzed to determine the areas of improvement within the school district. To ensure that the data is being reported effectively throughout the district and its communities, the district uses several different methods of communication to accomplish this task. These include, but are not limited to, the following: school board and council meetings, newsletters, data walls, open houses, parent meetings, and the news media. Also, the team noted that to facilitate other effective communicative processes regarding its data, the district develops and publishes a testing calendar and provides many resources, reports, and data on the school and district websites. However, the team noticed that there was very little evidence that parents are involved in the district's continuous improvement efforts.

### **Strengths**

- LCSS uses a variety of resources to communicate data throughout the district.
- The district has implemented effective methods to use the AdvancED Standards and the District Accreditation Model to unify its continuous improvement efforts at the school and district levels.

### **Opportunities**

- Expand the use of formative assessment resources and/or materials in the data-driven decision process.
- Improve methods to monitor student achievement more effectively throughout the district. While the district and schools conducted meetings to monitor the success of the district and the school improvement plans, there is limited evidence to suggest that data meetings have a clear focus or that walk-throughs at the district and school levels are being done by the leadership teams.
- Increase the level of parental involvement in the continuous improvement process.

## Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Liberty County Schools on 02/27/2011 - 03/02/2011.

|                                 |                              |            |         |       |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|---------|-------|
| Liberty County Pre-K            | 206 Bradwell Street          | Hinesville | Georgia | 31313 |
| Liberty County High School      | 3216 East Oglethorpe Highway | Hinesville | Georgia | 31313 |
| Bradwell Institute              | 100 Pafford Street           | Hinesville | Georgia | 31313 |
| Lewis Frasier Middle School     | 910 Long Frasier Street      | Hinesville | Georgia | 31313 |
| Jordye Bacon Elementary School  | 100 Deen Street              | Hinesville | Georgia | 31313 |
| Taylors Creek Elementary School | 378 Airport Road             | Hinesville | Georgia | 31313 |

## Conclusion

The commendations and required actions in this report are designed to focus the school district on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and system effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and required actions only have meaning when acted upon by the school district and its schools. The strength of this report lies in the school district's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school district is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified required actions for improvement that the school district will need to address. Following this review, the school district will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's required actions.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the district leadership, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the district and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS-CASI-GA accreditation with AdvancED.

# Appendix

## Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Andre' Harrison, CHAIR (Elmore County Board of Education)
- Dr. Roy Morgan, VICE\_CHAIR (Emmanuel College)
- Colonel Scott Mahone, MEMBER (Mercer University)
- Dr. Lawanda Gillis, MEMBER (Dodge County School System)
- Ms. Cynthia Cochran, MEMBER (Elmore County School System)
- Dr. Constance Helton, MEMBER (Collier County School District)
- Dr. Kathleen Thomas, MEMBER (Lake County School District)
- Mr. Christopher Henry, MEMBER (Burke County School System)

## AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

### Vision and Purpose

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

### Governance and Leadership

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

### Teaching and Learning

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

### Documenting and Using Results

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

### Resource and Support Systems

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

### Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

**Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

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