

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Towns County High School**

1400 US Hwy 76 E.
Hiawassee, Georgia 30546
US

Roy Perren
Michael O'Neal, Chairperson - SACS-CASI-GA Team

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North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI 3

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review 4

Summary of Findings 5

 Commendations 5

 Required Actions 5

 Next Steps 7

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools 9

 Standard 1. Vision and Purpose 9

 Standard 2. Governance and Leadership 9

 Standard 3. Teaching and Learning 10

 Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results 10

 Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems 11

 Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships 11

 Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement 12

Conclusion 13

Appendix 14

 Quality Assurance Review Team Members 14

 AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools 14

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 School Improvement (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 April 2006, the 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 National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form one strong unified organization dedicated to education quality. That unified organization, known as AdvancED, creates the world's largest education community, representing 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 65 countries worldwide and educating 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 continuously improve.

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

- 1) Meet the AdvancED Standards and Policies for Quality Schools.** Schools demonstrate adherence to the AdvancED standards and policies which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement.** Schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose the school is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school 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.** Schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, schools host an external Quality Assurance Review Team once every five years. The team evaluates the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the school improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school and a written report detailing the team's required actions. The school acts on the team's required actions and submits a progress report following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help schools be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

1. Evaluate the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and policies.
2. Assess the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and required actions to improve the school.
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 is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

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

Summary of Team Activities. The Quality Assurance Review Team is led by an AdvancED certified team chair and comprised of professionals from outside the school. The team reviews the findings of the school's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school'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 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 school. The report contains commendations and required actions for improvement.

Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions. The school uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The NCA CASI/SACS CASI State Office is available to assist schools in addressing the required actions. At prescribed intervals, the school must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress the school has made on the team's required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school 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 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 the Towns County High School in Hiawassee, US-GA, US on 03/10/2010 - 03/11/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 2 members of the administrative team, 8 students, 5 parents, and 28 teachers. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school'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 within a school 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, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics of a quality school.

Through its examination of the school's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following commendations and required actions.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the school 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.

- **Joint DOE GAPSS visit.**

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

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 school effectiveness. The school will be held accountable for addressing each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions.

- **Develop and implement a systematic plan for using assessment data (diagnostic, formative, and summative) to monitor and adjust instruction in order to maximize student achievement and to ensure continuous improvement for individual learners.**

On the Certified Staff Survey (CSS), only 28% teachers responded that assessment data are used consistently to plan and adjust instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Additionally, only 21% of staff indicated on the CSS that diagnostic assessments are used to adjust instruction to accommodate students' readiness levels consistently. Interviews indicated teacher use of diagnostic assessment data to identify learning gaps and to use that information to adjust instruction is limited. Written commentary aligned to the Georgia Performance Standards and elements was not observed in any of the classrooms visited. During the review, self-monitoring and self-evaluation were observed in only 20% of the classrooms visited. The CSS further substantiated this observation with only 16% of the staff responding that this was occurring consistently. Only 31% of the staff indicated on the CSS that assessment data are consistently used to plan for and adjust instruction for each student and subgroup.

Involving teachers in ongoing collaborative analysis of achievement data and review of student work products and performances will improve overall and individual student performance. Students' ability to self-monitor and self-evaluate their work will be enhanced by involving students in assessment tasks (e.g., constructed-response test items, reflective assessments, academic prompts, and culminating performance tasks and projects), as well as by informing students of their level of achievement on assessments, and by routinely providing feedback through teacher conferences. As a result, students will be able to set learning goals collaboratively with their teacher. The participation of all staff in an on-going cycle of gathering, disaggregating, and analyzing individual student assessment data (not just standardized test results) will more effectively address the needs of all students.

- **Develop and implement strategies that promote high expectations for all students by ensuring that: teachers teach the GPS at a rigorous level; students are engaged in authentic work that requires higher-order reasoning and independent application of GPS; and teachers use the language of the standard throughout the sequencing of the lesson in all classes.**

Only 17% of teachers indicated on the CSS that teachers and students work together consistently to establish high expectations and challenging learning goals. This was supported by classroom observations which did not consistently support high expectations (49%) and the transfer of responsibility to the students for their learning (20%). During classroom observations, students were noted as being engaged in rigorous work as the predominant form of student engagement approximately 40% of the time.

Assuring all teachers' use of the language of the standard throughout the sequencing of the lesson will help establish high expectations and rigor for all students. Other routines that will enable students to take responsibility for their learning include: benchmark work, anchor papers; posted examples of student work noting areas that meet the standard/elements; scoring guides and evaluation checklists; feedback as students work through the unit using written commentary (written commentary aligned to the GPS/QCC was not noted in any of the classrooms observed), teacher/student conferences; rubrics developed by teachers and students which outline expectations to meet the standards; and daily discussions of standards by all teachers.

- **Develop a more detailed written school improvement plan with input from all stakeholders that: is consistently data-driven; includes a manageable number of clearly defined measurable goals with**

research-based strategies that will bring school-wide focus; guides the day-to-day operations of the school and includes professional learning to address high priority initiatives; and is closely monitored and evaluated by school administrators and the Leadership Team on a regular basis with frequent feedback regarding the implementation of the plan provided to all staff.

On the CSS, only 45% of the respondents indicated that the administrators and school Leadership Team consistently monitor the implementation of the school improvement plan and its impact upon student achievement. Moreover, interviews with teachers, administrators, and members of the Leadership Team confirmed the need for establishing a clearly defined improvement plan.

Developing a data-driven, research-based, and consensus-oriented process for continuous improvement will guide and inform instruction. The development, implementation, and monitoring of clearly defined goals, strategies, and timelines will provide a school-wide focus for school improvement and will inform students, staff, parents, and stakeholders regarding the school's endeavors to improve.

- **Analyze disaggregated student learning, demographic, perception (e.g., needs assessment/teacher survey) and process data to develop and implement a comprehensive, clearly articulated, focused, long-term (two to three years) plan for professional learning aligned with the goals and strategies in the School Improvement Plan and focused on three to four expected teacher learning outcomes that will most significantly impact student achievement. Clearly communicate the intended results and expectations for implementation and describe expected changes in classroom practices so that teachers are able to use the new strategies routinely. Conduct ongoing monitoring and evaluation (both formative and summative over a three- to five-year period) of the impact of professional learning on teacher practices and student learning; provide feedback and coaching to teachers.**

On the CSS, only 36% of teachers and staff answered that this occurs consistently. Only 14% of the staff indicated on the CSS that they consistently participate in long-term (two-to-three year period) in-depth professional learning aligned to school improvement goals. While content taught is aligned with the GPS/QCC, whole group instruction was observed in 49% of classrooms visited and differentiation in only 23% of classes visited. On the CSS, only 28% of the staff indicated that professional learning prepares them in practices that convey high expectations for all students and only 17% said that their professional learning prepares them to adjust instruction and assessment to meet the needs of diverse learners. On the CSS, only 14% responded that this is occurring consistently.

Providing more opportunities for teachers to participate in instructional leadership development experiences and to serve in instructional leadership roles (i.e., mentors, model classroom teachers, leading teacher meetings, participating in focus/awareness walks, redelivering professional learning, etc) will enhance the school as a professional learning community. Providing more appropriate instruction for all students based on varying needs will enhance student achievement. Offering professional learning that provides opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn how to involve families in their children's education will also positively impact student achievement.

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools: The team reviewed the school'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 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.
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's efforts to improve student performance and school effectiveness.
5. 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 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 schools with their improvement efforts. Available any where, any time, the network can be queried for information on a variety of school improvement subjects. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides research, handbooks, and tools to assist schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for more information on the range of resources available to you.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for state review and for action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school should celebrate its achievement with the school community. The SACS-CASI-GA accreditation seals are available at www.advanc-ed.org/communicationskit for accredited schools and districts to post on their website and to use in school communications. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and lapel pins are also available and can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the strengths and address the required actions noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the Towns County High School 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.

Standard 1. Vision and Purpose

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

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

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Finding: Towns County High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 2. Governance and Leadership

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

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

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Finding: Towns County High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 3. Teaching and Learning

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

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

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Finding: Towns County High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

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

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Finding: Towns County High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Emerging" and has not met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

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

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Finding: Towns County High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

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

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Finding: Towns County High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

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

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

Joint DOE GAPSS visit.

Finding: Towns County High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Emerging" and has not met this standard for accreditation.

Conclusion

The commendations and required actions in this report are designed to focus the school on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and school effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and required actions only have meaning when acted upon by the school. The strength of this report lies in the school's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school 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 will need to address. Following this review, the school 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 School Administration, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality throughout the visit. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS-CASI-GA accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Michael O'Neal, Chair (Georgia Dept. of Education)

AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

The AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As schools 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 school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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