

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Southgate Community School District**

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**Review Dates: 03/21/2010 - 03/24/2010**



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

# Quality Assurance Review Report

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## About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the NCA CASI Michigan State Office (NCA-CASI-MI), a division of AdvancED, visited Southgate Community School District on 03/21/2010 - 03/24/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 20 administrators, 115 teachers, 35 support staff, 56 parents and business partners, 63 students, and 6 Board of Education members for a total of 295 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 10 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 Southgate Community School District 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.

- **There is a comprehensive adult and alternative learning program that provides the opportunity for lifelong learning for non-traditional students and all members of the community.**

Interviews with all district personnel, community members, and parents indicated strong support for the adult and alternative education program. The extensive nature of this program from observation of the programs offered substantiated this as a key opportunity for the community.

A commitment to lifelong learning opportunities provides for economic as well as educational growth of the community. When adults continue to pursue education, it sends a strong message to the youth of the community as to the importance of education and continuing to learn and grow in knowledge and skills.

- **There is effective use of data teams and the Monday morning professional development time that provides for intensive focus on student learning and teacher collaboration.**

Through interviews with district staff, administrators, and teachers, it was evident that data teams provide for in-depth study of student performance, the identification of specific intervention strategies, and direct impact on classroom instruction. The teachers also indicated the strength of the collaboration and learning opportunities provided through the Monday professional development time.

Student learning is improved through in-depth analysis of student work aligned with specific learning targets and teacher collaboration.

- **There is a strong commitment of the district to provide 21st Century technology that enhances the teaching and learning within the schools as well as for community engagement.**

Through interviews with the various stakeholder groups, it was evident that the district has a strong commitment to technology that provides multiple external communications to the community. Interviews and observations provided evidence of the extensive use of technology within classrooms by both teachers and students.

Technology, when used appropriately and extensively, provides for expanded teaching and learning opportunities. In addition, the use of multiple electronic communications can expand the sharing of critical information to parents and the community as well as provide avenues for stakeholder input. Technology skills are a critical need for lifelong learning.

## 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 Southgate Community School District 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 process for continuous improvement based upon identified learning objectives and student performance data, resulting in a comprehensive strategic plan with a strong, long-term supporting fiscal component.**

It is apparent that the district has a mission and vision the intent of which stakeholders can articulate. What is not apparent are clearly defined vision, mission, beliefs, and learning expectations that allow for consistent implementation and monitoring through a comprehensive assessment system determining student performance and organizational effectiveness. There was no evidence of long-term budget planning to identify program and facility needs and to establish priorities, especially in times of financial stress.

A formalized process that results in a comprehensive strategic plan is the hallmark of a commitment to continuous improvement. The establishment of a strategic plan, which embodies processes for setting direction and evaluation both in student performance and organizational effectiveness, provides for systematic review, and permits adaptability to the changing educational needs of children. In an environment of fiscal limitations, the commitment to continuous improvement, through a well-articulated strategic plan, guides the decision-making process to protect viable programs.

- **Increase and refine the internal communications to continue the articulation of K-12 curriculum and clearly define learning expectations to increase student learning particularly at the critical transition points.**

There was strong expression by stakeholders for better internal communication to align learning needs of students especially at the critical transition points from elementary to middle school to high school.

Enhanced communication and articulation of learning expectations and effective strategies will help improve student learning at all levels. Communication and collaboration among those responsible for providing instruction are strengthened when all share a common direction and goals.

**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.

## 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:**

Based upon the interview with the superintendent and supported by other stakeholder interviews, the district developed a vision and mission statement during the period of the bond issue in the 1990s. At that time the facilities were in bad shape. There were four attempts to pass the bond issue before it did pass at a reduced level. A strategic plan was also developed at that time that focused on improving facilities and taking technology to the future needs of students. A curriculum director was hired in late 1999, and the current superintendent was hired in February 2000. The district embarked on curriculum alignment, K-12, the upgrade of five facilities, and major investment in technology as teaching and learning tools.

In June 2004, the District Accreditation Team reviewed the vision and mission. There was a desire on the part of the team to develop a vision and mission that could easily be remembered by the stakeholder groups. During interviews with board members, central office staff, support staff, and parents, it was apparent that the essence of the mission is understood by both internal and external stakeholders. The mission is to provide learning opportunities for all community members from birth to death. The mission identifies the “who” that is to be served; however, there is not common understanding of the “what” they are to know and be able to do. The vision statement is to be a school district where people want to be. The understanding of the vision is to be a district that provides solid learning experiences that will attract nonresident students to the district and encourage people to stay.

Interviews with central office personnel, parents, community members, and administrators indicate that the district has communicated the vision and mission. The various stakeholders could articulate the mission and indicated a strong presence of nonresident student participation in the schools. There was reference through the district video of the need to keep a focus on the future with emphasis on being “digital, global, and green.”

The district plan for 2008-09 found on the website identified four goals. There was little discussion in

regard to these goals or the data that identified these as areas of need. The belief statements do not address instructional practices. There is also a need to identify data indicators that will track progress toward meeting the vision, mission, belief statements, and goals.

The profile contains Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) trend data for each grade level in the areas of language arts and mathematics. The most recent trend data point was 2008-09. The data indicate up and down results at all grade levels in language arts. Grade seven is the only grade that shows a positive trend in student achievement. The other grades show a fluctuation of student achievement. Grades 3-7 show growth in levels of students passing the MEAP. Grade eight math scores do not show growth and are significantly lower than the other grades. The data for each grade level have also been disaggregated. The results of the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) do not indicate a solid trend of positive improvement in student learning in all areas tested. Social studies results are much higher than the other areas tested. These data are also disaggregated by the different student populations. These data have strong potential for identifying potential learning goals for the district.

Student performance data are gathered through the Calendar of Common Assessments, math benchmarks, and quarterly assessments. This information was shared through interviews with administrators and teachers. The building-level data teams gather data and work with grade-level teachers to identify specific skills that need to be addressed in classroom instruction. The data teams work within each building to identify and design professional development to address the strategies and interventions aligned to the specific skill areas. This process is well embedded within schools to address specific learning deficiencies within goal areas. The individual school improvement plans are well developed and provide guidance to the teachers in planning instruction.

During interviews with support staff, it was apparent that there are not formal processes in place for the departments and services to develop improvement plans aligned to the vision and mission. Specific and aligned processes for all departments, services, and programs provide for evaluation and improvement strategies.

It was not evident that there are systematic processes in place to routinely review and revise the vision and purpose to maintain a shared focus on the direction of the district.

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

- Stakeholders understand and can articulate the current vision and mission.
- Various assessments of student performance are collected.

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

- Articulate the vision, mission, and belief statements to identify specific knowledge, skills (beyond the Michigan state learning expectations), instructional practices and environment to provide direction and guidance in decision-making for the district and stakeholders.
- Align current data sources to measure the identified elements of the vision and mission so as to monitor progress in student learning and organizational effectiveness.
- Develop systematic processes for all levels to set direction and measure effectiveness of improvement strategies.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Southgate Community School District 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 district is governed by a seven-member board of education in conjunction with the leadership of the superintendent. An associate superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and a part-time elementary curriculum coordinator assist the superintendent. There are other directors of district services such as human resources, special education, and technology.

The Southgate Community School District has policy manuals that show their established policies for effective operations. There are components in each of these manuals that are reflected in each school's manual that is then shared with the students and parents in the form of a student/parent handbook. More specifically, the student/parent handbooks contain relevant board, discipline, and attendance policies. Secondary students receive a planner that they use daily. This planner also contains all of the schools' operating policies, as well as relevant board and district policies.

Many district policies are set in place by the board who were able to clearly define this as their role. The superintendent asserts that he assumes an authoritative role. These definitive roles and their adherence to them have created a positive relationship between the board and the superintendent.

With a highly qualified board of education, based on their certification to the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) already in place, new members have been encouraged to complete 30 hours of certification from the MASB as well. There are additional workshops and monthly meetings at the Wayne County Regional Education Service Agency (Wayne RESA) which board members attend. Prior to running, prospective board members are briefed on their responsibilities. After election, they attend an official school leader visit and are assigned a senior board member as a mentor.

The QAR team saw a positive correlation between board members and their "adopt-a-school" program and their community involvement and relationships. During the parent interviews, people expressed their comfort in attending and contributing their issues and concerns at board meetings. All board meeting minutes from the past two years are posted on the district website.

A finding in a parent and community survey showed that nonresident parents rank schools higher than resident parents. The superintendent expressed his constant concern for creating a sense of community and continually building public support. This district has conducted many surveys to analyze the perceptions of the community and also to analyze the support for the millage.

The district shows compliance with all local, state, and federal laws and standards. The evidence includes documentation that Title I, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Special Education have all been approved and are in compliance. The district also enforces the Michigan state law in regards to student attendance. Appropriate legal counsel has been approved by the board of education.

All district leadership and stakeholders have demonstrated knowledge and awareness of the state standards and requirements for teaching and learning. Many of the teaching and learning initiatives and communications are based on these standards. Examples of these include standards-based report cards and

curriculum alignment to the state standards.

Although the entire district has a substantial amount of data and processes in which to collect it, there is a lack of evidence in how the district monitors this data collection and the process they use to analyze it for student performance. An effective system the leadership has put in place to analyze and review student performance and school effectiveness is school data teams. These teacher-led teams are able to show how data are used to drive instruction. However, there is a lack of consistent evidence in how these data teams are monitored. While the central office leadership sees the use of principals conducting classroom walkthroughs as a way to evaluate and monitor instruction, there is a lack of evidence that this is a consistent and valued process of evaluation among all administrators. The district does use other forms of evaluation and monitoring such as monthly administrative staff meetings, district-wide common assessment calendars, and yearly school professional development calendars. How all of this information is systematically analyzed and used was unclear.

During the teacher interviews, many teachers and some school support staff expressed their positive feelings in terms of the central office providing them time for internal professional development as well as the opportunities for external professional development. They feel the Monday professional development is a time that is crucial to student achievement. The district focus on technology has allowed them many opportunities to attend out-of-district professional development. Staff members who attend these then serve as trainers and leaders to other staff members. While much of the professional development opportunities are for teacher and support staff in the classroom, there is a lack of professional development for school office and central office support staff.

As the district approaches a budget deficit at the end of the 2010 school year, financial decisions have become a priority for the leadership. The QAR team noted a lack of evidence of a long-term financial plan. The board members and other stakeholders involved in the hiring of a new financial manager were able to articulate their desire for a candidate that would develop a financial plan with a vision of the future.

Upon the complete review from the QAR team, it is apparent that each school is functioning according to its own successful processes, expectations, goals, and plans. There is no clear alignment between the district's expectations, direction, communications, monitoring, and evaluation of the schools' processes.

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

- The relationship between the board and superintendent is strong based upon roles that are clearly defined and to which they adhere.
- The implementation and continued use of data teams provides for a focus on student improvement.
- Extensive and continued training of the board provides for skilled and informed governance.
- Availability of professional development to the teaching staff and the use of professional development through Wayne RESA provides ongoing improvement in teacher knowledge and skills.

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

- Develop a comprehensive, coherent, and strategic process that will effectively provide for a systematic analysis, monitoring, and evaluation of student, school, and district performance.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Southgate Community School District 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 district's mission of *Learning for Life* is manifested through a curriculum that reflects the core content required by Michigan Curriculum Framework Standards and Benchmarks, Grade Level and High School Content Expectations. To support instruction of the required curriculum, teachers have developed curriculum maps/pacing guides that, at the high school level, spell out objectives and skills, and at the elementary level include content, skills, essential questions, and assessments. Learning expectations are communicated to K-5 students and parents in documents that summarize skills and concepts covered in each learning area, while course descriptions and syllabi are provided for students and parents, grades 6-12.

The 2008-2009 improvement plan reports a board-approved seven-year revolving cycle for curriculum review associated primarily with textbook adoption. Written guidance is provided on textbook adoption as well as the procedure to follow, with targeted time frames, to change curriculum and instruction, to add or drop courses, or to add or delete special programs.

The associate superintendent reports that the district's priority is inquiry-based instruction and critical thinking. However, school faculty and administration did not report a pervasive awareness of these two priorities. Nevertheless, there is evidence of support for the application of knowledge, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills through PLATO, a hands-on approach to science instruction at all elementary grades, and application of knowledge in the high school environmental science course. As well, students at the high school have access to nine Advanced Placement courses and to the Michigan Virtual High School. The academic coaching program at Davidson Middle School also supports student engagement and reflection. To varying degrees, principals report the use of the three-minute walkthrough to monitor the delivery of curriculum and instruction.

District-wide examination of state test scores has resulted in initiatives in math and literacy for several years. The improvement plan for 2008-2009 included four goals for improvement in reading and writing, scientific inquiry, problem-solving in mathematics, and understanding and application of Core Democratic Values. To varying degrees, individual school improvement plans are aligned with district improvement goals. One priority related to math is evident at the high school where the message was described as follows: "Find a way to put math into your curriculum." As well, the high school improvement team reported that when it was initially determined that reading scores were low, there was a school-wide initiative for silent reading. When data analysis revealed that reading had failed to improve, teachers shifted to implementing specific literacy strategies.

All schools report the consistent and regular use of teacher-led data teams which function autonomously, meeting as part of the Monday morning professional development time period. These data teams report the review and response to data to varying extents. Some examples are: the examination of student work, discussion of instructional strategies, review of the results of common assessments at the elementary level, use of data to inform school improvement goals at the high school, the analysis of data leading to such interventions as Reading Recovery and Response to Intervention (RtI) at the elementary level, and "Help on Demand" tutoring at the high school.

Teachers and administrators alike report the importance of Monday professional development time which supports professional learning and collaboration. Teachers have received professional development on Marzano's Classroom Instruction that Works with the goal of increasing the use of differentiated instruction. In addition, teachers report increased use of research-aligned practices such as collaborative teaching, interdisciplinary units, the Davidson teach-test-reteach-retest instructional model, and use of technology to support instruction. One elementary principal reported that school and district leadership encourage innovation and that teachers work and think "outside the box."

Students, stakeholders, and teachers all report that the curriculum is challenging and appropriate for the range of students served. When students need modifications related to the curriculum or assistance meeting curricular challenges, stakeholders report that there are support structures and actions taken to meet the unique needs of individual students. For example, elementary parents report that when their children need more challenging reading, teachers are responsive by providing books that require a higher level of reading. To ensure equity and the meeting of student needs, in the summer of 2009, five of the six elementary schools fast-tracked the training and application to become school-wide Title I schools which enabled them to hire intervention specialists to meet the needs of struggling readers. (The sixth elementary will go school-wide next year because they now have 40% free and reduced lunch.) At the secondary level, for students interested in career technical courses there is a nine-district vocational consortium that offers career and technical education courses. There is also a JROTC program for students interested in the military. GenNet supports course recovery through online courses, and Davidson Middle School has the ABCE Program in its third year of operation. This program includes a system of interventions that reinforce continuous improvement toward skill and content mastery through lunchtime academic coaching, after-school academic coaching, Thursday assessment make up, Saturday School, and a Planning Center. Also, students in the middle schools have access to PLATO, an after-school tutoring remediation/intervention program, in reading and math. The district move to trimesters also enables students who failed courses to retake immediately.

Teachers report their commitment to ensuring that student learning needs are met. One example ensures that elementary students at Chormann Elementary are known well through a "looping" structure that has students stay with the same teacher for two years and through Reading Recovery, a short-term early literacy intervention designed for first grade children. Consistent with the mission of *Learning for Life*, a comprehensive adult and community education program is available in the Asher School for Adult and Community Education. Viewed by one board member as "the best adult education in the state," Asher provides a highly customized learning plan to assist its students in achieving their graduation objectives along with academic advisors who work intensively with students. To assist adults who are functionally illiterate, the Downriver Literacy Council has provided over 19,000 hours of tutoring to adult students in the adult education program since 1985.

Interviews with teachers indicate that instructional time is protected with few interruptions from the PA system, visitors, etc. At the high school level, the principal reported concerted efforts to protect instructional time by eliminating such practices as the use of class time to do senior pictures and the holding of the faculty Christmas party during school time.

Elementary principals report long standing and regular informal collaboration. Often meeting together over a meal, the six elementary principals report discussions related to test scores, use of technology, interdisciplinary units, and collaborative teaching. Middle school administrators report that they collaborate over such things as grading practices which resulted in the ABCE grading, the curriculum, and common assessments. Across the district, administrators and teachers affirm within-school collaboration and articulation of the curriculum and activities to support the transitions of students from one level to the

next. However, numerous teachers and administrators noted that collaboration at transition points between elementary and middle, middle and high school is consistently inadequate. The elementary curriculum coordinator specifically cited a weakness related to writing instruction stating, "We are disconnected when it comes to writing." The superintendent indicated that he would like to see grades 8-9 and 10-12 "working better together."

With the exception of resources available at Asher, teachers, stakeholders, administrators, and students consistently report that ready access to instructional technology and the integration of these resources into instruction and learning constitute a district strength. One community member said, "The curriculum department and technology department are on the same page." The superintendent echoed his own support commenting, "That's the way students learn now." One parent observed, "Technology is not just video games for the teachers." To ensure growth and a clear direction, there is a comprehensive Technology Plan 2008-2011 with goals for staff and students focusing on full integration of technology in teaching, learning, and assessment practices to improve student achievement. There is also an on-line course experience in the health class at Davidson Middle School. Teachers consistently reported they have ongoing training and technical support for technology.

The provision of a range of interventions at all levels to achieve state learning expectations conveys a clear and consistent message that providing a supportive climate for student learning is a priority. The commitment of staff to looking at data, to working on identified learning goals, and to using research-aligned instructional strategies ensures a supportive climate for the range of students in the district.

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

- The availability of technology and of training related to technology is consistently cited as a strength.
- There is a major commitment to alternative and adult learning.
- All schools have comprehensive interventions to support student achievement.
- There is effective and productive collaboration among elementary principals and between middle-level principals.
- Monday morning professional development time is universally judged to be highly supportive of improved professional practice.
- The work of data teams is embraced at each school.

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

- Increase communication and articulation K-12, particularly at transition points.
- Develop vehicles that ensure use of differentiated instruction, inquiry-based learning, and the development of critical thinking throughout all grades.

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

## Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

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

### **Description:**

The district has established common assessments for all grade levels and were referred to by the staff in many of the interviews. The administrators and teachers indicated that their common assessments have been aligned to the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs) and the High School Content Expectations (HSCEs). The data team minutes referred to the GLCEs and the HSCEs by number, as well as other data summaries. Although teachers share the results of these assessments and in some cases have conducted common scoring sessions, the validity and reliability of the assessments were not indicated in any of the materials provided.

Teachers meet in data teams monthly to examine the results from common assessments, along with data from the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP), the MEAP, and the MME. The work of the teams was verified by agendas, minutes, and reports of the teams to their principals. Although not mentioned in the interviews, the materials provided to the QAR team indicated the use of data from the MI Tracker Golden Package program. The elementary buildings use a software program, GLCE Tracker, to provide a summary of which GLCEs have been taught. This is reported by each teacher within a two-week period of the lesson. Evidence from school and district artifacts indicate that the teachers use the information to make decisions about gaps in the curriculum or student performance. The instructional strategies or assessment changes to be made by the teachers are part of the data team reports.

PowerSchool has been in use for the past ten years. It provides real-time information for teachers and administrators on student attendance and grades. The availability and use of the data from PowerSchool was indicated in the teacher and administrator interviews. As mentioned during the many parent interviews, PowerSchool's portal provides important information about their child's attendance, grades, and submission of assignments. The parents were particularly pleased to have access to these data.

School data teams meet once a month to discuss student progress on common assessments, MLPP, and other performance measures. A protocol for these meetings was discussed by teachers and administrators during several interviews. The agendas and minutes of these meetings are provided to the principal and the curriculum director. Currently the elementary data are on Excel spreadsheets and the high school has data on various forms. The team heard many references to the fact that everyone in the schools understands the need to be "data-driven."

With the introduction and implementation of the Tapestry data management program, the school data will reside in Tapestry. The Tapestry data management system (Pearson Information Systems) is currently being implemented in a cooperative venture with Pearson. The technology director referred to the district as contributing "sweat equity" in working out the glitches in this new product before full implementation to the schools. The Tapestry system will provide collection, storage, analysis, and reports of the instructional program. It will also provide tools for teachers to develop common assessments from a bank of items.

The data teams at each school tend to function "autonomously" according to information gathered during interviews. Although this gives teachers the ability to focus on issues of importance to their classrooms, it

does not provide a comprehensive way of collecting and analyzing data for school or district planning. The district has done a good job of developing the capacity of their staff in gathering and analyzing data. With a common district plan, the data team structure can be an excellent means of providing data for achieving the improvement goals.

Data on the effectiveness of programs in the district do not appear to be collected. Parent surveys have been conducted in the past several years. However, the analysis and decisions reached were not available. All programs and projects need a formal evaluation in order to determine if they are contributing to increased student achievement.

Asher School does an excellent job in documenting the performance of their students, as well as the corresponding social and emotional factors that brought them to an alternative learning experience. These corresponding factors contribute equally to a student's success in academic achievement; therefore, these data are used by the school social worker and academic advisors to provide the various resources for Asher students to achieve the mission of *Learning for Life*. Evidence of their use of data was provided in their artifacts and interviews by teachers, support staff, and students.

Asher School also collects and evaluates the data needed for various state and federal programs that sustain their fiscal viability. The school has been able to apply for and receive many grants as a result of their attention to data collection, management, and analysis. The artifacts, including the many awards for the program and staff, and interviews provided a great deal of evidence regarding their use of data. The building and classroom visits provided evidence of both the challenges of substandard equipment to the learning process, as well as the creative and innovative ability of the staff to maximize available resources. The attention to data and their use by Asher School is particularly noteworthy, because their available hardware and software is not supportive or conducive to the quality of their programs nor do they leverage the opportunities available through their inclusion in a comprehensive strategic plan.

Trend data and comparable school data were provided to the team. Once again, the analysis of these data and decisions made as a result of this analysis did not appear to be used for development of the district or school improvement plans.

The schools collect student data using state and common assessments. It is clear that the schools use this information to develop their plans. The data teams also make use of this information during their monthly meetings. Use of student performance data at the district level was not evident in the materials provided. However, the need for a system for data collection, analysis, and management was the reason the technology director sought a solution – the implementation of the Tapestry program.

The school and district policies address a secure student record system. PowerSchool that is currently in use provides secure access and retention of student data. The new Tapestry program also has excellent security for its data. Reference to secure access was mentioned during parent and administrator interviews.

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

- The district provides comprehensive, diverse opportunities for student and adult learning.
- The data teams are an established practice that focus teachers on student data and provide opportunities to collaborate on analysis and resulting teacher interventions necessary to improve student achievement.
- The dedication of time (late start Mondays) for teachers to meet and discuss student data has been important for building the capacity of teachers to use data for instructional decisions.

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

- Collect, analyze, and use data to determine district needs in order to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan.
- Develop protocols, including criteria, for analyzing and use of data for decision-making.
- Establish clear protocols for monitoring and evaluating progress on interventions, programs, and professional development, including data teams and strategies.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Emerging," indicating that the Southgate Community School District has not met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

## Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

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

### Description:

The district established hiring procedures to assure that its teachers meet the requirements of highly qualified as defined by state and federal laws. With the assistance of the Wayne RESA, the district has a mentoring program to help support, retain, and train new teachers.

A professional development program has been instituted for all the schools. Every Monday morning, students arrive at a later time allowing teachers and principals to use the additional time to work on school improvement priorities as identified through the data team process. Data teams meet regularly to review and analyze student achievement data.

Due to the reduction in state revenues, the district is currently engaged in discussions with the various labor unions and community stakeholders regarding future school budget cuts. Through the schools of choice provisions in Section 105 of the Michigan School Aid Act, the district relies heavily on enrolling students from the neighboring school districts. Over one thousand students do not reside within the district's attendance boundaries. The district has put a heavy emphasis in addressing the short-term budget needs.

The QAR team found the district facilities well maintained with the exception of the Southgate Adult and Community Education building. That facility, designed to be an elementary building, has been retrofitted to accommodate a wide array of educational purposes. These shortcomings include adequate lighting for learning; appropriate classroom space for instruction; state-of-the-art technology necessary for the educational objectives of the adult and pre-vocational learner.

A comprehensive security and crisis management plan has been fully developed and implemented with the assistance and support of the local law enforcement agencies. A Crisis Response Team Manual has been compiled with copies provided to all school personnel.

Community stakeholders, teachers, students, and staff indicated a high level of satisfaction with the infusion of innovative technology within the schools. Computer labs are available at every school. Elementary school students have access to Apple iPod Touch portable media players. Teachers are trained to effectively use the instructional technology equipment available in the classrooms. The PowerSchool

information management system improves local data management to keep parents informed of their child's progress.

Support services are provided for pupil transportation, health, facility maintenance, and co-curricular activities and programs. After-school academic support programs are available at all schools. Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) are written and kept on file for students qualifying for special education services. At the secondary level, counselors work with the students in the attainment of personal, educational, and professional goals. An Educational Development Plan (EDP) is developed for each student as it relates to career education. The Downriver Career Technical Consortium provides all high school students with a career assessment that measures both aptitude and interest. Career and technical education classes are offered to high school students.

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

- The district provides for the development, training, and distribution of a crisis management plan with an emergency flip chart booklet for each staff member.
- Weekly professional development opportunities for the teachers and administrators are built into the district calendar.
- The district recruits, employs, and mentors highly qualified personnel capable of fulfilling their assigned roles and responsibilities.
- There is a high level of commitment to provide training and support for the use of instructional technology in the district.

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

- Design a consistent process for measuring the overall effectiveness of the professional development program.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategic plan that includes a strong component addressing the long-term financial needs.
- Improve the communication and articulation opportunities across grade levels, particularly at transition points.
- Consider providing instructional materials, equipment, and physical plant enhancements for the Southgate Adult and Community Education program.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Southgate Community School District 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:**

Artifacts and interviews provided clear evidence of a high level of community satisfaction. There is evidence of a strong relationship between city government and the school district. In a showing of the district's video, the Southgate mayor referenced the district as the "backbone" of the community; and the board of education assigns a liaison board member to attend and participate in city council meetings.

Further evidence of this strong collaboration between the city and the district is the emergency preparedness and the jointly developed crisis plan. The crisis plan and intervention strategies are practiced with drills supported by city public safety officials in conjunction with school officials.

A recurring response by stakeholders referenced a sense of “family” and caring in the district and community. Another respondent stated, “We take care of each other.” This is reinforced by the district and community collaboration with the food bank serving approximately 100 families each week. The mission and vision, *Learning for Life*, is evident in the relationship between the district and community in the program integrating the community’s senior citizens with high school students.

Further community and school collaborations were cited in stakeholder interviews with examples of the alternative school (Asher) and the Professional Golf Association to provide golf lessons. Further evidence was presented in citing collaborations with community service clubs, i.e. Kiwanis, and joint work with the city police department. The district’s relationship with other community organizations such as community theater, community band, and the boy/girl scouts serve to validate this strong relationship between the district and the community of stakeholders. Numerous collaborations exist both at the district and at the school level.

Interviews with community stakeholders provide evidence of the district’s external communications via town meetings and collaboration with the local newspaper. Additionally, the superintendent uses a network of “key communicators” to distribute information to the community and conducts regular evening office hours in order to provide community accessibility to his office and the district. Parents, staff, and community stakeholders all referenced the open-door policy of the superintendent and district office. The board's adopt-a-school program is evidence of the district’s strong interest in maintaining open lines of communication with the community.

Stakeholders repeatedly cited the website as a common source of district information. An Alert Now program was cited by numerous stakeholders as a means of receiving information regarding the district events. The Alert Now program is a set of audio files and web portals that provides an expanded avenue for internal and external communications. Through interviews with parents and community members, it was evident that the community stakeholders are proud of their school district and the recognition it receives as an outstanding educational environment for their children.

The district has demonstrated a continued effort to communicate internally with staff and parents via the PowerSchool software. This technology provides for the parents and students to access their individual academic progress at any time. In an interview with a principal, it was noted that parents who lack access to computer technology at home are given access to the school facility and the availability to the PowerSchool program.

A “Reach Out” program is in place to build and maintain a relationship with senior citizens utilizing “cyber-citizens”, where students of the high school work with seniors in using computers and technology. This district effort is aimed at involving community citizens that otherwise would have no contact with the schools.

In an interview with the superintendent it was stated, “We do a great job getting people to come here.” For the purpose of this report and standard, there is a distinction between communication and marketing. This being stated, there is significant evidence that certain external communication, i.e., district video, is aimed at marketing to the “school choice” parents.

Artifacts and interviews provide evidence the district seeks input and feedback from the

community. Evidence of community-wide surveys along with individual school-based surveys were presented. Most district-wide surveys were linked to community feedback on bond and/or millage campaigns. The district has utilized both "Survey Monkey" as well as contracting with professional survey services. School personnel stated many of the surveys resulted in a small sampling of the community but were informative on the issue(s). In an interview with a small business owner and community patron, it was stated the citizens feel their opinions and concerns are listened to by district officials.

The district's communication is extensive; however, most of the information flow is one way (from school to community/stakeholders). Recurring evidence indicates concerns related to the limitation of information coming from the community.

Interviews with school personnel and parents provided evidence that parents have access to their child's information via PowerSchool. Student interviews revealed this program is also utilized by the students to access their individual information at anytime. Additional interviews provided further evidence of staff availability and a proactive rather than reactive approach to meeting and sharing information. Evidence also indicates internal communications breakdowns; this is particularly true from district to school sites. This becomes a critical point in communication with the establishment of school and district educational goals.

The website is comprehensive and serves as a wealth of information about the schools. Stakeholders repeatedly cited the website as a common source of district information. The use of the website, the Alert Now notification program, and PowerSchool software is evidence of the utilization of technology to increase and improve communication with the school community.

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

- A high level of community satisfaction is exhibited.
- Crisis planning/intervention is an example of a high level of district/community collaboration.

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

- Expand and refine the efforts in soliciting and collecting community feedback and information.
- Review and initiate comprehensive internal communication strategies to coordinate and align improvement efforts.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Southgate Community School District has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

## Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

### Description:

The district is comprised of ten schools, all of which have successfully attained building accreditation. District accreditation is the logical “next step” to continuous school improvement. In May of 2008, the district completed its readiness report and visit. The district-wide AdvancED school improvement steering committee is comprised of select teachers and administrators who undertook a comprehensive process to engage stakeholders at all levels and throughout various constituencies within the community in the accreditation process.

A district mission of *Learning for Life* was established and was articulated by various stakeholders through interviews and a review of artifacts. This mission can best be understood through the perspective of who will learn (cradle to senior citizens) rather than what they will learn. Through observations and interviews, it was evident that schools are readily engaged in a continuous process of improvement which supports the mission while adapting it for their unique building-level population of learners to address the “what” of learning. This mission presents both strengths and challenges that were articulated through interviews with internal and external stakeholders.

Each school has generated profiles of the student population, their academic achievement, and the surrounding community demographics from which to identify needed instructional and operational objectives for improvement. Evidenced through interviews with staff and administration, as well as a review of individual school improvement plans, each school has created learning goals and unique comprehensive school improvement plans. Intervention strategies (i.e. academic coaching at Davidson Middle School) have been developed, adjusted, and monitored for effectiveness in attaining student academic gains over time. Teacher feedback and involvement in this process were strongly present.

The efforts for continuous improvement at the building level appear both systemic and systematic; however, there was little evidence of a comprehensive culture or process of school improvement district-wide. This was further substantiated by a review of the artifacts. It was evident that substantial capacity has been created to leverage comprehensive district-wide continuous school improvement upon implementation of a well-developed strategic plan that would bring all buildings and programs into alignment. It was evident that the district accreditation steering committee members have done a commendable job of engaging in the accreditation process in spite of the lack of a strategic plan to guide their efforts.

Stakeholder involvement in continuous improvement can be evidenced in several distinct areas starting at the board level and continuing through every school. Prior to choosing to run for the board, an orientation is offered to prospective candidates in order to acquaint themselves with the responsibilities of the board and their role in continuous school improvement. Once elected, a mentor is assigned to the new board member, and they begin the process of ongoing training and professional development. Board retreats are held twice a year, one to establish goals for the board and one to assess progress towards those goals. Through interviews and observations, a strong relationship exists not only between the board and superintendent, but also with individual buildings as each board member “adopts a school” to serve throughout a school year.

During interviews with central office and building level staff, it was apparent that the positions put into place at the central office level have been developed and refined over time to provide a system of support to schools in order to coordinate comprehensive improvement. These positions include an associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction, a grants coordinator, a director of technology services, and recently, the delegation of K-5 curriculum support to an elementary building principal, allowing the associate superintendent to focus on secondary curriculum needs. These positions will be essential to aligning the schools, departments, and programs into one cohesive system of continuous school improvement once a systemic and systematic continuous improvement process resulting in a strategic plan is developed.

After a careful review of each school's improvement plan and through interviews and observations at all ten schools, there is clear evidence that a system of curriculum articulation through pacing guides and common assessments have been developed to guide instructional practices. The unique practice of building data teams creates both a process and a culture of instructional feedback based on student performance. Elementary schools have utilized these data teams to collaborate within and across grade levels in their own building, as well as among all six of the K-5 schools. Gerisch and Davidson Middle Schools appear to have a long-standing practice of collaboration as well, and with the recent change in high school leadership, have extended that to include Anderson High School. Interviews suggest that articulation of data between the K-5 level and the 6-12 level is somewhat fragmented and sporadic.

With the new expectation of a state department of education for all Michigan school districts to submit school improvement plans in a consistent format, an opportunity for alignment of plans exists for which the district is well positioned to benefit. Through the development of a district strategic plan, there is an opportunity to enfold individual building plans into one single aligned district-wide continuous improvement plan.

The practice of Monday morning professional development time is a critical piece to school improvement for ongoing data collection, analysis, and creation of effective instructional practices to achieve student growth. This is a valuable commitment of time and resources to the continuous improvement process and should be acknowledged for both as the visionary practice and the strategic opportunity it is. Through evidence provided from schools, each is responsible for developing the agendas of Monday morning professional development with data team meetings taking place once a month. It is recommended that these professional development opportunities be organized at the district level to leverage all schools in working towards one strategic plan. The district offers State Board-Continuing Education Units for professional development activities that are an incentive for participation in these activities, as well as a method to monitor the participation and effectiveness of all professional development activities.

The professional learning community practice of utilizing research-based books and material to foster dialogue was evidenced through teacher and administrator interviews. This is a strong component of professional development. [A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades](#), by Ken O'Connor, was used by multiple schools to reshape the conversations and practices over grading student work. As a direct result of this research, a new grading system was adopted in some schools to support student mastery and common approaches to assessment evaluation.

A notable practice of continuous improvement is their effort to communicate with stakeholders. This communication can be found in as simple a practice of a principal tapping on the window of the car of a parent picking up their child in the parking lot to share about the good things happening in school that day. It is also found in the comprehensive website and innovative technology resources like Alert Now. Through this automated mass phone messaging system, stakeholder communication can be frequent

and customized to suit the purposes of various schools and happenings in the community. Parent and community member interviews substantiate a high degree of satisfaction with communication on the part of the schools and district. Stakeholder feedback indicates that the district is much more critical of themselves than necessary with respect to communication with their community.

Communication between and among schools and between schools and central office was perceived by internal stakeholders as not as consistent as it could be. Although monthly meetings are held with the administrative team, there was little evidence of a formalized process for how data flows from those meetings back to the schools and is eventually translated into feedback to inform instructional practices. The development of a comprehensive strategic plan should articulate a system of communication between all schools and central office.

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

- A culture and a process of continuous improvement are evident in every school.
- Substantial capacity for district-level continuous improvement is evident in appropriations of central office staffing when combined with existing continuous improvement efforts at the schools.
- School data teams and Monday professional development are well-established practices for ongoing communication and articulation of student performance results.

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

- Develop a comprehensive, coherent, district strategic plan for improvement involving all schools and key stakeholders.
- Embed an established and research-based process for continuous improvement within a district strategic plan.
- Develop a systemic approach to communication within and among schools and between schools and central office to utilize data effectively for the purposes of informing instructional practices.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Emerging," indicating that the Southgate Community School District has not 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

It was evident through interviews, review of artifacts, and the Standards Assessment Report (SAR) that pockets of quality assurance can be found but there is no comprehensive strategic plan to monitor organizational effectiveness.

Each school completes an annual Self-Assessment (SA) as required by the Michigan Department of Education. In preparation for the QAR, each school completed the more comprehensive Standards Assessment Report. Information from the district's SAR indicated that it was difficult for some to respond through a district lens as opposed to a school perspective. The schools' SAR information was compiled along with input from the District Accreditation team to complete the district SAR and to come to consensus on the ratings on the standard rubrics. The District Accreditation Team is comprised of a wide variety of stakeholders including central office personnel, parents, union representatives, community members, and students.

It was evident that schools have maintained profiles and improvement plans but few district processes seem to be in place to monitor quality assurance with regard to continuous improvement and compliance of NCA standards. Data for a district profile were available but an analysis and report of the implications of the data were not found. School administrators have been trained and conduct periodic classroom walkthroughs to monitor instructional strategies, etc. But a lack of data exist to indicate how these results are being used at the district level.

Interviews verified that the Monday morning professional development time is valued and considered by staff to be time well spent. Additionally, the district has been approved by the Michigan Department of Education to offer State Board-Continuing Education Units (SB-CEUs) which requires an evaluation component. However, the QAR team was not able to identify a consistent process for evaluation of professional development. During the Monday morning professional development time, teams of administrators and teachers gather to review grade-level or content-area data. Data teams at each building gather, use, and report results to building staff. Data teams identify deficiencies and recommend adjustments in goals and strategies accordingly.

The QAR team learned through interviews that the district gathers student performance data through the Calendar of Common Assessments, math benchmarks, and quarterly assessments. It is unclear how the data are monitored and analyzed for decision-making at the district level. According to the SAR, district-wide data reports are given publicly at board meetings especially following the release of MEAP and MME results.

Interviews revealed that there is a systemic effort to maintain articulation among and between the levels of schools to ensure readiness for the next level although many stakeholders would like to increase the dialogue among the teachers especially at the transition points (e.g., 5th to 6th grade, 7th to 8th grade, and 9th to 10th grade).

Extensive safety procedures are in place along with district behavior policies, human resources, etc. Standard policies and administrative regulations exist that address board governance, curriculum, etc.

## **Strengths**

- Data team meetings provide a valuable process to analyze data to inform instruction.
- Continuing education units are offered for their participation in the Monday morning professional development.
- A meaningful self-study was conducted in preparation for the district QAR that included feedback from the schools.

## **Opportunities**

- Reconvene the DA stakeholder group on a regular basis for further self-reflection in response to the QAR report.
- Ensure alignment of both school and district improvement processes.
- Compile a comprehensive district profile using the data to make decisions.
- Institute an internal review process with regard to meeting AdvancED standards.
- Develop a process to monitor the student performance data that are gathered from the schools.

## 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 NCA-CASI-MI accreditation with AdvancED.

# Appendix

## Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Joyce Fulford, Chair (Indiana NCA CASI)
- Ms. Mary Heidloff, Vice Chair
- Ms. Andrienne Hill, Team Member (Romulus High School)
- Dr. Judith Backes, Team Member (Macomb ISD)
- Mrs. Kelly Wittman, Team Member (Yorktown High School)
- Dr. Neyland Clark, Team Member (South Harrison Comm School Corp)
- Dr. Pam Gray-Bennett, Team Member (AdvancED)
- Mr. Reniero Araoz, Team Member (MDE/NCA)

## 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.