External Review

Accelerated Schools

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Introduction to the External Review Process

Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools, and designed primarily to distinguish schools adhering to a set of educational standards. Today the accreditation process is used at all levels of education, and is recognized for its ability to effectively drive student performance and continuous improvement in education.

Institutions seeking to gain or retain accreditation must meet AdvancED standards specified for their institution, demonstrate high levels of or improvement of student performance if applicable, and provide evidence of stakeholder satisfaction with the operation of the institution. The accreditation standards focus on conditions and processes within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards, student performance, and stakeholder feedback.

Institutions participate in an External Review by a team of highly qualified evaluators who examine the institution's adherence and commitment to the accreditation criteria. The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation as it energizes and equips the leadership and stakeholders of an institution to achieve higher levels of performance and address those areas that may be hindering efforts to reach desired performance levels. External Review is a rigorous process that includes examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of instruction, learning, and operations.

The AdvancED External Review Team used the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators and related criteria to guide its evaluation, looking not only for adherence to standards, but also for how the institution functioned as a whole and embodied the practices and characteristics of quality.

Using the evidence at their disposal, the AdvancED External Review Team arrived at a set of findings contained in this report. The report is presented in three sections: Findings, Conclusion, and Addenda.

Part I: Findings

The Findings section presents the External Review Team's evaluation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators. It also includes Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement identified by the External Review Team, observations of the Learning Environment, as well as Required Actions.

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

Standards help to delineate what matters. They provide a common language through which an education community can engage in conversations about educational improvement, system effectiveness, and achievement. They serve as a foundation for planning and implementing improvement strategies and activities and for measuring success. AdvancED's Standards for Quality were developed by a committee comprised of effective educators and leaders from the fields of practice, research, and policy who applied professional wisdom, deep knowledge of effective practice, and the best available research to craft a set of robust standards that ensure excellence and continuous improvement. The standards were reviewed by internationally recognized experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research.

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, conclusions concerning Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards, and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team. Indicators are evaluated and rated individually by the External Review Team using a four-level performance rubric. The Standard Performance Level is the average of indicator scores for the standard.

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction
Purpose and direction are critical to successful institutions. A study conducted in 2010 by the London-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that "in addition to improving performance, the research indicates that having a sense of shared purpose also improves employee engagement" and that "...lack of understanding around purpose can lead to demotivation and emotional detachment, which in turn lead to a disengaged and dissatisfied workforce."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution commits to a shared purpose and direction and establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the institutions' vision that is supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	2.67

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	•Accreditation Report •Minutes from meetings related to development of the school's purpose •Survey results •Examples of communications to stakeholders about the school's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook) •Observations •Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the school's purpose •Interviews •Purpose statements - past and present	3
1.2	The school's leadership and staff commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	•Interviews •Observations •Survey results •The school's statement of purpose •Accreditation Report	3
1.3	The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	•Observations •Survey results •The school data profile •Interviews •Accreditation Report •The school continuous improvement plan	2

Opportunities for Improvement *Indicator*

1. The school should develop a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate the school purpose for student success.

   1.1

   The use of a documented systematic continuous school improvement plan promotes purposeful efforts for improving student learning and the conditions that support learning. Revisiting the mission /vision on a systemic basis can drive the upward movement of student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

2. Implement a continuous improvement process that will provide clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	1.3

The Self Assessment and interviews with stakeholders show that there is a need for a an articulated improvement plan with the focus on student improvement. Develop the data that will identify the goals for the improvement of achievement and instruction that are aligned with the school's purpose. Develop measurable performance targets and concrete steps to reach them.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

Governance and leadership are key factors in raising institutional quality. Leaders, both local administrators and governing boards/authorities, are responsible for ensuring all learners achieve while also managing many other facets of an institution. Institutions that function effectively do so without tension between the governing board/authority, administrators, and educators and have established relationships of mutual respect and a shared vision (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998). In a meta-analysis of school leadership research, Leithwood & Sun (2012) found that leaders (school and governing boards/authority) can significantly "influence school conditions through their achievement of a shared vision and agreed-on goals for the organization, their high expectations and support of organizational members, and practices that strengthen school culture and foster collaboration within the organization." With the increasing demands of accountability placed on institutional leaders, leaders who empower others need considerable autonomy and involve their school communities to attain school improvement goals. Leaders who engage in such practices experience a greater level of success (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Similarly, governing boards/authorities that focus on policy-making are more likely to allow school leaders the autonomy to make decisions that impact teachers and students and are less responsive to politicization than boards/authorities that respond to vocal citizens (Greene, 1992).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has leaders who are advocates for the institution's vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders. The institution's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.		2.83
Indicator	Source of Evidence	Performance Level

2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the school.	•Observations •Student handbooks •Governing body policies, procedures, and practices •Accreditation Report •Interviews	3
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	•Accreditation Report •Proof of legal counsel •Assurances, certifications •Interviews •Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies •Observations •Historical compliance data •Governing code of ethics	2
2.3	The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	•Roles and responsibilities of school leadership •School improvement plan developed by the school •Accreditation Report •Stakeholder input and feedback •Maintenance of consistent academic oversight, planning, and resource allocation •Survey results regarding functions of the governing body •Observations •Interviews	4

2.4	Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school's purpose and direction.	•Examples of collaboration and shared leadership •Survey results •Observations •Interviews •Examples of decisions aligned with the school's statement of purpose •Accreditation Report •Examples of decisions in support of the school's continuous improvement plan	3
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.	•Minutes from meetings with stakeholders •Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys •Accreditation Report •Observations •Interviews	3
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and student success.	•Accreditation Report •Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation •Observations •Interviews	2

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. The school's leadership is autonomous and capable of meeting goals for student achievement and instruction and managing day to day operations.   2.3

    Through the process of stakeholder interviews and as evidenced by interactions with parents, staff, and the board, it is clear that the leadership has authority over every aspect of school operation. Most importantly, the leadership has the trust and respect of all stakeholders. The governing body is very clearly separated from the day to day operations.

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Develop and implement a complete set of board policies and train board members and administrators to implement them.   2.2

   A clear and complete set of board policies will ensure that the governing bodies will continue to operate responsibly and function effectively in order to facilitate their purpose of supporting the education of children in the community. Throughout interviews with the board it appeared that board policies are incomplete. The board suggested the need for professional development to develop the roles and responsibilities of the board and its individual members.

2. Formalize the personnel evaluation process and instructional coaching practice to improve professional practice and student success.   2.6

   The need for professional practices improvement is evident through the process of stakeholder interviews, and because of the absence of a formal evaluation system. A professional practices system should establish school leadership as instructional coaches and implement a professional learning community for creating a data-driven focus in assessment and professional development.

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

A high-quality and effective system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership" (Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of quantifiable and intangible characteristics, which include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The school's curriculum and instructional program should develop learners' skills that lead them to think about the world in complex ways (Conley, 2007) and prepare them to have knowledge that extends beyond the academic areas. In order to achieve these goals, teachers must have pedagogical skills as well as content knowledge (Baumert et al, 2010). The acquisition and refinement of teachers' pedagogical skills occur most effectively through collaboration and professional development. These are a "necessary approach to improving teacher quality" (Colbert et al, 2008). According to Marks, Louis, & Printy (2002), school staff that engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective schools, "supports teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations. Teachers give students feedback to improve their performance.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.		3.08
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The school's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	•Interviews •Accreditation Report •Course descriptions •Observations •Descriptions of instructional techniques	4
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	•Curriculum guides •Observations •Interviews •Accreditation Report	3
3.3	Teachers engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	•Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource •Interviews •Observations •Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool •Accreditation Report •Interdisciplinary projects	3
3.4	School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	•Interviews •Accreditation Report •State approved induction program.	2
3.5	Teachers participate in collaborative learning communities to improve instruction and student learning.	•Examples of cross curricular projects, interdisciplinary instruction, and classroom action research project •Accreditation Report •Interviews	3

3.6	Teachers implement the school's instructional process in support of student learning.	•Observations •Interviews •Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance •Accreditation Report •Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction	4
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the school's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	•Accreditation Report •Observations •Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices •Interviews	3
3.8	The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress.	•Interviews •List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days •Calendar outlining when and how families are provided information on child's progress •Accreditation Report •Parental/family/caregiver involvement plan including activities, timeframes, and evaluation process	3
3.9	The school has a formal structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.	•Accreditation Report •Interviews •Observations •Evidence of methods instead of structure.	4

3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	•Accreditation Report •Observations •Sample report cards for each grade level and for all courses •Interviews •Sample communications to stakeholders about grading and reporting •Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting	3
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	•Interviews •Accreditation Report •Observations	2
3.12	The school provides and coordinates learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	•Observations •Interviews •List of learning support services and student population served by such services •Accreditation Report •Data used to identify unique learning needs of students	3

Powerful Practices	*Indicator*
1. Highly individualized diagnostic testing and curriculum selection processes allow students to begin learning where they are ready and progress at a rate where they find success. As students enter the school, they undergo diagnostic assessments to target their level of knowledge in various content areas and academic skills. The results from these tests were described as useful in the accurate placement of the students in grade levels, courses, and even activities within those courses enabling them to build on prior knowledge and experience without having to repeat them. Students, staff, and parents all concurred that this contributed to an excellent start at the student's new school. Such careful planning at the outset of a student's enrollment provides excellent motivation through acknowledgement of what the student already knows and connections of that learning to new lessons.	3.1

2. The individualized instructional model is a powerful extension of the school's mission customizing the educational experience to improve the students' skills, self-confidence as a learner and pursue goals.

    3.6

    Teachers and staff describe considerable effort to locate, refine and deliver instruction matched to the needs of students they grow to know very well. Students describe teachers as remarkably responsive to their needs and supportive when needed. Small class sizes enable teachers to constantly monitor student progress, provide feedback and adjust the instructional approach as needed. Team members observed this in virtually every classroom visited and heard about it during interviews. Fidelity to the mission through demonstrably successful practice puts the school on very strong footing in a competitive market for private school dollars.

3. Each student is well known and strongly supported by administrators, faculty, and staff members.

    3.9

    An extensive registration process, small school enrollment, small class sizes, a compact campus, and the school's individualized instructional program combine to create an environment that students and parents acknowledge as highly supportive and effective. When asked, every student named more than one person at the school who is making a difference in their lives both academically and personally. Genuine care and concern for students was readily observable by the team throughout the visit. Particularly for students who are at risk, a caring but supportively challenging climate is well known as a significant key to success.

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Align mastery assessments with common core standards that are foundational to the newly adopted Curriculum Loft.

    3.2

    Mastery assessments required for granting credit are currently designed or selected from a resource bank by teachers based on the content taught in their courses.   As the school transitions to a standards-based curricular resource, careful alignment between what is intended to be learned (the standards) and what is demonstrated on the assessment (mastery tests) will be critical to ensuring coherence in the system. This alignment will also be important as sending schools rely more heavily on the same common core standards and expect credit to be awarded based on demonstration of the skills and knowledge defined by the standards.

2. Implement a review cycle for learning resources, instructional practices, and curriculum selection to ensure they remain effectiveness over time in reaching the intended learning outcomes.

    3.2

    Many changes are underway to enhance the curriculum through Curriculum Loft and alignment with Common Core Standards, implement new digital resources such as the Kuno tablets, and identify other resources students need. While these changes are forward-thinking and exciting today, they will need to be monitored and evaluated to be sure they maintain potency and original intention in the long run. For example, as teachers independently select units from Curriculum Loft, they need to be able to evaluate those units for effectiveness in helping students achieve mastery of the standards.

    A cyclical review process based on student performance data can help confirm what is in place remains effective and guide decisions for needed revisions as they arise.

3. Activate the planned Parent Portal as soon as practical. 3.8

   While considerable efforts are currently expended to communicate with parents including generous availability of faculty and staff, regular report cards, and parent-oriented functions at school, an online student information component accessible by parents 24 hours a day would strengthen the parents' role in supporting their students. Students reported they were not always aware of their grade status in classes being more focused on the daily report card and its attendant rewards. Parent access to grades could also help keep students more informed of the longer-term goal reflected by grades leading to academic credit.

4. Align the professional development program with the purpose and direction of the school and the needs that arise from personnel evaluation and school improvement planning. 3.11

   After review of artifacts and conversation with administrators, it appears that professional development is planned based on faculty suggestions and administrator preference. The generous number of retreat days and bi-monthly faculty meetings can be more effectively targeted if they respond needs identified through school improvement planning and personnel evaluation. Such focus is especially important given the pivotal directions the school is now considering as it reemerges as a viable organization.

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

Institutions, regardless of their size, need access to sufficient resources and systems of support to be able to engage in sustained and meaningful efforts that result in a continuous improvement cycle. Indeed, a study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Pan, 2003) "demonstrated a strong relationship between resources and student success...both the level of resources and their explicit allocation seem to affect educational outcomes."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, to meet special needs, and to comply with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staffs who are well qualified for their assignments. The institution provides a safe learning environment for students and staff. The institution provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.		2.86
Indicator	Source of Evidence	Performance Level

4.1	Qualified professional and support staff are sufficient in number to fulfill their roles and responsibilities necessary to support the school's purpose, direction, and the educational program.	•Observations •School budgets for the last three years •Survey results •Interviews •Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff •Accreditation Report •Assessments of staffing needs •Documentation of highly qualified staff	3
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.	•Accreditation Report •Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources •Survey results •School schedule •Interviews •Alignment of budget with school purpose and direction •Observations •School calendar	3
4.3	The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	•Survey results •Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Documentation of emergency procedures such as fire drills, evacuation and other emergency procedures.	2

4.4	Students and school personnel use a range of media and information resources to support the school's educational programs.	•Interviews •Accreditation Report •Survey results •Observations •Data on media and information resources available to students and staff •Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information	3
4.5	The technology infrastructure supports the school's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	•Technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure •Assessments to inform development of technology plan •Survey results	3
4.6	The school provides support services to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	•Student assessment system for identifying student needs •Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support •Survey results •Schedule of family services, e.g., parent classes, survival skills •Accreditation Report •Interviews •Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education •List of support services available to students •Observations	3
4.7	The school provides services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	•List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning •Accreditation Report •Survey results •Budget for counseling, assessment, referral, educational and career planning •Description of referral process	3

Opportunities for Improvement	*Indicator*

1. Incorporate into the school's long-range, continuous school improvement plan additional resources to enable students and staff to use a range of media and information sources supporting the school's educational programs.

   Stakeholder interviews and review of the artifacts provide evidence the school needs to design and develop resources to support the work of the school in implementing the common core standards. During the implementation of the new curriculum framework students and staff will need access to media and information resources necessary to achieve the educational programs of the school. Qualified personnel need to be available to assist students and school personnel in learning about the tools and locations for finding and retrieving information.

| | 4.4 |

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

Systems with strong improvement processes are moving beyond anxiety about the current reality and focusing on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, that is, data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, & Wohlstetter (2007) from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California indicated that data can shed light on existing areas of strength and weakness and also guide improvement strategies in a systematic and strategic manner (Dembosky et al., 2005). The study also identified six key strategies that performance-driven systems use: (1) building a foundation for data-driven decision making; (2) establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement; (3) investing in an information management system; (4) selecting the right data; (5) building school capacity for data-driven decision making; and (6) analyzing and acting on data to improve performance. Other research studies, though largely without comparison groups, suggested that data-driven decision making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Lafee, 2002; McIntire, 2002).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures. The system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine strategies to improve student performance. The institution implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained, and the institution demonstrates progress in improving student performance and institution effectiveness.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.		2.8
Indicator	Source of Evidence	Performance Level

5.1	The school establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	•Accreditation Report •Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols •Observations •Survey results •Interviews •Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local assessments on student learning and school performance •Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free	3
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze, and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions.	•Survey results •Interviews •Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning •Observations •List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning •Accreditation Report	3
5.3	Professional and support staff are trained in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data.	•Interviews •Survey results •Observations •Accreditation Report •Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data	3
5.4	The school engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	•Student surveys •Accreditation Report •Evidence of student readiness for the next level •Evidence of student growth •Observations •Evidence of student success at the next level •Interviews	3

5.5	Leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.	•Observations •Survey results •Accreditation Report •Interviews	2

Learning Environment

Every learner should have access to an effective learning environment in which she/he has multiple opportunities to be successful. The Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT) measures the extent to which learners are in an environment that is equitable, supportive, and well-managed. An environment where high expectations are the norm and active learning takes place. It measures whether learners' progress is monitored and feedback is provided and the extent to which technology is leveraged for learning.

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External review team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a 4 point scale with 4=very evident, 3=evident, 2=somewhat evident, and 1=not observed. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the 7 learning environments included in ELEOT.

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT)

Environments	*Level*
A. Equitable Learning Environment:	2.8
B. High Expectations Environment:	2.62
C. Supportive Learning Environment:	3.16
D. Active Learning Environment:	2.33
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment:	2.44
F. Well-Managed Learning Environment:	2.9
G. Digital Learning Environment	2.17

Part II: Conclusion

Summary of the External Review

In off-site and on-site review sessions, the AdvancED External Review Team examined artifacts and evidence provided by the institution. During the on-site portion of the review, the team reviewed additional artifacts, collected and analyzed data from interviews, and conducted observations.

The External Review Team visited Accelerated Schools on April 14-16, 2013. The team was comprised of three members, one from Arizona, one from north Denver, and one from Manitou Springs, Colorado. Prior to arriving in Denver, the team reviewed the training documents on becoming an effective team member including and introduction and overview of AdvancED, the purpose and value of the external review, roles and responsibilities, off-site activities before the review and on-site activities during the review. Team members studied the Executive Summary, the Self-Assessment, Diagnostics, and the school's website. On Sunday afternoon, the team met to discuss the agenda, logistics, and to share initial thoughts on the school's self assessment of the indicator ratings. The team then visited the school and began the review of the documentation by each standard and the essential artifacts compiled by the school.

On Monday morning, the executive director, principal and director of facilities, grants and technology presented an overview of the school, which was followed by a standards overview highlighting strengths and rally points. The school provided a presentation on the student management system "Sales Force" and a demonstration of tracking and assessing student progress with EDUSS. A teacher provided a demonstration on using Kuno tablets for individualizing   instruction and how the school plans to develop common core standard units.   The team conducted ELEOT classroom observations in the majority of the classrooms. Stakeholders were interviewed including students in grades K-12, parents, teachers, and board of trustees. The team discussed with the administration the school's individualized education from credit analysis to credit evaluation.

The team found stakeholders to be well informed about and involved in the accreditation process. They were open about the school's strengths and challenges. After reviewing artifacts and doing follow up interviews Monday afternoon, the team stayed at the school to continue dialogue and deliberations concerning standard ratings. During the evening, team members began writing proposed powerful practices, opportunities for improvement and suggested required actions.

On Tuesday, the external team met with the counselor to discuss the college-counseling program. The Director of Community Outreach and Recruitment discussed the school's community outreach and the foreign student program. Staff members presented how the school accommodates special needs students. The student rewards, daily report cards and performance pay was reviewed. The bookkeeper provided information on the financial overview and the difference between Accelerated Schools and Randel Moore. A promotional video wrapped up the morning presentations. The staff provide insight to Accelerated school's uniqueness by explaining how students are transported, the lunch truck, afternoon activities, Saturday school, mastery tests, parent training, host parents, and a partnership with the University of Denver. Administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and external stakeholders were interviewed. Tuesday afternoon, the team shared observations and information from their visits and

continued to discuss ratings, powerful practices, opportunities for improvement, and possible required actions. The team did follow-up interviews and continued to study artifacts. The external review team met with the leadership team for a final meeting to review the findings. The review concluded with a presentation to all interested stakeholders.

Using the evidence collected, the team engaged in dialogue and deliberations concerning the degree to which the institution met the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators.

The thoroughness of the school's collaborative approach to their self-assessment and the friendliness of all stakeholder groups were critical factors in the review process. School leadership demonstrated a spirit of collaboration and a willingness to share information. As the External Review (ER) Team conducted the on-site review, several powerful school themes emerged.

- Commitment and focus on students
- Friendliness of all of the stakeholders
- Spirit of collaboration
- Management of growth
- Creative problem solving
- Willingness to innovate

School leadership and staff have demonstrated skill in creative problem solving, management of growth, and a willingness to be innovative in meeting the challenge of ongoing change.   One parent stated: "The school does it right… start time, homework, real life experiences and accountability."

During the on-site review, members of the External Review Team evaluated the learning environment by observing classrooms and general operations of the institution. Using data from these observations, the team evaluated the quality of instruction and learning that took place classified around seven constructs or environments: equity, high expectations, support, engagement, progress monitoring and feedback, management, and use of technology.

The External Review Team utilized the Effective Learning Environment Observation Tool (ELEOT) to observe 10 classrooms in the school and score the seven areas of the learning environment. The team gathered evidence to determine powerful practices, opportunities, and required actions during these twenty-minute observations. After participating in interviews, studying artifacts, and analyzing student data, team members used this student-focused tool to corroborate information. The area rated highest or most effective was the "well-managed learning environment." Throughout the school, students were obviously aware of the classroom routines and behavioral expectations. There was mutual respect between teachers, students, and their respective peers. The team saw active learning occurring in all classrooms as indicated by students asking questions and participating in class discussions and activities. The school's belief that every student needs and deserves to study the same rigorous and challenging curriculum was validated as team members rated the "equitable learning environment" as well as the "high expectations environment."

The External Review for the Accelerated Schools was well planned and coordinated by school-level

personnel. Prior to the review, the lead evaluator communicated often with school personnel to ensure overall readiness. Accelerated Schools' administrators and staff demonstrated strong support for increasing student learning. Their attention to detail and collaborative preparation ensured a successful review. All stakeholders were friendly and open with the team and readily provided information and assistance related to the continuous improvement process.

The External Review Team has completed a comprehensive review of artifacts, interviews, and observations and will relay these findings to AdvancED. The three required actions are designed to support increasing student success and organizational effectiveness throughout the school. The External Review Team appreciates the school's hospitality, support, and professionalism. The team recommends accreditation of Accelerated Schools for a five-year term of accreditation by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. Design and implement a policy and procedure for annual personnel evaluation including a job description, monitoring methodology, individual goal-setting, and self-reflection all aligned with the purpose of the school, career stage of the employee and the school improvement needs identified through the planning process.

   Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.4

   Currently there is no formal system for personnel evaluation. Instituting a documented, policy-driven system is not only accepted business practice but allows another opportunity to align the school's resources to its critical mission and emerging needs. The documentation of employee performance provides evidence of implementation of school priorities and progress toward planned improvements.

2. Develop a long-range facility plan in order to maintain the facilities and continue to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.

   Primary Indicator or Assurance: 4.3

   The school is located in a beautiful old building. Buildings such as these, however, require a significant amount of maintenance and upkeep. Effective schools create and adopt clear expectations for maintaining safety, cleanliness, and healthy environments and share these definitions and expectation with stakeholders. In these effective schools, personnel and students are accountable for maintaining these expectations. Effective schools put measures in place that allow for continuous tracking of these conditions, and improvement plans are developed and implemented by appropriate personnel as necessary to improve these conditions. Finally, in effective schools, results of improvement efforts are evaluated.

3. Develop a new school improvement plan focusing on the school improvement long-range goals in order to monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning and conditions that support student learning.

   Primary Indicator or Assurance: 5.5

An updated comprehensive school improvement plan will assist in determining student performance and organizational effectiveness. Effective leaders monitor comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school in the school improvement plan. Successful schools implement a continuous school improvement plan that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and use the results to guide continuous improvement.

Part III: Addenda

Next Steps

The institution 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 Powerful Practices section to maximize their impact on the institution.
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 institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
5. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Required Actions. Institutions are required to respond to all Required Actions. The Required Actions should be completed before the Accreditation Progress Report is submitted. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to monitor and ensure that the system has implemented the necessary actions to complete the Required Actions. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the completion of the Required Actions and the resulting improvement.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the External Review, the Team submits the final report to AdvancED for review and for action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and upon the institution. Upon receiving its accreditation, the institution should share its achievement with internal and external communities.

About AdvancED

In 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), both founded in 1895, along with the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form AdvancED: one strong, unified organization dedicated to education quality. In 2011, the Northwest Accreditation Commission (founded 1917) joined NCA CASI and SACS CASI as part of AdvancED. AdvancED is the world's largest education community, representing 30,000 public and private schools and systems across the United States and in 75 countries worldwide and educating 16 million students. The Northwest Accreditation Commission joined the AdvancED network in 2011.

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI share research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help educational institutions continuously improve.