

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Hope School District**

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Hope, Arkansas, United States 71801

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**Review Dates: 04/25/2010 - 04/28/2010**



*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 Arkansas State Office (NCA-CASI-AR), a division of AdvancED, visited Hope School District on 04/25/2010 - 04/28/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 14 administrators, 55 teachers, 21 support staff, 25 parents and business partners, 44 students, and 3 Board of Education members for a total of 162 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 4 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 Hope 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.

- **Certified staff members and administrators receive extensive professional development and have opportunities for more.**

The district supports professional development for certified staff in addition to the 60 hours of professional development required by statute in Arkansas. Examples include special professional development to meet the needs of target groups and flexible professional development or choice days to address job-embedded needs of a teacher or administrator in line with their long-range plans for professional development. Membership in professional organizations is provided to administrators. District educators attend national conferences.

Continued professional growth of teachers and administrators is critical to the continued improvement of the district and its schools.

- **Technology hardware, software, and infrastructure are in place to facilitate learning for district students at all levels.**

Technology is available for students, teachers, and administrators (i.e., 1576 computers with internet access, 145 SMARTBoards, 200+ LCD projectors, and 26 servers). A variety of basic, instructional software packages are available for student use. These include Success Maker, COMPASS, Renaissance Place, and APEX. A technology coordinator and lean technology staff keep all components of the total technology system working effectively.

The district and its schools are poised to move to the next level in the instructional use of technology.

- **The district has the fiscal resources needed to provide excellent learning opportunities for all of the students it serves.**

Both human and physical resources are abundant throughout the district. In addition, there is no evidence of need due to the lack of funding in programs currently offered by the district. These programs include services to preschool children and adults in the community as well as K-12 students. District officials report an operating budget of \$19,189,673 for the 2009-2010 school-year, with an anticipated balance of \$2,508,002.

The many resources needed to move the district from good to great are readily available.

## 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 Hope 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.

- **Establish a systematic communication plan to address the needs of both internal and external stakeholders in a timely manner.**

The district's self-assessed need for more effective communication was confirmed by focus groups interviewed at both the district and building levels. Internal stakeholders reported several instances of first hearing about major changes or district initiatives from public media rather than official district communications. Community patrons often receive information about the district that is outdated. There is no evidence of an established, structured plan engaging all schools in delivering a consistent message about district strengths to the greater community.

Guaranteeing regularly scheduled district communications to faculty, staff, parents, and the community in a manner that is easily accessible to them will increase trust and support throughout the district.

- **Align all aspects of the P-12 instructional program.**

When viewed through the lens of students, the current organization and operation of the district poses significant changes and transitions for students at three different points in their school careers – between 4th and 5th grades, 6th and 7th grades, and 8th and 9th grades. There is no evidence of a continuum of developmentally appropriate expectations or programming to ease these transitions for students, or their parents who face the challenge of adapting to the academic expectations, operational procedures, and policies as presented in different student handbooks they receive at these same transition points.

Students who follow a fully aligned educational pathway from preschool to graduation experience easier transitions, display more desirable behaviors, and achieve at higher levels.

- **Take a systems approach to all elements of district organization and operations.**

The Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team observed individual schools operating in isolation rather than as parts of a totally aligned system of schools. This was evidenced by such things as each school adopting different textbook series for the same learning area, schools using different intervention software packages, and each school adopting discipline policies, support services, communications, and attendance guidelines without consultation or collaboration with other district schools.

The elimination of silos of influence is a first step in creating an organization that operates in a systemic and systematic fashion toward the achievement of sustainable results and improvements.

**Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools:** The team reviewed the district's adherence to each of the AdvancED standards. The findings from this review are provided in the next section of this report.

## Next Steps

The school district should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.

2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.
3. Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.
5. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

### **Resources**

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at [www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork](http://www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork), provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help school districts and their schools with continuous improvement.

### **Celebrating Accreditation**

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for review and action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school district. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school district should celebrate its achievement with the community. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and other related items can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

### **Summary**

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



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# Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

The Quality Assurance Review Team divided into standard teams to review each standard and prepare a standards report summarizing the team's findings. These standard reports, along with the quality assurance findings that follow these reports, provided the basis for the team's identification of over-arching commendations and required actions presented earlier in this report. The reports submitted by each team are provided on the following pages for the district's review and use. Each report reflects its respective team's unique voice, perspective, and deliberations. The reports can be used to help enrich and deepen the district's understanding of the overall commendations and required actions.

## Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

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

### Description:

An outdated mission statement to express the district's vision is posted throughout district schools and facilities and appears on district publications. This statement is not currently being used to guide district decision-making or operations. The district is in the early stages of developing new vision and mission statements. Initial meetings have focused on determining what students need to know and be able to do in order to be successful adults. District administrative team leaders understand the process and timelines for successful completion of this task.

Currently, each school is operating from its individual vision and mission statement which does not directly correlate to any direction from the district. Each school staff revisits its vision and mission statement annually and makes revisions that are deemed appropriate. Building level vision statements are used to provide direction for building operations.

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

- Preparations have been made and actions are underway to create an up-to-date, viable vision and mission statement for the district.
- District personnel have the resources to complete this task.

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

- Engage a diverse group of stakeholders in the development of the district vision and mission statement.
- Utilize the AdvancED standard and indicators as guidance for the development, communication, and stewardship of the district vision and mission statement.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall

assessment level of "Emerging," indicating that the Hope School District has not 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:**

School leaders have established and made available to various publics appropriate district policy as required by law. Access to legal counsel has been secured. Policies and Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (ACSIP) for the district and each school site are available to the public on the district website. Action steps for ACSIP school improvement are aligned with school improvement goals and objectives. While information is posted, very few stakeholders could report a working knowledge of the policies or how such policies affect the instructional program in district schools.

The district administrative organizational chart provides names and titles for central office positions with a brief description of areas of responsibility. Recorded job responsibilities are incomplete. The titles and responsibilities are not consistent with current practice. The superintendent's span of control presently exceeds that normally seen in districts this size (i.e., direct supervision and evaluation of three assistant superintendents, eight director specialists, and five building principals among others).

A high percentage of community members, parents, staff members, and students expressed confidence in and high regard for district leaders. Stakeholders recounted a number of stories about the successes and opportunities available in the district. Recent annual reports give evidence of a gradual decline in student enrollment in the district, and leaders express concern that this trend may continue into the future. In spite of the number of stakeholders choosing to enroll their children in schools other than district schools, there is evidence that support for the district exists throughout the school community.

Leaders allocate necessary personnel and resources for school improvement. Few staff persons could articulate their specific roles in implementation of the ACSIP or the role they were to assume to specifically address action components of the plan. School leaders review formative and state assessment data, as well as data from chunk tests and the Learning Institute reports. There was no evidence of how these data are used to revise school improvement plans or to establish student performance goals for future plans. Currently, there is no systemic process to provide for ongoing, data-driven decision-making to address student achievement across school levels. There is a limited connection between data review and the setting of specific and measurable academic goals.

The QAR team observed evidence that leadership and common core team meetings occur on a consistent basis among faculty at each building. The entire district staff meets at the start of the school year. There is reported evidence of informal vertical articulation; however, the district does not systematically facilitate discussions that include all stakeholder groups.

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

- A diverse school board reflects the composition of the school and community.
- The annual summer school board retreat provides an opportunity for team building as well as district planning and direction setting.

- “Star Honors” recognition by the Arkansas School Boards Association attests to board member completion of in-service training and continuing education.

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

- Restructure the roles and titles of central office administrators to create a team with more efficient and cohesively aligned distribution of responsibilities.
- Update job titles and responsibilities on the organizational chart to accurately reflect roles and expectations for each administrator.
- Provide leadership for the systematic evaluation of all district programs and initiatives.
- Increase efforts to engage in effective two-way communication at the district level with school and community stakeholders.

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

District written curriculum is aligned to state goals and assessments. Curriculum is reviewed and revised each year as evidenced by work with Lisa Carter’s design for curriculum mapping – Total Instructional Alignment (TIA). Curriculum and instruction is reviewed and aligned with chunk tests that are given throughout the district. At the building level, weekly grade level and/or collaboration meetings during common planning times provide staff members with opportunities to revisit curriculum and make adjustments to instruction throughout the year.

Numerous best instructional practices are used in district classrooms (i.e., small group instruction, interventions provided by highly qualified paraprofessionals, individualized instruction). Word walls, environmental print, graphic organizers, and other high yield instructional strategies were seen in many classrooms visited by the QAR team. The availability of SMARTBoards and other technology is extensive, but not visibly used by students or teachers to any significant extent. Research-based best instructional practices were also evident in the literacy and mathematics programs. Students are engaged in explicit literacy instruction as well as a standards-based mathematics program that has been in place at the lower grades for several years.

Multiple intervention programs are evident and supported across the district for students in all grades. These include Reading Recovery, Jedi, APEX, Reading Renaissance, small group literacy, before- and after-school tutorials, double-block classes for mathematics and literacy, Extra Push Program, summer remediation, ACT prep classes, Math Navigator, Get Ahead Math, Literacy Navigator, Read Right, and Ramp Up to Literacy classes. Although the QAR team did not see any data to reflect student achievement based upon looping and single gender classes, parents, teachers, and students were overwhelmingly positive in their comments. Staff members commented that looping decreased the time spent on transition and resulted in more instructional time.

The current professional development plan describes the process for acquiring professional growth hours and opportunities for further professional learning, including graduate work. Although the district offers an abundance of professional development opportunities, there is not an evaluation system to monitor the effectiveness of the pieces that are being used and the impact each has on student achievement.

Professional learning communities (PLC) are beginning in all schools, with book studies for teachers to join for professional growth beyond the state-required sixty hours of professional development each year. Staff members who participated in these book studies generally find them to be positive professional growth experiences that enhance their learning and impact teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Communication of No Child Left Behind performance is shared with stakeholders in the Annual Report to the Public. The district is in School Improvement Year 2. Two schools failed AYP last year and two are listed on alert status. Literacy is the area in which all schools failed to meet AYP expectations. Throughout the district, multiple interventions and research-based best practices are being implemented to address individual student needs. However, a system for reviewing and analyzing data of the effectiveness of the abundance of interventions was not found.

A team consisting of the building principals, instructional facilitators, and assistant principals meets regularly, sometimes addressing curriculum issues. However, there is no evidence of regularly scheduled meetings to address curriculum issues at the district level. There is some planning between some schools for transitioning students between these schools, but no evidence of a systematic approach to address transitions. Some evidence was observed that students are challenged to reach higher order thinking skills through creating stories and making judgments based upon reading and knowledge of previously learned skills. On the other hand, the QAR team did not observe many students engaged in project-based learning. Concern about the lack of rigor at the upper grade levels was noted by parents as part of an expressed desire for the curriculum to be more challenging.

Each school staff meets regularly to discuss student progress by reviewing formative data such as the modular test data from the Learning Institute, DIBELS data, and other student achievement data. Some of these meetings are by subject, by grade level, and or by school. Data walls are seen throughout the district. There is evidence of planning among teachers based upon Student Learning Expectations (SLE) is shown in teaming rooms throughout the district.

Counselors were visible in the district, with classroom guidance seen in the lower grades. Interviews with students indicated that they were aware of the role of the counselors in the schools and were sought out in time of personal needs. Comments from students indicated that these were valuable staff members. Parents, other community members, and staff members indicated a concern for the decrease in the number of counselors in the district and a need for services at all buildings. Wrap-around programs include a district social worker who is a valued resource for helping students and families at all schools. Based on the changing demographics of the district, people interviewed indicated a need for help in this area.

The district ESL staff works closely with students and provides assistance to students and families as well as support for classroom teachers. Positive comments were made by all stakeholders concerning the ESL support in the district.

School climate is very inviting and welcoming in most schools. Parents, community members and students feel a general sense of community and family in the buildings. Parents and community members who were interviewed believe students were developing skills needed to be successful in college and the world. Several comments were voiced regarding the need for more challenging course work and opportunities to go beyond the required curriculum.

Instructional technology is readily available. Examples include student computers, teacher computers, SMARTBoards, and curriculum software such as Success Maker, Jedi, and Apex. However, the QAR team did not observe these technology components utilized to their fullest potential throughout the district. Technology supports the curriculum as evidenced by the alignment of software programs with SLE's that are taught for each module test.

Instructional facilitators throughout the district were viewed as essential to the instructional program. At each school these facilitators provide staff extra support in delivering instruction and enhance staff training and professional development on research-based practices.

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

- The Pinnacle software program provides a communication piece to enable parents to monitor student academic progress and attendance.
- Numerous intervention programs are available for struggling students.
- Team meetings occur throughout each school among disciplines and grade levels, with many meeting in various pods throughout the week.
- Instructional facilitators work closely with classroom teachers to enhance instruction, disseminate data, and work with staff on specific student needs.
- Four teachers hold National Board Certification, and the district rewards them with a \$2000 annual stipend.

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

- Develop vertical planning among individual schools and the district to ensure continuity of instruction and a seamless delivered curriculum.
- Provide professional development to teachers on the use of technology as a means to ensure greater student engagement that is based upon each individual teacher's level of current use and knowledge.
- Focus classroom walkthroughs, in part, to gather data regarding implementation of the use of technology for instruction throughout the system.

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

District-wide assessment is aligned with state frameworks and local district pacing guides. Literacy and mathematics instructional facilitators help gather student data and make these data available to appropriate staff members for analysis and use. The Learning Institute provides chunk tests that are aligned with the district curriculum and pacing guides. Same-day results provide teachers opportunities for timely remediation and interventions for students. Internal stakeholders are aware of the assessment schedule.

However, parents and community stakeholders have limited knowledge of the nature of the tests and the testing dates.

The QAR team did not see a district-wide evaluative tool used for monitoring instructional and intervention program effectiveness. Data shared and observed focused on student performance; however, no data were shared about the effectiveness of the rich array of interventions and programs used throughout the district.

The district communicates information about student performance and school effectiveness to stakeholders through the school website, the annual report to the public, quarterly newsletters, and mail. Parents and community members indicated a desire to be more involved in planning and decision-making rather than just attending meetings to hear information. Many parents and community members interviewed by the QAR team indicated that the website was a way of getting information to the community, but it was not easy to access for many parents who do not have access to this mode of communication.

With the assistance of the coaches, teachers meet in grade-level meetings to share effective instructional strategies and materials, to assess student progress, and to plan. Disaggregated student performance growth for each school and the district is shared in data reports. There is evidence of in-depth staff discussion of these data during teaming time in each school. Student progress is discussed by reviewing formative data such as the modular test data, DIBELS data, and other student data. Data walls are seen at all levels and evidence of planning based upon student SLE's is shown in teaming rooms in schools throughout the district. These reviews identify areas of growth and weaknesses, with an eye on making adjustments and to providing remediation for students not performing at grade level.

Some schools have a system for reviewing data regularly through the Learning Institute; however, a district-wide system is not evident. The district does not regularly compare its performance to like districts with similar demographics. Long-term trend data for the district are not currently being collected and maintained.

Policies and procedures are in place to ensure accuracy and security of all data as witnessed by interviews with school secretaries and attendance clerks. Consistency and longevity in key positions dealing with student data provide continuity to this work. Attendance clerks and office personnel interviewed by the QAR team provided evidence of effective practices that assure the district and its schools maintain student records in accordance with state and federal guidelines.

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

- The district has acquired help in matching assessment to curriculum through the Learning Institute.
- The work of the Learning Institute is highly valued by staff members who see the Institute as a provider of both specific data and professional development for key instructional leaders.
- A rich array of data sources are in place for future analysis as part of a systemic plan for evaluating program effectiveness.

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

- Develop a comprehensive system to evaluate instructional program effectiveness across all parts of the district.
- Create a process for reviewing the data collected by schools in order to develop a seamless, P-12 alignment of information to drive instruction and to improve curriculum.
- Create an action plan to increase student performance on all standardized state and national assessments currently being used in the district.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Emerging," indicating that the Hope 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 has the human, material, and fiscal resources needed to implement the curriculum and achieve high academic expectations. The district's financial status remains solid and reflects an operating budget for the 2009 - 2010 school year of \$19,189,673 and an anticipated balance of \$2,508,002. The district employs 430 total staff (237 certified + 193 classified) with 11:1 certified teacher to student ratio and 13:1 classified staff to student ratio. However, the 20 per year turn-over rate of certified staff poses a continuing challenge for the district. District facilities provide adequate space for programming. The need to improve appearance, maintenance, and climate was observed in parts of some buildings. Technology hardware and software is abundant throughout the district and its schools.

The system employs and allocates staff members who are qualified for their assignments. There are established processes in place to employ, retain and mentor qualified professionals. The district provides orientation for all new certified staff prior to the beginning of the school year. Numerous and diverse professional development opportunities are made available to certified staff, but professional development tightly focused on improvement goals was not evident. Limited opportunities for on-going growth and improvement are available for classified staff.

The district demonstrates a commitment to meeting the unique needs of students. District schools are staffed with counselors, nurses, instructional coaches, and ESL coordinators. The district has one full-time social worker who serves all district families and students. Stakeholders expressed high regard for the work of these departments and people. Various focus groups identified the growing need for more social services and more focus on college counseling as issues for future growth. The district has employed a School Improvement Specialist to assist the high school in meeting state benchmarks in accord with state mandates.

The district and school have an established crisis management plan. However, there was little evidence of this plan being fully articulated with all stakeholders. Stakeholders expressed some concern about student safety and behavior, especially at the secondary level.

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

- The district has sufficient funding to support the vision and mission of the district
- The district has a plethora of technological resources to support student achievement including SMARTBoards, Elmos, and computers, as well as the capacity to run multiple programs on district servers without interruption.
- The district is using America's Choice to increase opportunities for quality professional development.
- The district has implemented a K-12 student fingerprint reader system to increase cafeteria

efficiency.

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

- Explore opportunities to extend the student fingerprint reader system into other student management such as student attendance, class tardy control, and discipline management, or address these issues with other computerized systems.
- Evaluate each part of the professional development program to determine effectiveness and alignment to established district and school goals.
- Provide a structured program of learning and growth opportunities to improve the skills and performance of classified staff.
- Assess and address immediate maintenance needs at all sites and facilities to assure each location provides a safe, orderly and healthy learning environment for all students.
- Explore ways to meet the expressed need for increasing social services of students and families at each school.
- Evaluate staffing to ensure appropriate placement and numbers in high-need areas such as social work and fundamental learning areas.
- Maximize use of the ACT Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) and other current resources to encourage students to continue their education and to assist them in being prepared for success, making application to colleges, and securing financial aid and scholarships.
- Maximize the value of the time currently devoted to Career Action Plans (CAPs) by creating an advisory program that uses student assessments, inventories, and student performance data to guide and assist students in career and college planning.
- Conduct exit interviews and surveys to determine the reasons for the high turnover of certified staff.

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

The district’s public relations director facilitates communication within the school district and the Hope community. Stakeholders gain information from the district newsletter, website, and annual report. The website appears to be a work in progress. In addition, many district and school stories are reported by the local press, radio, and television. Parents also have access to student grades and attendance at the high school through the Pinnacle program. Current communication strategies have a one-way focus on informing others with little or no attempt to solicit input from them. Various community stakeholders identified language and cultural differences as the major challenge to effective communications.

The QAR team observed a high level of collaboration among and between the grades at the administrative level, but found limited evidence of strategies to share district issues beyond the district leadership team. Staff expressed disappointment and dismay that too often they first hear about district concerns from public media rather than internal district communications. Neither systematic communication throughout the district that provides timely information and direction to all certified and classified staff nor formalized



methods to proactively gather input from all staff are evident at this time.

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

- The district employs a public relations director who distributes a quarterly newsletter and is present at schools to chronicle events.
- The district provides Pinnacle Internet Viewer to enable parents to view grades and attendance in a real-time atmosphere.
- The high school utilizes a mass messenger call communication system to alert parents of issues.

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

- Prepare all communications in English and Spanish.
- Disseminate district and school newsletters and flyers at local businesses to increase communication with the community.
- Redesign the marketing campaign to promote the positive aspects of the district and its schools, including the district’s cultural diversity.
- Investigate opportunities to add a district news channel on the local station in order to better showcase and promote the district, its schools, and students.
- Empower a staff member at each site to serve as a communications liaison to the Public Relations Officer.
- Establish a parent organization at the secondary level to increase face-to-face communications.
- Create, distribute, and regularly update a district calendar of activities to prevent overlapping of events.
- Increase strategies to proactively solicit stakeholder input in district planning and decision-making.
- Create weekly internal communication for all staff to provide updates of programs, issues and highlights to increase cohesion among the schools and to ensure that staff is aware of important issues.
- Enhance the district website to make it more user-friendly for all stakeholders and to provide more current information.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Emerging," indicating that the Hope School District has not 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 follows the improvement plan format and process mandated by the state of Arkansas. District improvement goals are aligned with state initiatives and directives. In addition to the state improvement process, the district is in the initial stages of developing a strategic plan to provide direction for the next five years. Clearly defined goals focused on student performance are not present in the current improvement plans. Limited student profile data are currently available for use in the identification of student performance goals and school improvement planning.

Proven best practices and intervention programs have been adopted that include America's Choice (state-approved restructuring), Accelerated Reading, APEX (credit recovery), and Jedi (tutorial). Classroom walkthroughs are conducted on a regular basis with a minimum of 15 visits per week completed in the district. Feedback is compiled for reporting to the building leadership team sessions, and later sharing with the faculty. There is little or no evidence of systematic monitoring of the implementation of specific interventions or the assessment of its effectiveness in improving student performance.

The high school is the only school listed under state-directed improvement (year 6). America's Choice is the approved restructuring program and is entering its third year of implementation. A school improvement specialist has been employed as part of this restructuring intervention. An entirely new administrative and guidance team, including the principal, both assistant principals, and both counselors, will begin work at the high school at the start of the 2010 - 2011 school year.

Interviews indicate that professional development in the district to meet the state required sixty hours is primarily planned by the school leadership team. The effectiveness of these activities is assessed with a view on being compliant rather than part of a change process over time that impacts continuous growth. PLCs at each site meet periodically to review established instructional practices and curriculum. Site based decisions drive school improvement efforts.

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

- The district strategic planning initiative to collaboratively set direction will provide the framework needed for effective system and school improvement planning for the next five years.
- The Southwest Regional Cooperative provides a broad array of district in-service opportunities that are used by district staff and administrators.

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

- Create procedures to collect, analyze, communicate, and maintain district-wide student and community profile data for use in improvement planning.
- Create improvement plans that meet state compliance and also provide alignment and mutual support between and among the district and individual school efforts.
- Engage district leaders in systematic monitoring and assessment of improvement efforts, as well as effective communication of results to internal and external stakeholders.
- Revisit the ACSIP document on a regular basis to ensure full implementation of goals and actions related to professional development.
- Take full advantage of the 2010-2011 reconstituted high school administration and guidance teams to redefine the culture and operation of the building.

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

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# Quality Assurance Findings

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

## Description

The results of mandated Arkansas state testing and the related AYP indicators are the primary summative measures of student performance used by the district to assure quality. District-wide results are communicated to stakeholders via the district's annual report. These success indicators are also used each year by the district and all schools as the basis for curricular and program improvement planning. Most analysis and interpretation of data is done on the building level. The district provides fiscal support for improvement efforts established by each building.

Formative measures of student learning are made on a short-term basis by use of Learning Institute interim testing. These "chunk" tests provide teachers information needed for grouping and regrouping of students, planning remediation, and the improvement of instruction. District administrators and academic coaches make regular walkthroughs as part of the quality assurance process.

A team of teachers and administrators from each building conducted the district self study and prepared the Standards Assessment Report (SAR). However, classified staff, parents, or community stakeholders had no direct representatives on this team. Each part of the report was discussed at the building level, but there was a lack of face-to-face discussion across buildings at the district level. The timeline for development of the SAR indicates greater concern for creating a final document in time for the QAR visit than for engaging all stakeholders in meaningful discussions as part of a continuous process of quality assurance.

Communication of district results, strengths, and direction is limited. While various types of communication are utilized, internal and external stakeholders report a lack of knowledge about the district and its operation. Stakeholders also report that too often communications are received long after the time that they felt the need to know.

## Strengths

- Abundant human and capital resources are available to address quality assurance issues.
- District leaders express a strong commitment to the AdvancED standards and district accreditation protocol.

## Opportunities

- Develop shared accountability for district success among all schools and stakeholders.
- Collaborate with stakeholders prior to finalizing district plans.
- Engage more stakeholders from different areas as new vision and mission statements are adopted for the district.
- Assess progress toward achieving all AdvancED standards at the highly functional level every year rather than just in preparation for a QAR visit.
- Communicate district strengths, weaknesses, and vision openly to all internal and external stakeholders in a

timely manner.

- Review the effectiveness and alignment of programs, formative assessments and intervention models.

## 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-AR accreditation with AdvancED.

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# Appendix

## Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Mr. Dick Spohr, Chair (University of Illinois - Illinois NCA)
- Mr. Rogers Ford, Vice Chair
- Mr. Junious Babbs, Team Member (Little Rock School District)
- Ms. Kay York, Team Member (Margaret Daniel Primary School)
- Mrs. Michele Mason, Team Member (Carver High School)

## 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.