

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Dawson County School System**

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Dawsonville, Georgia, United States 30534

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**Review Dates: 01/30/2011 - 02/02/2011**



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

# Quality Assurance Review Report

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## About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

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

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

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

- 1) Meet the AdvancED Standards and Policies for Quality School Systems.** School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards and policies which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement.** School districts and their schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose that the school district is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school and district effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results).
- 3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.** School districts and schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, school districts host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the school district improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school district and a written report detailing the team's required actions. The school district acts on the team's required actions and submits a progress report two years following the review.

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

# Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI Georgia State Office (SACS-CASI-GA), a division of AdvancED, visited Dawson County School System on 01/30/2011 - 02/02/2011.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 15 administrators, 58 teachers, 18 support staff, 49 parents and business partners, 42 students, and 5 Board of Education members for a total of 187 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 Dawson County School System 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.

- **Dawson County School System has partnered with post secondary institutions in the area to provide opportunities to recruit teachers, provide articulation from high school to the University, promote professional development, and expand dual enrollment.**

The superintendent shared that one of the post secondary institutions places interns in schools and instructors teach classes in the buildings where most of the interns are placed. A vision shared by some stakeholders during the visit is to provide opportunities for students to hold an Associate's degree upon graduating from high school

College pre-requisites provided at the high school level and give students an opportunity for a head start in post secondary education. A variety of opportunities permits students to compete globally and individualizes the student's pathway.

- **There is a strong sense of a partnership in the system for placing "Kids First".**

When a new board member came on board he presented each person present at the meeting with a lapel pin that stated "Kids First". These pins were very visible during the visit as many stakeholders wore them on their lapels. Board members were passionate about placing Kids First in the system. This passion was echoed by all stakeholder during interviews.

The future of the world rests with the education preparedness of students in school today. Everyone working in harmony on behalf of each student strengthens the opportunity for students to compete globally.

- **Student achievement data is being used as a driving force for continuous improvement.**

Data rooms and walls were evident at the system and school level. A visual display of the flow of data from goal identification to summative results was in every school visited by the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team. This information also includes the 45 day action plans which are used to write instructional improvements for each goal. The middle schools posted this information on attractively decorated bulletin boards in flow chart form that was easily understood by the QAR team.

Baseline data forms the foundation for continuous improvement and creates a method to measure achievement gains. A visual of steps for continuous improvement creates a symbol for quick reference and accountability for each step of the process.

- **There is a sense of transparency in the school district among district and school staffs.**

Throughout the visits and during interviews, district and school staffs were consistent when sharing the goals and the many initiatives being implemented in the school district. A common language exists among all stakeholder regarding system and school goals. A passion for the children in the district radiates among all stakeholders.

Communication and collaboration are important factors to sustain quality improvement in an organization. It creates a system wide awareness of the operations of an organization, creates transparency, and holds everyone accountable for identified goals and improvement efforts.

- **The school board works collaboratively with the Superintendent to provide governance that is transparent and supportive of district improvement efforts.**

School board members shared their support of the Superintendent and voiced that they are willing to provide the financial assistance to the system to maintain the quality performance that is presently occurring in the district. Board members recognize that they are the governing board of the district and follow appropriate guidelines as provided by the Georgia School Board Association.

The board provides the foundation for school districts to carry out the day to day business of the school. When a board, district and school staff works in concert on behalf of students, district goals are achievable.

## 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 Dawson County School System 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.

- **Enforce the attendance policy thus lowering the percent of students missing fifteen or more days of school.**

Pioneer Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) regional attendance comparative data showed that 8.7 percent of Dawson County students miss fifteen or more days of school. This information was echoed throughout the school visits and strategies to improve attendance among students were observed by the QAR team. While attendance policy was reviewed by QAR team members, stakeholders shared that the policy is being inconsistently enforced throughout the system.

School attendance is one of the most important variables of academic success for students. Additionally, students must attend school to engage in the instructional delivery of content to gain the knowledge needed to improvement achievement.

- **Develop and implement a strategic plan that provides a comprehensive three to five year focus for the school system.**

The system is involved in improvement efforts; however, it lacks a strategic plan that will focus on system initiatives over the next five years. System administration stated that they are often Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) driven which indicates a more reactive than proactive improvement emphasis.

Providing a strategic plan will give the system, schools and classroom teachers longitudinal direction and a process to keep the system on track. It will provide unified goals and establish indicators that can easily be measured and monitored. Schools staffs and system personnel will work more systemically and will be

more aware of the role each play in the improvement process.

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

## Next Steps

The school district should:

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

## Resources

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

## Celebrating Accreditation

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



**Summary**

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

## Standards for Accreditation

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

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

### Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

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

**Description:**

A vision, mission, and belief statement initiated by the superintendent, with collaboration from school board members and stakeholders, was developed to create a direction for the school system. An attractive display of these statements are posted in strategic places throughout the system office and schools. It is also visible on the System's web site. Each school developed its own vision which is linked to the system vision. Dawson County's superintendent worked collaboratively with the school board and stakeholders to develop goals for the system as a focus for the school system's improvement efforts. In addition, the system developed No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) and SMART goals as part of a state Comprehensive Local Education Agency Improvement Plan (CLIP) process. This plan tends to be the foundation for the school system but lacks a systemic approach. While the system holds data review meetings to discuss the results of student achievement, interviewees shared little about the connection of these goals to improvement process in the system. Annually, the board, superintendent, and the cabinet review student achievement data and adjust the vision to focus on the need as identified by data results; for example, the superintendent shared that this school year the focus is on increasing the achievement of student with special needs.

A current description of student demographics, their performance, system effectiveness in addressing needs, and the input of stakeholders is indicated through a written profile of the district.

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

- A vision, mission, and belief statement was collaboratively developed and posted throughout the system and schools.
- Every stakeholder strives for Dawson County schools to be an exemplary school system as indicated in the vision.

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

- Ensure that the system's vision and purpose guide the teaching and learning process and the

strategic direction.

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

## Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

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

### Description:

The School Board of Dawson County School System is comprised of five elected members who must live in the district that they represent, but they are elected by all constituents in a county-wide election. The Board members rotate the chair position so that all board members serve as the chair. Board members annually participate in training activities and attend the Georgia Schools Board Association Conferences (GSB) each year. In interviews, board members clearly articulated their role as board members and work within the chain-of-command. The students are clearly the focus of the Board. The longevity of the current Board has created stability in the system. The Board has ensured that the system has fiscally sound budget with two months of reserve. The superintendent, the cabinet, and all principals attend the board work sessions; these meetings and retreats foster communication within the entire system. Meeting notes and interviews of stakeholders stressed the importance of these meetings.

The superintendent, who is only in his second year, clearly models transparent communication and has the trust of all stakeholders who were interviewed. The superintendent has a strong background in curriculum and instruction. In his presentation and interview, the superintendent clearly demonstrated that he was a true instructional leader for the system. Conversations with stakeholders and observations by the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team confirmed that the superintendent is approachable and concerned about all students, teachers, parents, and the community. The parent and teacher forum meetings held by the superintendent also contribute to strong ratings of collaboration and communication. In addition, the system implements an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel.

Dawson County school system presently has 8.5 percent of students missing fifteen or more days of schools. During the visit, QAR team members reviewed the procedure for attendance and upon visiting the schools reviewed documents that confirmed that the procedure is currently being inconsistently implemented. This was also verified by school staffs and parent stakeholders. In order to reduce the percent of absenteeism, the schools must become more consistent when enforcing attendance procedures.

The community and stakeholders are clearly committed to the education of all students. The stakeholders and staff members of the Dawson County School System clearly voiced a "Student First" mentality. In interviews, students clearly recognized this fact and shared that they were valued as individuals.

The team reviewed artifacts confirming that the district ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws, standards, and regulations. The district maintains access to legal counsel to advise or obtain information about legal requirements and obligations.

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

- The consistency and leadership provided by the Dawson County Board of Education is instrumental in the stability of the system.
- The support for the students and the school system from the community and stakeholders is exemplary.

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

- Develop a 3- 5 year strategic plan for the system that provides systemic analysis.
- Enforce and provide consistency of the student attendance procedure among all schools in the system.

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

### Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

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

**Description:**

The Dawson County School System implements a coherent curriculum, instruction, and assessment program in grades Pre K-12 as prescribed by the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). This allows for efficient opportunities for students to receive essential knowledge, 21st Century performance tasks, and higher order thinking skills. As evidenced in the school system's Response To Intervention (RtI) structure, each school in the system uses benchmark tools and formative assessments to guide instruction. This instruction is measured summatively in order for the system to determine achievement over time and find common trends. Based on the Comprehensive LEA Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans(SIP), data analysis occurs after data disaggregation, and is followed by action plans to strengthen deficiencies. Walkthrough findings indicate a high level of student engagement at all levels. Students are involved in establishing their own learning targets and demonstrate mastery of skills through application oriented assessments.

As evidenced by walkthroughs, teacher interviews, and leadership interviews, student engagement is higher than in prior years. Teachers credit the increase in student engagement to discovery learning, hands on learning, and cooperative learning for heightened engagement among students. Students indicate teachers expect application oriented performance on assessments. Although not pervasive, some instruction shows innovative instruction which encompasses application practice of 21st Century skills. The school system employs Assistant Principals who oversee teaching and learning growth within the schools. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction oversees an Instructional Focus Team which aligns system-wide curricular and instructional structures. Decisions are made by this team after careful analysis of local school formative and benchmark data as well as collaborative meetings with teachers and principals. "Thinking Maps" and "Kansas Strategies" are two instructional strategies currently embraced by the school system. School system records indicate a strong dedication to job-embedded professional learning. The school board ensures teachers have innovative, research based materials, and provide professional learning which is highly effective and considered best practice.

Although the student population has minimum diversity, the school system provides instruction and support for students who are diverse in ethnicity or challenged by other factors through innovative instruction as seen in walkthroughs.

A strength of the school system is an allocation and protection of instructional time. Based on the documentation of the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team, walkthroughs, and school schedules, student learning seems to be optimized by a strong commitment to guarding time where students are actively engaged in meaningful learning activities. Horizontal and vertical teaming, as documented through Superintendent's interview and student interviews, is an attempt at strong articulation among and between all levels. Grade levels and departments plan and align instructional services so that students have smooth transitions from grade to grade, school to school, and high school to work/college. The school system has provided all schools with a plethora of scientifically based intervention programs as well as the professional learning needed to optimize their use. Based on meeting agenda's and interviews, data are carefully analyzed so that students receive appropriate intervention support which is intended to accelerate learning. All administrators, teachers, support personnel, and stakeholders are dedicated to fostering a climate which is student centered. Based on financial records, agendas, board minutes, and interviews, the Dawson County School System's dedication to advancing the learning of all students is a strength. Forty-five day action plans are developed which benchmark school improvement plans and curriculum decisions. Teacher interviews show a commitment to continuous upgrading of curriculum at all levels. Smartboards, Mac Labs, LCD projectors, document cameras, and other technological devices assist the total instructional program. Evidence indicates a strong use of technology within the schools at all levels and students are immersed in sound 21st Century practices.

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

- Pacing guides and curriculum maps created collaboratively by teachers and school administrators are reviewed frequently in order to maximize and best align student learning.
- Technology integration promotes a strengthening of the curriculum and is embedded into instruction in such a way that students are mastering skills at high levels and becoming proficient with the latest technological devices.
- Teaching and learning are guided by a plethora of data sources. These data sources inform intervention efforts and aid in innovative scheduling of tiers II, III, and IV for struggling students.
- The Dawson County School System integrates job-embedded professional learning that is focused upon the area of differentiated instruction.
- Partnerships with local colleges offer the school system opportunities to attract student teachers and secure sound professional learning advancements for teachers.

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

- Develop a systemic plan to connect the continuous improvement process with advancing quality instruction pervasively from the system level.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Dawson County School System has met the accreditation

requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

## Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

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

### Description:

The Dawson County School System continues to build a comprehensive assessment system by using a variety of valid measures which are intended to monitor and improve student achievement for all students. School system documentation shows summative data are gathered through standardized state tests such as Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA), Georgia Writing Assessments, Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (G-KIDS), Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELL's), End of Course Tests (EOCT), and Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT). Further, the school system collects progress monitoring data by using AIMS Web, USA Test Prep, Scantron Performance Series, and Success Maker. The system collaborates with Pioneer Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) in order to disaggregate student data to facilitate the analysis of student performance. This analysis aids in the instructional planning process and the scheduling of intervention services for struggling students. Based on summative and formative data, the school system determines a yearly focus with regard to teaching and learning. This focus is created by the Instructional Focus Team led by Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Assistant Principals in charge of curriculum and instruction at the local schools collaborate with teachers, analyze school data, and determine focus. Meeting agendas and interviews validate that this effort is strongly collaborative and involves teachers and stakeholders. The Instructional Focus Team facilitates best practice professional learning opportunities which are aligned to the focus determined by teachers and school administrators. The team, along with all principals, participates in ongoing analysis of assessment data to understand and to improve the overall effectiveness of instructional practices. The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction and the Instructional Focus Team hold monthly meetings in order to measure instructional effectiveness as well as set next steps for improvement.

The school system's leadership team, including some principals and assistant principals were trained on data analysis through the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI). The SIPs are developed in conjunction with the CLIP. After approval of all plans, a schedule for forty five (45) day action plans is determined. Specifically, these action plans measure progress toward meeting benchmark and annual goals. Based on school system documentation and interview data, the system uses a standards based report card for kindergarten through second grade. Third grade through twelfth grade use a traditional report card for communication with stakeholders. Stakeholders state that teachers and school administrators are efficient in their communication regarding student progress. Powerschool is an online vehicle provided by the school system for parents to use to monitor student progress. School personnel, according to interview documentation, often use email to communicate with parents regarding grades or other issues that arise. The QAR team documents that the school system has provided comparable school system data to other systems within the Pioneer RESA to the schools to document and review. Documentation shows the school system has completed longitudinal analysis of all data sources. This provides all educators with trends and necessary information to develop plans of correction and intervention plans. Multiple sources of evidence support a growth in student performance. The team found that the district maintains a secure, accurate, and complete student record system in accordance with state and federal regulations.

Students in the school system continually make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). School leaders, during interview sessions, attribute their progress monitoring plans and benchmark assessment structure to their ability to make AYP each year. Power school maintains a record of student progress and is used by the school system.

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

- There is a strong commitment from the central office staff to improve student achievement and benchmark student progress throughout the year.
- The system ,with the assistance of Pioneer RESA, provides schools with a variety of formative assessments in order to inform and guide core instruction as well as intervention groups.

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

- Provide a systemic alignment of system expectation for student learning to schools.

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

## Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

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

**Description:**

The Dawson County School System focuses on employment practices that maintain and mentor certified and classified staff. The system allows internships and practice teaching experiences from local colleges that lead to the recruitment of highly qualified faculty. The teachers are assigned teaching duties based on the highly qualified indicators to ensure quality instruction. The staff development program is formulated and directed by data compiled from the Staff Needs Assessment, staff discussions, and SIP. System demographic data shows that there are 314 certified staff servicing 3,434 students for a student/teacher ratio of 1 teacher per 10.93 students.

Budgetary items are developed from school leadership meetings and compiled by the principal for consideration by the Superintendent and the Director of Finance. The Director of Finance oversees the management and expenditure of system funds. The review of the state and federal audit indicated no exceptions.

Dawson County School System is comprised of four elementary schools (K-5), two middle schools (6-8), and one high school (9-12). All schools are well-kept, modern structures. The high school custodial staff is one member short which has impacted the normal aesthetics of the building. Robinson Elementary School is the oldest of the schools, which was built in 1989 and recently renovated in 2010. All other structures are less than 14 years old with the most recent school, Riverview Elementary, opening the fall of 2010.

The system plans for fire, tornado, and emergency situations are documented by policies and plans provided and stakeholder survey data supporting safety. The system addresses hazardous materials (HAZMAT), injuries, dispensing of prescription medication, and special program safety requirements through policies and procedures as provided to the QAR team.

The technology used by the system is primarily Apple-based computer technology. The computers used primarily by the Board of Education staff were Apple. Internet and educational applications access are limited, however, plans are being developed to correct the availability of technology applications. When bandwidth issues are corrected, a strategic technology plan is needed to prioritize purchases and development. In the future, more technology support staff may be needed.

Dawson County Schools provide for assistance, evaluation, and accommodations for the students of the system. The system monitors the education plans for all Special Education and Gifted students through Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) Meetings, Individualized Development Plans and Special Needs Department Committee Conferences.

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

- Business and community partnerships with the school system are strong and viable.
- The schools are safe and orderly as evidenced by the student, parent, and stakeholder interviews.
- The system meets the needs of each student by providing various programs and pathways demonstrated by the courses and activities documented through the school schedules.

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

- Integrate the use of Personal Computer type technology for Central Office and school staff.
- Improve internet connections with increased bandwidth for improved student support through educational software and applications.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Dawson County School System 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 Dawson County School System has an open, transparent system of communication. The system has the support, commitment, and trust of its stakeholders. A system of collaboration was evident in the interviews with teachers, administration, parents, board members, business partners, and system support staff. The superintendent models collaboration by having parent and teacher forum meetings and demonstrates his desire to interact and communicate with parents and teachers. In the interviews, stakeholders indicated that their opinions and knowledge were solicited and valued. Artifacts like the Charter System Application demonstrated the system's commitment to increasing shared governance with stakeholders by creating a Governance Council to assist the superintendent and board education in the



decision making process. The system creates opportunities for communication and collaboration by holding various parent nights, staff retreats, board retreats, board work sessions, instructional meetings, and various leadership meetings. This needs to be extended to include surveys to measure stakeholder approval primarily among non-parent stakeholders. Most stakeholders interviewed were parents, business partners or post secondary partners. A strategic plan that involves input from a cross section of stakeholders is needed to provide long term direction for the school system. Presently system staff is focused on annual data rather than long term data and lacks comprehensive perceptions to address long term concerns that will impact the system in the next three to five years. The partnerships with local agencies and entities like Lanier Technical, North Georgia College and State University clearly show how students are impacted by collaborative relationships.

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

- Dawson County School System values its stakeholders and has the support and trust of its stakeholders.
- Collaborations established with Lanier Tech and North Georgia College and State University will benefit students and the mission of the system.

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

- Validate actions by creating surveys to measure stakeholder approval, especially those non-parent stakeholders not surveyed in federal programs surveys, and evaluate the effectiveness of the parent forum or the governance council.
- Create a strategic plan that establishes clear, measurable goals for the system that can be easily measured.

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

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

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

**Description:**

There is a continuous improvement process implemented by the Dawson County School System. The CLIP descriptors, Technology Plan, and Professional Learning Plan denotes goals with prescribed interventions, and instructional strategies to address identified student, local school, and system needs. Local school improvement plans are aligned with system goals and interventions as denoted in the CLIP. Summative and formative data are utilized to identify targets, to provide diagnostic information, to make systemic instructional and improvement decisions, and to report progress. The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of continuous improvement is evident in most schools and embraced by the entire system through the

45day action plan and report out process along with follow-up next steps. Formative assessment of student performance through the use of AIMS Web, benchmarks, Success Maker, Georgia Online Assessment System, Scantron Performance Series, and Dibels in Kindergarten – first grade which permits teachers to make adjustment in the curriculum or provide additional support to student. Students and parents are made aware of the assessment results. The QAR team observed a flow chart of the improvement process in several schools on attractively decorated bulletin boards located in data rooms. It was apparent during interviews that teachers and administrators “owned” the data and were focused on the improvement process. Planning time is allocated and protected to ensure that the continuous process of school improvement is dynamic and evolves.

The central office leadership staff works collaboratively with the local school level leadership teams through the Instructional Leadership Forum in reviewing the effectiveness of strategies, evaluating program effectiveness, and making decisions regarding the retention or the elimination of program initiatives. Ongoing monitoring is documented in team minutes, Georgia Assessment Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) Reviews, SIP, 45 day plan presentations, CLIP Reviews, posters, board minutes, and data charts. The results of improvement efforts is communicated to stakeholders through parent teacher conferences, information/data systems, emails, progress reports, report cards, and the system website.

The local School Improvement Plans include a focus on increasing learning for all students and closing gaps between current and expected student performance levels. Monthly Instructional Focus Team meetings hosted by the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction are held with school administrators at the system office. Various topics are discussed during the 45 day action plan reviews according to the results of instructional strategies used to increase student achievement. A more systemic process to ease the flow and connection of the improvement process among system personnel and school staff is needed to promote a more common focus, improve alignment, and common language regarding continuous school improvement system wide.

Professional learning on Differentiation of Instruction, Kansas Strategies, Response to Intervention, Thinking Maps, PD 360 online professional learning modules with video clips which model instructional strategies, Pioneer Regional Educational Service Agency, and local school lead instructional in-services. Additional professional learning includes: Gifted Endorsement, Rigor in the classroom, RtI, Math, Classroom Instruction That Works, Learning Village, and GPS Frameworks. However, a process to monitor, evaluate, and provide feedback is not evident with regard to professional learning.

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

- Stakeholders are engaged in the process of continuous improvement at all levels.
- Summative and formative test results are monitored and communicated to students and stakeholders.
- Dawson County School System allocates and protects time for planning and engaging in continuous improvement efforts system-wide.
- There is a strong, dedicated, committed, compassionate, professional staff who fully embrace the vision for Dawson School System in becoming exemplary at preparing the students to compete globally.

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

- Integrate a systemic process of continuous improvement process throughout the entire school

- system.
- Incorporate and monitor strategies to address the system goals of closing the math achievement gaps between all subgroups (economically disadvantage and Student with Disabilities) at all schools which will strengthen the overall systemic performance progress.
  - Establish a professional learning evaluation, monitoring, and feedback process to assess the effectiveness of professional learning activities to further enhance consistent, pervasive implementation of research based best practice.

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

## Quality Assurance Findings

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

### Description

The QAR team finds that the Dawson County School System has established a quality assurance process that supports academic excellence and promotes continuous improvement through an organizational configuration that aligns the work of local school improvement teams with the goals of the school system. A current description of student demographics, their performance, system effectiveness in addressing needs, and the input of stakeholders is indicated through the written profile, the system welcome brochure, surveys, and minutes of CLIP meetings. Surveys are used at all levels to acquire stakeholder input to develop plans and pinpoint needs.

Dawson County System personnel works collaboratively with school personnel and Pioneer Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) to improve student achievement performance. Pioneer RESA disaggregates data for the system and schools to identify trends in student performance. Data is used to formulate overall system and local school goals. This data is provided to the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction who in turn presents it to the school administrators and system cabinet for review. A system review consisting of NCLB goals, SMART Goals and GAPSS provides a blueprint for system and school staffs to follow. System goals are referenced in the local school improvement plans as emphasized by the local school leadership teams and teachers. However, a more systemic process is needed at the system level to align system and school improvement efforts.

QAR team's review of the CLIP showed that the system has an annual plan which aligns various goals for improvement purposes; however, the QAR team noted the need for a more formal strategic planning process that provides for community input and development of long-term strategies to deal with future opportunities, barriers, and threats.

The school system and the QAR team affirms that the AdvancED standards are met by all of the schools and the System as a whole through the ongoing analysis of data, the work of the System CLIP Team, Local School Improvement Plans, the monitoring of building principals, and the work of respective building leadership teams. As indicated in the Standards Assessment Report (SAR), the system will continue to build a comprehensive culture of data to maintain systemic focus, providing research-based instruction that leads to student improvement and increase parent and stakeholder communication. The pledge to maximize resources and supports to address the needs of student achievement and optimal exemplary performance is endorsed by Board members, Superintendent, System Cabinet, School Administrators, business partners on school councils, and community stakeholders.

### Strengths

- The comprehensive use of data drives school improvement efforts in the school system.
- Instructional Focus Teams meet bi-weekly to discuss data results and to make adjustments where needed.
- School staff and administrators are knowledgeable of student performance and the approaches needed to increase student achievement.

**Opportunities**

- Develop and implement a Strategic Plan that provides a comprehensive three to five year focus for the school system.
- Implement a systemic process in the system to connect improvement efforts between the schools and the system.
- Teachers and school administration are dedicated to addressing the academic needs of all students (Kids First).

## Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Dawson County School System on 01/30/2011 - 02/02/2011.

Kilough Elementary School	1063 Kilough Church Road	Dawsonville	Georgia	30534-
Dawson County High School	1665 Perimeter Rd.	Dawsonville	Georgia	30534
Herbert W. Robinson Elementary School	1150 Perimeter Road	Dawsonville	Georgia	30534
Riverview Middle School	5126 Highway 9 South	Dawsonville	Georgia	30534

## Conclusion

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

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

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

## Appendix

### Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Olivia Hodges, CHAIR
- Dr. Eleanor Scott, VICE\_CHAIR (Walton County Schools)
- Mr. Allen McCannon, MEMBER (Madison County Schools)
- Mr. Bryan Edwards, MEMBER (Cartersville High School)
- Mr. Greg Cobb, MEMBER (St. Clair County Schools)

### 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.