

Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for Galer Elementary School

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AdvancED is the unified organization of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE).

Quality Assurance Review Report

Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI 3

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review 4

Summary of Findings 5

 Commendations 5

 Recommendations 6

 Next Steps 6

Standards for Accreditation 8

 Standard 1. Vision and Purpose 8

 Standard 2. Governance and Leadership 9

 Standard 3. Teaching and Learning 9

 Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results 10

 Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems 11

 Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships 12

 Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement 13

Conclusion 14

Appendix 15

 Quality Assurance Review Team Members 15

 AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools 15

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

In 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 continuously improve.

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

1) Meet the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools. Schools demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.

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

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

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

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

A key aim of the quality assurance review is to verify that the school is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

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

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

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

Using the Report - Acting on the Recommendations. The school uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The NCA CASI/SACS CASI State Office is available to assist schools in addressing the recommendations. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review team visit, the school must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress the school has made on the team's recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school is addressing the recommendations.

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited the Galer Elementary School in Beaufort, South Carolina on 02/11/2008 - 02/12/2008.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed the Principal, 1 member of the administrative team, 17 students, 13 parents, and 20 teachers. In addition, team members of 8 Support staff and 1 Superintendent were interviewed. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

- Vision and Purpose
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Documenting and Using Results
- Resource and Support Systems
- Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems within a school and systematic methods of attaining high student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of the standards lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards. The Quality Assurance Review team used the AdvancED standards to guide its review of the school, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics of a quality school.

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

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review team commends the school for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted.

- **The learning environment at the school is child-centered.**

Through observation and interviews, the team noted that the students are highly engaged in relevant hands-on activities. Learning opportunities and instruction revolve around student need.

The child-centered learning environment at the school contributes to the success of students.

- **Personal communication between staff and families is open, interactive, timely, and frequent.**

Positive communication was evidenced by parent and faculty interviews, survey results, and other artifacts. This is one of the most highly regarded practices of this school's faculty.

The team observed significant evidence of personal communication between staff and families. As a result a strong partnership exists between home and school.

Recommendations

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review team identified the following recommendations for improvement. The team focused its recommendations on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall school effectiveness. The school will be held accountable for making progress on each of the recommendations noted in this section. Two years following this review, the school will be asked to submit a progress report on these recommendations.

- **Develop an assessment system that aligns with the math problem-solving goal and includes formative assessments that are given frequently throughout the year.**

Assessments that are specifically aligned to the school improvement goal will be challenging to find or develop, but they will guide the instructional decisions more cohesively.

An assessment process will help determine the effectiveness of the strategy as well as provide the ability to make adjustments in instruction as needed.

- **Develop a formal staff development plan that includes collaboration across and between grade levels.**

The staff development that has occurred in the school has helped build teacher capacity to better understand the school improvement system, the selected goal, and the evaluation process. One that is more precise in timelines and assigned responsibilities will provide even more focus for this collaborative staff.

The plan will provide a more consistent approach to the training of the faculty that will result in improved instructional practices.

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

Next Steps

The school should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school.

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

Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork, provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help schools with their improvement efforts. Available any where, any time, the network can be queried for information on a variety of school improvement subjects. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides research, handbooks, and tools to assist schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for more information on the range of resources available to you.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for state review and for action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school should celebrate its achievement with the school community. The NCA CASI logo is available through the NCA CASI website for schools to post on their website and in school communications. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and more can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

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

Standards for Accreditation

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

Standard 1. Vision and Purpose

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

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

The school established a clear vision that provides a foundation for the school mission and school improvement goal. Input from varied stakeholder groups encouraged the development of the positive shared vision. Some teachers, parents, and students did not differentiate the vision from the School Improvement Plan (SIP) goal but were able to articulate the impact of the SIP goal in the classroom. Students are given choices as a means of "engaging learners and providing an atmosphere of creativity and happiness." These are words from the vision statement that are visibly fulfilled in classrooms where students actively learn in a variety of ways. Problem solving activities aimed at helping primary students understand the multiplicity of processes were observed by the team. Reminders of the selection of age-level appropriate strategies, when solving problems of different aspects and content areas, were visible in classrooms and along hallways.

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

- The faculty and staff created a shared vision that serves as a guide to create an engaging learning environment for all students. Faculty and staff members are enthusiastic about the vision and discussed how it impacted their instructional decisions.
- All stakeholder groups work together toward a shared vision through the establishment and monitoring of school-wide goals.
- Copies of the vision statement are displayed throughout the school classrooms.

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

- Increase efforts to ensure an understanding of the school improvement process and vision of the school by all stakeholders.

Finding: Galer Elementary School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 2. Governance and Leadership

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

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

The leadership and governance structure provides regular and consistent opportunities for staff members to participate as a learning community. The faculty meets for an hour each Tuesday after students are dismissed to develop rubrics for assessment, look at data, collaborate on teaching strategies, review and revise the school improvement plan, and become familiar with the accreditation process. The team observed a variety of opportunities for teacher collaboration. Evidence of the focus on the school improvement goal, problem-solving skills, is found in all classrooms. Math word walls are found in each classroom, and problem-solving activities are practiced daily. The principal discusses the progress of students with each teacher during the ongoing evaluation process.

Administration is receptive of and respectful to parent concerns. One example of responding to parent concerns, is the opening of a pre-kindergarten program at Parris Island, a campus 14 miles from the school. A large number of students enrolled, and parents expressed concern that there were too many students for one teacher and aide. The class was divided into two sessions as a result of bringing this to the leadership of the school. The principal has an open-door policy and is visible and accessible before school, during lunch, and after school. Involvement by community volunteers occurs frequently. Policies are often sent out in draft form for input before the final form is provided to the staff.

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

- The school atmosphere is warm and welcoming.
- Abundant student and faculty leadership opportunities exist at the school. Among others, teachers can sponsor clubs, serve on school improvement committees, and present at faculty meetings. Students can serve as mail carriers, be members of the recycle and flag clubs, and present at Parent Teacher Organization events.

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

- Develop and disseminate a single handbook that contains all of the policies and procedures that faculty and families need for reference.

Finding: Galer Elementary School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 3. Teaching and Learning

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

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

The curriculum is based on DoDEA standards with clearly defined expectations for student learning. Teachers report that the staff development and research-based practices presented on math problem-solving have changed their teaching practices. Mathematical problem solving was highly visible and evident throughout the school both within the classrooms and on the hallway bulletin boards. Math word walls were found in every homeroom, and these words are incorporated in student math journals, math literature readings, and spelling lessons. Centers and hands-on activities are often employed to allow students to work at their specific level. Teachers provide constructive oral and written feedback to keep students motivated to improve their performance in each subject area. Instruction is differentiated and individualized when possible. Standards are unpacked into student-friendly terminology to give students a foundation in their objectives and goals for each lesson.

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

- Student-oriented learning is highly prevalent in all homerooms. Students are heavily engaged in learning, and teachers act as facilitators of instruction. Students contribute to lesson activities and centers, whenever appropriate, which gives them choices to accommodate their learning styles.
- Centers and hands-on activities are employed to allow students to work at their specific learning level.

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

- Provide opportunities for collaboration within and transversely between grade levels to strengthen student achievement and teacher planning.

Finding: Galer Elementary School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results

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

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

Numerous and varied assessments have been implemented to define clear improvement goals and to direct changes in instruction. Standardized assessments include Developmental Reading Assessment, Scholastic Reading Inventory, and TerraNova scores of third grade students who attend Bolden Elementary School after this school. Baseline data were gathered in 2006-2007. Parents feel they had received abundant analysis of data but still have the tendency to relate data information into a letter grade system.

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

- Local assessments are developed and reviewed to provide feedback to students on

specific concerns and goals.

- Math performance tasks and rubrics are identified at each level to assess math skills.
- Analysis of data shows no achievement gap when comparing ethnic groups, gender, or the total in each classroom.

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

- Develop an assessment system that aligns with the math problem solving goal and allows the staff to periodically monitor student progress. The team found that assessments are in place. However limited assessments that were specific to the school improvement goal were noted.
- Regularly collect and analyze formative data that are specific to the learning goal to determine the effectiveness of the strategy. This will allow teachers to make adjustments as needed.

Finding: Galer Elementary School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems

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

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

Roles and responsibilities are fulfilled by qualified professional faculty and staff sufficient in number to meet the vision and purpose of the school. Teachers' input on staff development promotes opportunities for participation in a variety of workshops throughout the year. This year staff development focused on the accreditation process including the goal of problem solving, especially within the mathematical curriculum.

Budget resources are dispensed within the confines of money allotted by central office. Financial transactions are maintained by the school support personnel using the prescribed DoDEA software application. The team found the building well maintained and clean. The security and crisis management plans are within the approved DoDEA policies and guidelines. Quarterly crisis team meetings are conducted. Guidance classes and small groups are conducted on a weekly rotating basis. The guidance counselor teaches part of the health curriculum and informs the teachers of the topics she covers. Character education is also covered in the guidance curriculum.

Grade level teachers and resource teachers work together to plan appropriate modifications that are designed to meet the needs of individual special education students.

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

- The school effectively utilizes resources and services to support the vision of the school and ensure achievement for students.

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

- Establish a formal staff development plan to ensure a timely, organized, and ongoing learning opportunity for all staff.

Finding: Galer Elementary School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

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

Significant evidence exists that teachers are personally communicating with parents on a constant and consistent basis. Involvement by community volunteers occurs frequently. Volunteers, including parents, community members, and a group of senior citizens from nearby Hilton Head, read with children, mentor, paint, and provide support care for students who arrive at the building early and for those who need help with homework.

Positive communication was evidenced by parent and faculty interviews, survey results, and other artifacts. The team found that the staff is readily available and responsive to parents. Communication is highly personalized and timely. Parents reported to the committee that they get frequent phone calls, emails, and newsletters informing them about their child's progress, conduct, and homework. This process has strengthened the relationship between home and school. Student progress reports, report cards, parent conferences and teacher to student emails keep the stakeholders informed regarding the progress of their child.

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

- Personal communication by the faculty to parents and students is highly regarded by stakeholders. The team observed significant evidence of personal communication between staff and families.

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

- Maintain the supportive communication processes established by the school. Tradition is held dear to those who work in the building as well as those who have children attending this school.

Finding: Galer Elementary School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

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

The school staff is committed to a continuous school improvement process that focuses on student learning. The team observed a deep appreciation of the staff for what they do for the students by stakeholders who felt they were involved in the process by personal notifications from the school administrator and teachers.

A school improvement leadership team reviews the student data, maintains the current profile, and monitors and communicates the results of school improvement efforts to staff and stakeholders. Professional development opportunities are made available to staff when the tie to the school improvement goal is obvious. The teachers see the need for working together to promote growth and to support the efforts of the School Improvement Leadership Team. Assessment results are evaluated for intervention effectiveness and guidelines of changes to be made in the school improvement process.

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

- The school realizes that the school improvement document is ever-changing. Accreditation is an ongoing process.

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

- As assessment data are reviewed and analyzed, identify the strengths to continue and the areas that need expanded interventions. This will better serve the students who still need opportunities to learn mastery of skills needed to achieve the selected school improvement goals.

Finding: Galer Elementary School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Conclusion

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

The team identified several recommendations for improvement that the school will need to address. Two years following this review, the school will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's recommendations.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to Noel Tillman, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality throughout the visit. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through NCA CASI accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Joy Mockelmann, Chair
- Linda Wandtke, Vice Chair
- Krys Tuten, Team Member
- Suzanne Jones, Team Member
- Tommy Lee, Team Member

AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

The AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As schools reach higher levels of implementation of the standards, they will have a greater capacity to support ever-increasing student performance and organizational effectiveness. Each of the seven standards listed below has corresponding indicators and impact statements which can be accessed at www.advanc-ed.org.

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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