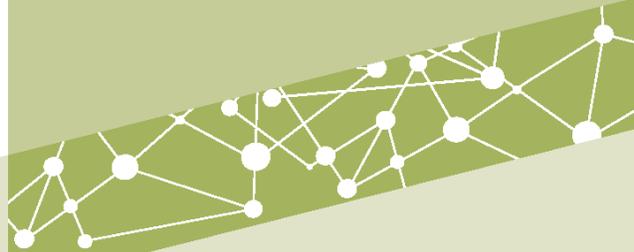**March 10 - 13, 2019**

AdvancED®
Engagement
Review Report

AdvancED®

AdvancED® Performance Accreditation

» **Results for:**
Newton County School System
2109 Newton Drive NE
Covington, Georgia 30014

Table of Contents

Introduction

AdvancED Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review

Accreditation is pivotal to leveraging education quality and continuous improvement. Using a set of rigorous research-based standards, the accreditation process examines the whole institution—the program, the cultural context and the community of stakeholders—to determine how well the parts work together to meet the needs of learners. Through the AdvancED Accreditation Process, highly skilled and trained Engagement Review Teams gather first-hand evidence and information pertinent to evaluating an institution's performance against the research-based AdvancED Performance Standards. Using these Standards, Engagement Review Teams assess the quality of learning environments to gain valuable insights and target improvements in teaching and learning. AdvancED provides Standards that are tailored for all education providers so that the benefits of accreditation are universal across the education community.

Through a comprehensive review of evidence and information, our experts gain a broad understanding of institution quality. Using the Standards, the review team provides valuable feedback to institutions which helps to focus and guide each institution's improvement journey. Valuable evidence and information from other stakeholders, including students, also are obtained through interviews, surveys, and additional activities.

AdvancED Standards Diagnostic Results

The AdvancED Performance Standards Diagnostic is used by the Engagement Review Team to evaluate the institution's effectiveness based on AdvancED's Performance Standards. The diagnostic consists of three components built around each of the three Domains: **Leadership Capacity**, **Learning Capacity** and **Resource Capacity**. Results are reported within four ranges identified by the colors. The results for the three Domains are presented in the tables that follow.

Color	Rating	Description
Red	Needs Improvement	Identifies key areas that need more focused improvement efforts
Yellow	Emerging	Represents areas to enhance and extend current improvement efforts
Green	Meets Expectations	Pinpoints quality practices that meet the Standards
Blue	Exceeds Expectations	Demonstrates noteworthy practices producing clear results that exceed expectations

Leadership Capacity Domain

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress toward its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its purpose and direction; the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives; the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways; and the capacity to implement strategies that improve learner and educator performance.

Leadership Capacity Standards		Rating
1.1	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.	Meets Expectations
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.	Meets Expectations
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.	Meets Expectations
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	Exceeds Expectations
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.	Meets Expectations
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.	Meets Expectations
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.	Meets Expectations
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.	Meets Expectations
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.	Meets Expectations
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.	Emerging

Learning Capacity Domain

The impact of teaching and learning on student achievement and success is the primary expectation of every institution. An effective learning culture is characterized by positive and productive teacher/learner relationships; high expectations and standards; a challenging and engaging curriculum; quality instruction and comprehensive support that enable all learners to be successful; and assessment practices (formative and summative) that monitor and measure learner progress and achievement. Moreover, a quality institution evaluates the impact of its learning culture, including all programs and support services and adjusts accordingly.

Learning Capacity Standards		Rating
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.	Emerging
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.	Emerging
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs and skills needed for success.	Meets Expectations
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.	Meets Expectations
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.	Meets Expectations
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.	Emerging

Learning Capacity Standards		Rating
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.	Emerging
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational future and career planning.	Meets Expectations
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.	Meets Expectations
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.	Meets Expectations
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.	Emerging
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.	Emerging

Resource Capacity Domain

The use and distribution of resources support the stated mission of the institution. Institutions ensure that resources are distributed and utilized equitably so the needs of all learners are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes support for professional learning for all staff. The institution examines the allocation and use of resources to ensure appropriate levels of funding, sustainability, organizational effectiveness, and increased student learning.

Resource Capacity Standards		Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.	Meets Expectations
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.	Meets Expectations
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.	Meets Expectations
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.	Emerging
3.6	The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.	Meets Expectations
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.	Exceeds Expectations
3.8	The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Meets Expectations

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®) Results

The AdvancED eProve™ Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®) is a learner-centric classroom observation tool that comprises 28 items organized in seven environments aligned with the AdvancED Standards. Classroom observations are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes. Trained and certifiedobservers take into account the level of embeddedness, quality, and complexity of application or implementation; number of students engaged and frequency of application. Results from the eleot are reported on a scale of one to four based on thestudents' engagement in and reaction to the learning environment. In addition to the results from the review, the AdvancED Improvement Network (AIN) results are reported to benchmark your results against the network averages. The eleot provides useful, relevant, structured, and quantifiable data on the extent to which students are engaged in activities and/or demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, and/or dispositions that are conducive to effective learning.

The insights eleot data provide are an invaluable source of information for continuous improvement planning efforts. Although averages by eleot Learning Environment are helpful to gauge quality at a higher, more impressionistic level, the average rating for each item is more fine-grained, specific and actionable. Institutions should identify the five to seven items with the lowest ratings and examine patterns in those ratings within and across environments to identify areas for improvement. Similarly, identifying the five to seven items with the highest ratings also will assist in identifying strengths within and across eleot Learning Environments. Examining the eleot data in conjunction with other institution data will provide valuable feedback on areas of strength or improvement in institution's learning environments.

eleot® Observations		
Total Number of eleot® Observations	**90**	
Environments	**Rating**	**AIN**
Equitable Learning Environment	2.54	2.86
Learners engage in differentiated learning opportunities and/or activities that meet their needs	2.03	1.89
Learners have equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	3.10	3.74
Learners are treated in a fair, clear and consistent manner	3.22	3.77
Learners demonstrate and/or have opportunities to develop empathy/respect/appreciation for differences in abilities, aptitudes, backgrounds, cultures, and/or other human characteristics,conditions and dispositions	1.81	2.06
High Expectations Environment	2.61	3.02
Learners strive to meet or are able to articulate the high expectations established by themselves and/or the teacher	2.61	3.17
Learners engage in activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	2.74	3.14
Learners demonstrate and/or are able to describe high quality work	2.44	2.83
Learners engage in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks that require the use ofhigher order thinking (e.g., analyzing, applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	2.44	3.06
Learners take responsibility for and are self-directed in their learning	2.79	2.89
Supportive Learning Environment	3.04	3.61
Learners demonstrate a sense of community that is positive, cohesive, engaged, and purposeful	2.91	3.66

eleot® Observations		
Total Number of eleot® Observations	**90**	
Environments	**Rating**	**AIN**
Learners take risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	2.80	3.49
Learners are supported by the teacher, their peers and/or other resources to understand content and accomplish tasks	3.20	3.66
Learners demonstrate a congenial and supportive relationship with their teacher	3.23	3.66
Active Learning Environment	2.73	3.08
Learners' discussions/dialogues/exchanges with each other and the teacher predominate	2.86	3.34
Learners make connections from content to real-life experiences	2.54	2.80
Learners are actively engaged in the learning activities	3.04	3.43
Learners collaborate with their peers to accomplish/complete projects, activities, tasks and/or assignments	2.47	2.74
Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.73	3.14
Learners monitor their own learning progress or have mechanisms whereby their learning progress is monitored	2.49	3.20
Learners receive/respond to feedback (from teachers/peers/other resources) to improve understanding and/or revise work	2.98	3.37
Learners demonstrate and/or verbalize understanding of the lesson/content	2.93	3.37
Learners understand and/or are able to explain how their work is assessed	2.53	2.63
Well-Managed Learning Environment	3.09	3.58
Learners speak and interact respectfully with teacher(s) and each other	3.30	3.86
Learners demonstrate knowledge of and/or follow classroom rules and behavioral expectations and work well with others	3.22	3.83
Learners transition smoothly and efficiently from one activity to another	2.76	3.09
Learners use class time purposefully with minimal wasted time or disruptions	3.07	3.54
Digital Learning Environment	2.04	1.50
Learners use digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	2.22	1.60
Learners use digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	2.02	1.46
Learners use digital tools/technology to communicate and/or work collaboratively for learning	1.88	1.46

Assurances

Assurances are statements accredited institutions must confirmthey are meeting. The Assurance statements are based on the type of institution and the responses are confirmed by the Accreditation Engagement Review Team. Institutions are expected to meet all Assurances and are expected to correct anydeficiencies in unmet Assurances.

Assurances			
Met	**X**	Unmet	
Unmet Assurances			

AdvancED Continuous Improvement System

AdvancED defines continuous improvement as "an embedded behavior rooted in an institution's culture that constantly focuses on conditions, processes, and practices to improve teaching and learning."The AdvancED Continuous Improvement System (CIS) provides a systemic fully integrated solution to help institutions map out and navigate a successful improvement journey. In the same manner that educators are expected to understand the unique needs of every learner and tailor the education experience to drive student success, every institution must be empowered to map out and embrace their unique improvement journey. AdvancED expects institutions to use the results and the analysis of data from various interwoven components for the implementation of improvement actions to drive education quality and improved student outcomes. While each improvement journey is unique, the journey is driven by key actions.

The findings of the Engagement Review Team will be organized by the Levels of Impact within i3: Initiate, Improve and Impact. The organization of the findings is based upon the ratings from the Standards Diagnostic and the i3 Levels of Impact.

Initiate

The first phase of the improvement journey is to **Initiate**actions to cause and achieve better results. The elements of the Initiate phase aredefined withinthe Levels of Impact of Engagement and Implementation. Engagement is the level of involvement and frequency stakeholders are engaged in the desired practices, processes, or programs within the institution. Implementation is the degree to which the desired practices, processes, or programs are monitored and adjusted for quality and fidelity of implementation. Standards identified within Initiate should become the focus of the institution'scontinuous improvement journey to move toward the collection, analysis and use of data to measure the results of engagement and implementation. A focus on enhancing the capacity of the institution in meeting the identified Standards has the greatest potential impact on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

Improve

The second phase of the improvement journey is to gather and evaluate the results of actions to **Improve**. The elements of the **Improve** phase are defined within the Levels of Impact of Results and Sustainability. Results represent the collection, analysis, and use of data and evidence to demonstrate attaining the desired result(s). Sustainability is results achieved consistently to demonstrate growth and improvement over time (minimum of three years). Standards identified within Improve are those in which the institution is using results to inform their continuous improvement processes and using results over time to demonstrate the achievement of goals. The institution should continue to analyze and use results to guide improvements in student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

Impact

The third phase of achieving improvement is **Impact** where desired practices aredeeply entrenched. The elements of the **Impact** phase are defined withinthe Level of Impact of Embeddedness. Embeddedness is the degree to which the desired practices, processes, or programs are deeply ingrained in the culture and operation of the institution. Standards identified within Impact are those in which the institution has demonstrated ongoing growth and improvement over time and has embedded the practices within the culture of the institution. Institutions should continue to support and sustain these practices that are yielding results in improving student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

Findings

The findings in this report represent the degree to which the Accreditation Standards are effectively implemented in support of the learning environment and the mission of the institution. Standards which are identified in the **Initiate** phase of practice are considered Prioritiesfor Improvement that must be addressed by the institution to retain accreditation. Standards which are identified in the **Improve** phase of practice are considered Opportunities for Improvement that the institution should consider. Standards which are identified in the **Impact** phase of practice are considered Effective Practices within the institution.

I3 Rubric Levels	STANDARDS
Initiate Priorities for Improvement	
Improve Opportunities for Improvement	Standard: 1.11 Standards: 2.1, 2.2, 2.6, 2.7, 2.11, 2.12 Standard: 3.5
Impact Effective Practices	Standards: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 1.10 Standards: 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10 Standards: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8

Accreditation Status and Index of Education Quality®(IEQ®)

AdvancED will review the results of the Accreditation Engagement Review to make a final determination concerning accreditation status, including the appropriate next steps for your institution in response to these findings.AdvancED provides the Index of Education Quality® (IEQ®) as a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of standards and review criteria. A formative tool for improvement, it identifies areas of success as well as areas in need of focus. The IEQ is comprised of the Standards Diagnostic ratings from the three Domains: 1) Leadership Capacity; 2) Learning Capacity; and 3) Resource Capacity.The IEQ results are reported on a scale of 100 to 400 and provides information about how the institution is performing compared to expected criteria. Institutions should review the IEQ in relation to the Findings from the review in the areas of Initiate, Improve and Impact. An IEQ score below 250 indicates that the institution has several areas within the Initiate level and should focus their improvement efforts on those Standards within the Initiate level. An IEQ in the range of 225-300 indicates that the institution has several Standards within the Improve level and is using results to inform continuous improvement and demonstrate sustainability. An IEQ of 275 and above indicates the institution is beginning to reach the Impact level and is engaged in practices that are sustained over time and are becoming ingrained in the culture of the institution.

Below is the average (range) of all AIN institutions evaluated for accreditation in the last five years. The range of the annual AIN IEQ average is presented to enable you to benchmark your results with other institutions in the network.

Institution IEQ	321.13	AIN 5 Year IEQ Range	278.34 – 283.33

Insights from the Review

The Engagement Review Team engaged in professional discussions and deliberations about the processes, programs and practices within the institution to arrive at the findings of the team. These findings are organized around themes guided by the evidence, examples of programs and practices and provide direction for the institution's continuous improvement efforts. The Insights from the Review narrative should provide contextualized information from the team deliberations and provide information about the team's analysis of the practices, processes, and programs of the institution from the levels of Initiate, Improve, and Impact. The Insights from the Review narrative should provide next steps to guide the improvement journey of the institution in its efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all learners. The findings are aligned to research-based criteria designed to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness. The feedback provided in the Accreditation Engagement Review Report will assist the institution in reflecting on its current improvement efforts and to adapt and adjust their plans to continuously strive for improvement.

The Engagement Review Team identified several themes that correlate to the continuous improvement process for enhancing the goals of Newton County School System (NCSS). These themes represent strengths and opportunities to guide the school system's improvement journey.

Interviews and documentation disclosed focused leadership of the board and superintendent with a very clear direction and commitment to continuous improvement for NCSS. As evidenced through board minutes, videos of meetings, and interviews, the governing authority commits to the establishment and adherence to policies that promote the effective operations of the school system. Board members participate in multiple training opportunities and continuously provide leadership with the autonomy for day-to-day operations. "Our board does not micromanage. They have internalized their training and their actions are aligned to the code of ethics," stated an internal stakeholder. Another stakeholder shared, "Board members have done a good job selecting a superintendent who knows her business. They support her every step of the way." Documentation was shared regarding the NCSS Board of Education's recognition by the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) as 'GSBA 2018 Quality School Board' because of its best practices in school governance and leadership.

"Newton County's school superintendent is a hardworking, visionary leader who has a laser focus on improvement," stated a school leader. "She understands instruction and meets regularly with system and school leaders to ensure that everyone is working towards the goal of educational excellence for all," shared an administrator. "Our superintendent is one who leads with passion and makes each of us want to give our best," stated a teacher. "Our superintendent has been in the system for approximately 20 years and has moved through the ranks to become the first female superintendent NCSS has ever had. Not only do we in Newton County know how strong her leadership is, but she has been recognized at the state level with the President's Award from the Georgia School Superintendents Association," stated a system leader. A community member shared, "The superintendent's honesty and transparency allow us to have courageous conversations." When asked about the superintendent, stakeholders used the following words to describe her: dedicated, hardworking, accessible, highly visible, focused, determined and everywhere all the time." Because of her leadership style, we have a data-driven, collaborative environment across the school system," stated a school administrator. "She helps us to connect the dots."

The school system provided documentation on the collaborative process that was implemented to develop a new district strategic plan for 2018-2023. The comprehensive process engaged community and stakeholder groups to

create universal ownership and support for system improvement. Stakeholders shared highlights of the facilitated planning process that assisted planning and action teams in analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the system and developing/defining the mission, vision, beliefs/core values, and four goal areas. Those four strategic goal areas are student achievement and success; high-quality workforce; culture, climate and communication; and organizational and operational effectiveness. "A fourth chief officer has just recently been added at the system level, so each of the four goal areas now has a chief officer in charge of leading and being accountable for the implementation of the action plans in each strategic goal area," stated a system administrator. Records demonstrated how the system's organizational structure is aligned to the district strategic plan and how fiscal resources are allocated in a manner that supports the plan. "Every decision we make is directly connected to the district strategic plan. It is our roadmap," stated an internal stakeholder. Newton County School System is to be commended on its strong leadership that is focused on the success of the strategic plan and encourages this ongoing commitment so that it is deeply ingrained and protected throughout the operations of the school system.

Meaningful stakeholder engagement and intentional communication efforts are cornerstones of the system's success. Artifacts and interviews indicated that all stakeholder groups were included in the revision of the mission and vision and the development of the strategic plan. Business and community members, representatives from the faith-based community, parents, staff, and students were well-represented in the groups interviewed by the Engagement Review Team, and each group spoke of the regularly scheduled sessions held to get their input. "Various groups are surveyed, and leaders then meet with us to discuss survey results and ask for input on next steps for improvement," stated an external stakeholder. Internal and external stakeholders spoke proudly about the community partnerships and Partners in Education that are so personally involved in the system's continuous improvement efforts. "We feel that the superintendent and staff really want our input. They are so receptive," shared a business leader. A member of Economic Development stated, "There is nothing better than having a good K-12 school system when trying to attract industry to the area." A business partner stated," We don't have to squirm when asked how the schools are doing. We are proud to be partners with NCSS." Interviews also revealed the superintendent's involvement in community activities with her serving on the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, as well as the Newton County Board of Health. Based on the increased need for services focused on the personal, social, and emotional well-being of Newton County's students, NCSS implemented Project Aware, an in-school mental health program, as well as partnering with Viewpoint Health to provide clinicians at various schools. One community member shared the school system's launch of the Opportunity Model to help community members to become informed about poverty. "This is a national movement designed to create stable communities and is achieved by increasing prosperity for people living in the crisis of poverty. The superintendent's focus on meeting the needs of all students in NCSS is the very reason the community got involved in this two-year initiative," stated a community leader. Internal stakeholders also feel that their input is valued and that they are heavily engaged in the collaborative, decision-making process of the school system. "The kick-off event at the opening of each school year begins the message of system-wide collaboration, common vision, and goal achievement," stated a principal. System-wide professional learning communities (PLCs) are conducted by the superintendent each month and serve as a model for department and school PLCs. "System leadership teams, principal and assistant principal groups, content specialists and content leader groups, and curriculum specialist teams engage in regular PLCs and set the collaborative culture for supporting learners in pursuing their goals," stated a system leader.

Intentional communication efforts are directly connected to successful stakeholder engagement in NCSS. The governing board shared how they have a public participation sign-up form placed out at each meeting and have a page on the system website dedicated to providing information to stakeholders on how they can participate at meetings. "Videos of all public board meetings are posted on its YouTube channel, and those video links are

shared on the system's Facebook and Twitter pages," shared a board member. "Numerous surveys are administered each year and results are analyzed and used as a part of the continuous improvement process," stated a system leader. "School Messenger and Infinite Campus are just some of the ways the school system communicates with us," shared a parent. "Annual School Chats are conducted by the superintendent at every school in the system to present information and to gain suggestions from teachers and classified staff on how to improve NCSS," stated a teacher. Artifacts also revealed the creation of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council that is comprised of 50 middle and high school students from across the school system who meet regularly. "I want to hear from the school system's number one customer, the students," stated the superintendent. Teachers shared information about the use of UPBEAT that is used by the school system to solicit their in-depth feedback regarding school climate. Even departing staff members are asked to provide feedback on exit interview surveys. Students in grades 6 through 12 shared that they get a college and career ready brochure at the beginning of each year specific to their grade level as a guide to career decision-making. System personnel shared copies of annual reports that are distributed to stakeholders to convey the mission and vision and updates on academics and financial stability. "Celebrations and recognitions are always happening in the system. We like to celebrate success in student achievement and recognize staff for a job well-done. Excellent customer service is being recognized by an anonymous process and schools are continually trying to get top ratings," stated a principal. One system employee shared," Our superintendent communicates with everyone and encourages all staff members to do the same. Her motto is, "You can't fix it if you don't know about it." Active engagement of all stakeholder groups and frequent and varied communication efforts are currently expected throughout the school system. To continue with the success currently enjoyed by NCSS, the system is encouraged to ensure these practices and programs continue to be deeply ingrained and protected throughout the culture of the school system.

A caring, supportive and well-managed learning environment exists in NCSS. In almost every interview, staff used such words as commitment, passionate, trust, supportive, collaborative, welcoming, transparent, resilient, family, homey feeling, excellence, and importance on building relationships, to describe the school system. Staff continually shared how they are willing to go over and beyond what is required in order for their students to succeed. Students described their schools as safe, comfortable, helpful, awesome, and welcoming. A group of administrators described the schools as places where every child has a chance. "We are all about building relationships and meeting the needs of the whole child," stated a principal. During the 90 classroom observations, the team saw students who were supported by their teachers and peers to understand content and accomplish tasks. Congenial and supportive relationships were observed between teachers and students throughout the schools. Students spoke and interacted respectfully with their teachers and each other.

"Everybody feels valued," shared a teacher. "Some of us might leave but we find our way back to NCSS because we feel loved," stated a teacher who had once worked in the school system, left and then returned. Staff talked about not only making improvements in student achievement but also meeting the social and emotional needs of students. "Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) is implemented in all schools as a way to create safer and more effective schools. Several schools in the system have achieved state recognition at various levels because of their adherence to PBIS," shared a system administrator. Interviews revealed the creation of the RISE Academy as an alternative for struggling learners, with the program being founded on principles of relationship building, PBIS, and positive culture and climate. The Georgia Health Survey results indicate that a vast majority of NCSS students at all levels feel they have at least one trusted adult in the school. Also reflected in the survey is the fact that most students feel safe at school. School personnel discussed their advocacy plans and the kinds of support the advocates provide for students. "Although our advocacy program is not completely formalized, most teachers and staff members work hard to have a bond with students," stated a teacher. High school personnel shared how

students have the same case worker for four years and, starting this year, students will have the same counselor for all four years in high school. "Middle school students are selected to go to the elementary school to mentor struggling students," shared a school counselor.

One of the six core values for NCSS is "All students and staff deserve a safe, positive and supportive environment." "One way of doing this is through the customer service initiative. The motto of having 'high quality service distinguished with love' has been demonstrated with 22 of the 23 schools in NCSS earning a 2018 School Climate Rating of 3, 4, or 5," shared a system leader. Parents shared how supportive they feel as numerous parenting activities are planned at each school throughout the school year. "If we are able to attend at least five of the activities, we receive a Gold Stamp award," stated a parent. Students at schools visited by the team recited their school motto. One such example was the RAMS motto meaning "We are Respectful, Accountable, Motivated and Successful." Students and staff also shared how the superintendent awards a Coin of Distinction to deserving persons who go "above and beyond" in service to others. The system's vision is for all students to be well rounded and prepared for the future. To achieve this vision for all students, NCSS is encouraged to implement many processes and practices that include all stakeholders in a safe, positive and supportive environment. This implementation should be continuous and pervasive so as to be sustained over time.

Strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and wise use of resources in support of the system's mission and vision is demonstrated throughout NCSS. Financial records, as well as the facilities plan, have evidence of adherence to the established budgets. Continuous monitoring is evident through interviews and artifact/records reviews. The financial snapshot provided by the superintendent included a general fund budget with approximately 67 percent coming from the state and 27 percent coming from local revenues. "In a study by the Education Law Center, NCSS is listed as one of two school systems in Georgia that made the list of America's most fiscally disadvantaged school systems with a poverty index of 1.37. This puts it in perspective as to our poverty level," stated the superintendent. The finance director shared a healthy fund balance of approximately four months. In the superintendent's presentation were records of NCSS' financial star rating of 3.5 on a 5 star rating scale indicating a positive comparison of per student spending and overall student performance. Documentation showed that NCSS has enjoyed the passage of five Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) initiatives bringing in approximately $188 million for school facilities, technology infrastructure and equipment, buses, and other approved needs. Construction of several new schools and renovations and additions to all other school sites have been completed. "We not only take pride in updated, clean and well-maintained buildings and grounds, but we are constantly analyzing enrollment projections, mobility rates, and looking at programmatic needs as we revisit our capital improvement plan each year," shared a system leader. Students and staff continually voiced their convictions that they have access to informational resources and materials that support their needs, interests, and the teaching and learning programs. "Hundreds of community partnerships, Partners in Education and the Education Foundation support our educational efforts, thus demonstrating the commitment of external stakeholders to be engaged in our strategic resource management process," shared a system leader.

Administrators shared information as to the level of technology equipment at each school, as well as the support for its usage. "The system is working towards a 2:1 initiative and allows students to Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). All classrooms have Promethean Boards, and every teacher has a microphone connected to a classroom camera," stated a system leader. "The use of the microphone and camera is a non-negotiable for us in NCSS for many reasons, one being safety," stated a system administrator. "All schools have computer labs, and computer carts with Chromebooks are being purchased continually. We still have work to do with adding needed technology and some of our ESPLOST funds are being dedicated to the purchase of additional technology equipment."

Interviews revealed three technology instructional coaches have been hired to support the effective integration of technology into teaching and learning. Although technology has been at the forefront of the school system's initiatives, there is a strong need to more effectively integrate the use of digital tools in teaching and learning. In only 50 percent of the 90 classroom observations conducted by the Engagement Review Team was there effective usage of digital tools by students. High quality classrooms could find more innovative and authentic methods to integrate student use of technology in a way that fosters a positive and strong digital learning environment.

"Having a high-quality workforce is one of the four strategic goal areas for NCSS," stated the superintendent. "We can't pay the salaries that some of the wealthier systems pay but we can sell ourselves with support." One of the school level persons stated, "We are true family, and we won't trade our family for money." "The system knows that professional development is key to improving the learning environment, student achievement, and system effectiveness. Therefore, we have developed a robust professional learning program," shared a system administrator. Records indicate that regularly scheduled PLCs operate throughout the system as a platform for continuous development and improvement of staff. Summer academies are coordinated for staff to continue their professional learning. "Newly hired teachers and staff are provided structured induction and mentoring programs to ensure their success. Building Excellence and Support for Teachers (BEST) is a structured program whereby new teachers are assigned mentors and receive professional learning designed specifically for them," stated a school leader. Instructional coaches in each school provide continuing instructional support for teachers. "We are also trying creative ways of retaining teachers, in addition to providing them with a plethora of love and support. One recent and successful initiative is to provide monetary rewards to current employees who recruit teachers to our school system. The first successful teacher recruit warrants a $500 stipend and subsequent ones are rewarded with a $200 stipend," shared an employee. "We still need to add high quality persons to our workforce. We never feel that we have enough certified teachers to get the job done for our diverse student population. When you have over 70 percent of your student population being economically disadvantaged with a mobility rate of 32 percent and 36 different languages being spoken by students, we would like to have more teachers to reduce class size and provide more interventions and intense support." As noted, one of the strengths of NCSS lies in securing and allocating resources, having well-maintained and updated facilities, and having strong and effective support systems and training opportunities for staff. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) and processes are also implemented to ensure organizational effectiveness. Documented procedures for such routine tasks as finance, purchasing, and hiring were shared. Staff also shared ways they hold each other accountable to the adherence of these SOPs to ensure effective and efficient routine operations. "Transportation even has a software package to monitor various aspects of transportation, including such areas as bus engine performance and on-time arrivals," stated a system administrator. Even with the challenges of recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff, NCSS is committed to a culture that supports growth and improvement in allocation of human resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities. The system is to be commended on its long-range planning and strategic resource management. Yet, more effective integration of digital resources is needed to sustain improvements in teaching and learning.

A documented need for NCSS is the implementation and sustainability of a system-wide instructional framework that is continuously monitored and adjusted to ensure differentiation, challenging and rigorous activities, creativity, innovation, collaborative problem-solving, and effective integration of digital tools to improve student learning. Interviews and document reviews included the components of the strategic plan (2018-2023) with an emphasis on the strategic goal area of student achievement and success. "The very first performance objective is to increase instructional capacity of all teachers," shared a system leader. Action steps include implementing research based instructional strategies, utilizing effective PLCs, developing year-long professional learning plans for teacher-capacity building, monitoring implementation of the plans, and creating a unified focus on effective,

rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment. "Revisiting instructional coach job duties and responsibilities to ensure focus on improved classroom instruction is another action step in the initiative to increase instructional capacity of teachers," stated an instructional leader. Aligned to these identified performance objectives and initiatives in the strategic plan are the findings of the Engagement Review Team. Based on 90 classroom observations in K through 12, there is a documented need for improvement in differentiation, rigor and tasks requiring the use of higher order thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and digital learning. Although graduation rates have improved and are now at 85+ percent, records of student performance as measured by Georgia Milestones have not shown consistent growth in student achievement in English language arts and mathematics for grades 3 through 8 and science and social studies at grades 5 and 8. "Improvements in End of Course (EOC) and Advanced Placement (AP) scores are not where they should be, and our American College Testing (ACT) and Scholastic Reasoning Test (SAT) scores are below the state and national averages," shared an internal stakeholder. "All of this is more about an instructional gap than a learning gap," stated a system leader.

"NCSS' mission is educational excellence for all students and our two non-negotiable goals are increased student achievement and more effective teaching," shared an instructional leader. Surveys show that 98 percent of the system leaders believe the system is fully embedded on setting high expectations for leaders, teachers, and students. "Regularly scheduled PLCs at every level, development and update of curriculum maps and pacing guides, development and use of common assessments, continuous data analysis and usage, and professional development for all staff members are constants in our efforts to improve student achievement," stated an internal stakeholder. "We have selected the Iowa Test and administer it twice per year as one of our formative assessments to help us to better prepare for state tests. We are showing some growth on this assessment," shared the superintendent. "The system is working to create a common PLC protocol aligned to the strategic plan. This should set the groundwork for high expectations in leading, teaching, and learning," stated a system leader. Based on interviews and analysis of student achievement data, Response to Intervention (RTI) and tiered instruction are inconsistently implemented from school to school. There are pockets of excellence while some school personnel had limited information to share about the process or the results. "Another action taken is the recent addition of a fourth chief officer at the system level so that each of the four strategic goal areas is being led by a chief officer," stated the superintendent. "This will help us to have a clear direction with more accountability," stated a system leader. Even with the educators in NCSS being committed to educational excellence for all students, there is a documented need for training, processes, and practices to ensure improvements in student learning and instructional practices that result in personalized and equitable learning opportunities for all learners. This is inclusive of challenging and rigorous activities, effective integration of digital tools, and creative, innovative, and collaborative problem-solving skills being embedded in all courses and subjects.

Even with the school system's laser focus on continuous improvement, there is evidence of a need to implement a more formalized process to continuously assess academic and organizational programs and services to improve student learning. An example of this is with the need to develop a performance management system. One leader shared, "To increase our effectiveness, we need to use a performance management system that includes evaluations, goal setting, and coaching. We have to look at what work needs to be done and how the work should be done. We need an evaluation system for system leadership, non-certified staff, and all other staff not evaluated by Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES)." Another example is the desire to implement software that integrates the core business functions. Records show strong standard operating procedures (SOPs) in place by department with such functions as finance, payroll, and human resources. "We want to provide high-quality operational supports and implementing a software program to integrate all these core functions will be beneficial. This will prevent double work when Human Resources needs a

report. It will prevent having to go to several different places to gather needed information," stated an internal stakeholder. Interviews and documentation revealed a need to improve the implementation of the RTI process. This need was substantiated in the strategic plan with reference to the need for a training plan for RTI coordinators, revised forms about support systems for students, and school leadership's ability to monitor student referral data and RTI status. "We have been using PLCs for years but know that we need to increase the quality of PLCs if we are going to improve student learning and instructional practices. To do this, we must develop system-wide indicators of high-quality PLCs and develop an evaluation instrument for PLCs related to the high-quality indicators," shared a system leader. "To be as effective as possible, we know we need to increase our focus on student records and tracking systems," stated an internal stakeholder. "Training and closer monitoring are needed, as well as the development of a retention tracking and reporting mechanism." Again, interviews revealed a belief that more accountability and overall improvements will increase since the addition of the fourth chief officer. "Having a chief officer in charge of each of the four strategic goal areas will provide a clear direction and more accountability," stated the superintendent. Formalizing processes and procedures to ensure that they are systemic is recommended so that consistency and effectiveness across the school system could be increased.

Effective leadership with a clear direction and commitment to continuous improvement, a caring, supportive, well managed learning environment with intentional communication efforts and meaningful stakeholder engagement, and strategic resource management are the center of success for Newton County School System. With 23 of the 31 Standards already in the "Impact" category, the system can now continually focus on ensuring these desired practices and programs are deeply ingrained and protected throughout the culture and operations of the system. For increased success and educational excellence for all students, a system-wide instructional framework that is continuously monitored and adjusted to meet individual learner's needs and the system's expectations, as well as formalized processes to continuously assess programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning, need to be sustained and become ingrained in all aspects of the school system.

Next Steps

Upon receiving the Accreditation Engagement Review Report the institution is encouraged to implement the following steps:

- Review and share the findings with stakeholders.
- Develop plans to address the Priorities for Improvement identified by the Engagement Review Team.
- Use the findings and data from the report to guide and strengthen the institution's continuous improvement efforts.
- Celebrate the successes noted in the report.
- Continue theimprovement journey.

Team Roster

The Engagement Review Teams are comprised of professionals with varied backgrounds and professional experiences. All Lead Evaluators and Engagement Review Team members complete AdvancED training and eleot certification to provide knowledge and understanding of the AdvancED tools and processes. The following professionals served on the Engagement Review Team:

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Dr. Cheryl Allread **Lead Evaluator**	Cheryl Allread's career spans over 47 years. She retired from Marion County Schools in South Carolina after having taught math and science for seven years, serving as principal for 11 years, as assistant superintendent for instruction for 11 years, and as district superintendent for seven years. After retirement from 36 years working in Marion County, she began working as a consultant with the South Carolina State Department of Education, serving as liaison for low-performing schools/Palmetto Priority Schools. She also conducted academic audits, served as principal mentor, and served as a leadership coach in instructional supervision. Dr. Allread currently works as lead evaluator for AdvancED in schools and systems across the United States and internationally, as well as continuing to work as a consultant with schools and systems in instructional supervision.
Ms. Stacey Dupre	Stacey Dupre currently works as a chief officer for support and special projects in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System where she supervises seven departments/programs (adult education, counseling and guidance, district accreditation, external behavioral providers, health centers in schools, I CARE, and such special projects as tax plan renewal, school naming, and district efficiency). Ms. Dupree holds the following degrees: Bachelor of General Studies, Master of Education, and Education Specialist from Louisiana State University and A&M College. She is certified through the Louisiana State Department of Education in the following areas: biology, counselor in secondary schools, guidance counselor, provisional secondary school principal, provisional principal, and education leader-level 3 (Superintendent). During her 28 years as an educator, she has served as a teacher, school counselor, senior counselor, assistant principal, director (counseling and guidance and school initiatives), executive director, and chief officer.
Dr. Sandra Nethels	Sandra Wallace Nethels is currently employed in Effingham County, Georgia, where she began her career in 1988. Her experiences include teaching kindergarten and first grade for 18 years prior to becoming an assistant principal at the secondary level. In 2012, she became the special programs coordinator for the school system, a position in which she monitors Title I and Title II programs, as well as coordinating services for the hospital/homebound students of the school system.

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Ms. Beverly Levine	Beverly Levine has been in education for 32 years. Her entire educational career has been with the Oglethorpe County School System. She taught elementary school special education for 10 years, then served as a middle school assistant principal and principal for 18 years. She is currently in her 4th year as superintendent. Her bachelor's, master's and specialist degrees are all from the University of Georgia.
Ms. Felicia Durden	Felicia Durden is assistant principal at Olympic Heights High School in Palm Beach County, Florida. Ms. Durden received her bachelor's degree from Florida State University and her master's and specialist degrees from Florida Atlantic University. She has been in the Palm Beach County School System for 30 years. Prior to becoming assistant principal, her experiences included secondary math teacher, guidance counselor, administrative liaison, and testing coordinator. She has served as the contact for beginning teachers for the past 10 years. Her current duties include updating the school improvement plan, supervising and evaluating teachers, student discipline, and testing.
Ms. Gina T. Foster	Gina T. Foster, Ed.S., has over 15 years of experience in education. She currently serves as a facilitator for the Fulton County Schools' school governance and flexibility department. Gina obtained her Education Specialist in leadership degree from Kennesaw State University, a Master of Education with a concentration in elementary education from Hampton University and her Bachelor of Arts in psychology from Hampton University. She is a member of the Georgia Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

References and Readings

AdvancED.(2015). Continuous Improvement and Accountability. Alpharetta, GA:
AdvancED. Retrieved from http://www.advanc-ed.org/source/continuousimprovement-
and-accountability

Bernhardt, V., & Herbert, C. (2010). *Response to intervention and continuous school improvement: Using data, vision, and leadership to design, implement, and evaluate a schoolwide prevention program*. New York: Routledge.

Elgart, M. (2015).*What a continuously improving systemlooks like*. Alpharetta, GA: AdvancED. Retrieved from http://www.advanc-ed.org/source/what-continuously-improving-system-looks like

Elgart, M. (2017).*Meeting the promise of continuous improvement: Insights from theAdvancED continuous improvement system and observations of effective schools.*Alpharetta, GA: AdvancED. Retrieved from http://www.advanc-ed.org/sites/default/files/CISWhitePaper.pdf

Evans, R. (2012). *The Savvy school change leader*. Alpharetta, GA: AdvancED.
Retrieved from http://www.advanc-ed.org/source/savvy-school-change-leader

Fullan, M. (2014).*Leading in a culture of change personal action guide and workbook*.
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hall, G., &Hord, S. (2001). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006).*Sustainable leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kim, W., &Mauborne, R. (2017).*Blue ocean shift: Beyond competing*. New York: Hachette Book Group.

Park, S, Hironaka, S; Carver, P, &Nordstrum, L. (2013).*Continuous improvement in education.* San Francisco: Carnegie Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/carnegie-foundation_continuous-improvement_2013.05.pdf

Sarason, S. (1996).*Revisiting the culture of the school and the problem of change*. New York: Teachers College.

Schein, E. (1985). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). *General systems theory*. New York: George Braziller, Inc.

advanc-ed.org

Toll Free: 888.41EDNOW (888.413.3669)   Global: +1 678.392.2285, ext. 6963

9115 Westside Parkway, Alpharetta, GA 30009

About AdvancED

AdvancED is a non-profit, non-partisan organization serving the largest community of education

professionals in the world. Founded on more than 100 years of work in continuous improvement,

AdvancED combines the knowledge and expertise of a research institute, the skills of a management

consulting firm and the passion of a grassroots movement for educational change to empower

Pre-K-12 schools and school systems to ensure that all learners realize their full potential.