



November 21, 2008

Dr. Gary S. Mathews, Superintendent
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Dear Dr. Mathews:

Enclosed is the Review Team Report for the Quality Assurance Review of the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools from October 12-15, 2008. The contents of the report reflect the observations and recommendations of the Quality Assurance Review Team charged with the responsibility of evaluating Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools' application for District Accreditation as a Quality School System through SACS CASI and AdvancED. SACS CASI is an accreditation division of AdvancED.

AdvancED District Accreditation provides a national protocol for school systems committed to systemic, systematic, and sustainable continuous improvement. The District Accreditation process invites school systems to collaborate in reviewing the quality of the district's systems and their contributions to teaching and learning. The process supports, enhances, and stimulates growth and improvement throughout the school system.

On behalf of the Quality Assurance Review Team, I am honored to report that the school system has satisfactorily met the expectations and responsibilities of the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study in pursuit of District Accreditation. Additionally, the Quality Assurance Review Team certified in the report that the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools met all the standards for accreditation for District Accreditation. Consequently, the Quality Assurance Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, unanimously and without reservation, that the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools be awarded District Accreditation.

As a result of successfully completing the Quality Assurance Review, the district is now charged with the responsibility of entering the implementation phase of the process. The implementation phase of the District Accreditation process requires that the school district will:

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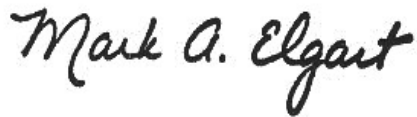
North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI)
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI)
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- Review and communicate the findings and observations contained in the report;
- Initiate steps to address the recommendations in the report;
- Continue to monitor accreditation requirements for the system and its schools;
- Monitor the execution and impact of strategies for improvement; and
- Continue to engage methods that provide for quality assurance.

On behalf of the Quality Assurance Review Team, SACS CASI and AdvancED, I once again commend and congratulate you, the professional staff, the Board of Education, and stakeholders throughout the community on this achievement to be awarded District Accreditation as a Quality School System. SACS CASI and AdvancED look forward to our continued association with the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools and our partnership to improve student learning through accreditation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark A. Elgart". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mark A. Elgart, Ed.D., President/Chief Executive Officer
AdvancED

cc. Dr. Billy K. Floyd, Chair – Quality Assurance Review Team
Hilda Kelly, Director – Virginia SACS CASI



Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools

Dr. Gary S. Mathews, Superintendent
Ms. Elsie Emanuel, Chair, Board of Trustees
Dr. Billy K. Floyd, Chair, Quality Assurance Review Team

**Review Dates:
October 12-15, 2008**

AdvancED is the parent 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 the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE). NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

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About AdvancED and NCA CASI /SACS CASI

Background

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

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

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

The Accreditation Process

To earn and maintain accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, school districts and their schools must:

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

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

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

Purpose

The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

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

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

School District Preparation

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

Summary of Team Activities

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

Using the Report – Acting on the Recommendations

The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the recommendations. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, the school district must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress it has made on the team's recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district 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 by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school district following action from the commission.

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement SACS CASI, a division of AdvancED, visited Williamsburg-James City County Schools on October 12-15, 2008.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed: 49 administrators, 267 teachers, 35 support staff, 108 parents and business partners, 79 students and 2 board of education members for a total of 540 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited eight schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts.

Throughout the visit, the team reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

- 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 Quality Assurance Review Team used the standards to guide its review of the school district, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school district and its schools function as a whole and embody the practices and characteristics of a quality school district. Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

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

The team used the standard reports and quality assurance findings to identify common themes, significant accomplishments, and pressing needs facing the district. These became the basis for the overall commendations and recommendations that are provided below. The commendations and recommendations should serve as the focus for the district as it acts on the team's findings. They represent the areas that the team believes will have the greatest impact in helping the district further its improvement efforts. The standard reports and quality assurance findings can be used to help reinforce and enrich the district's understanding of the commendations and recommendations.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools 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 Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools (WJCCPS) for:

1. **Establishment of a unified and coherent instructional and operational leadership team dedicated to supporting and assisting the efforts of schools to improve student learning.** As evidenced by statements from stakeholders' interviews and through school visits, the team noted a culture that supports a collaborative network that, in turn, supports the improvement process. A culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership is promoted by providing internal stakeholders meaningful roles in the decision-making process. By providing support, resources, and focus, the leaders demonstrate a commitment to student success and a willingness to engage in an aggressive and continuous improvement process. Encouraging self-reflection and analysis of results furthers the improvement process and fosters an environment that values continuous improvement.
2. **Development of a comprehensive system for data collection and analysis which includes the sharing of results with administrators and individual school faculties.** The QAR team observed that the district is data-guided. Professional development in using data has been provided for the district and each school faculty. Grade, department, small group, and individual meetings are conducted to present and interpret data, using it for projection of student performance and revising the curriculum. All data are disaggregated by subgroups, schools, grades, teachers and subjects. The data are presented to the schools and staffs in small group meetings.
3. **A superintendent who is committed to excellence and advancing the vision of the school division.** As evidenced by statements from interviews with board members, administrators, staff, students, and community stakeholders, the review team found division-wide knowledge of and enthusiastic support for the vision and mission of the school division. The superintendent clearly and consistently articulates the vision and mission of WJCCPS. The vision and mission statements serve as the basis for development of the division strategic plan, including long range goals and annual improvement goals at the division and school levels.
4. **The division communicates, funds, and maintains the expectation that all instructional and improvement strategies must be research-based.** As evidenced by key programs and improvement initiatives including Research-Based Instructional Strategies (RBIS) and Building Background Knowledge (DVI/Reading Strategies) by Robert Marzano and Dan Mulligan the division provides hands-on professional development that has translated theory into practice. Communicating, funding, and maintaining the expectation of research-based instructional and improvement strategies will ensure the consistent

implementation of strategies that have been proven effective in positively impacting student achievement.

5. **Williamsburg-James City County Schools has placed a high priority on providing personnel to support the instructional program.** Support instructional personnel including reading specialists, reading recovery teachers, student support teachers, mathematics specialists, support personnel and central office coordinators, offer support to classroom teachers and the instructional program. Providing personnel to support the instructional program ensures teachers have the professional foundation necessary to maintain a curriculum that challenges and meets the needs of all students.
6. **Providing effective leadership to promote the development of division-wide goals that reflect student learning as the major priority of the division.** The superintendent has shown strong leadership in revamping division goals from more than 129 to a manageable number of 12 Research Based Instructional Practices (RBIS). This has effectively allowed for a greater understanding of and focus on the new goals, which are directly related to improvement in student achievement. The new goals ensure that all stakeholder decisions are made with a singular aim of improving conditions and programs to foster student achievement.
7. **A superintendent who is highly visible throughout the schools and community and who provides numerous opportunities to dialogue with stakeholders.** The superintendent of schools, as the chief executive officer, represents all stakeholders of the school community and ensures an atmosphere of collegiality with the division leadership team. The support of the superintendent and the district office staff was evident throughout our discussions with all stakeholders. The district office staff viewed their role as facilitators for the schools. The school staff was very supportive of the superintendent and the board of education. The superintendent holds regular public forums to solicit community input and support. The superintendent's leadership team enlists input from stakeholders from a variety of networks to collect and communicate information and solicit support for programs. The district has established many advisory committees that involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders. The superintendent has established many collaborative networks to develop nationally acclaimed programs and educational processes. Evidence of this commitment is demonstrated through community partnerships, public forums, hearings, surveys, division-wide curriculum reviews, and professional development for a high caliber school division.
8. **The provision of high quality professional development at the division and school levels.** The Williamsburg-James City County Public School Division has developed a district-wide strategic plan that focuses on a common vision throughout the system. Each school within the district has established a systematic plan for school improvement based on instructional strategies and system-wide professional development training. The division offers the faculty and administration a wide variety of professional development opportunities and has structured common planning periods for departments throughout the division to ensure improvement goals are met. Strong evidence was presented to the committee that the division strategic plan and professional development were research-based and data-driven. Evidence of the commitment and expertise of the Williamsburg-

James City County Public School Division for visionary staff and professional development was recognized by the Virginia Association of Curriculum and Development. The superintendent was recognized as Curriculum Leader of the Year for emphasis on system-wide improvement.

9. **The implementation of innovative programs and practices to address student learning needs and promote student achievement.** As evidenced by the artifacts of professional development and practices on the WJCCPS website, interviews with the superintendent, superintendent's leadership team, administrative team, school principal and teacher interviews, strategies for addressing student achievement gaps learned through training in Marzano's identified research-based practices are being integrated into instructional practices in the classroom. Additionally, teachers shared examples of how the research-based practices of Marzano have influenced their instruction, and students at the high school shared their awareness of a change in teaching practices.
10. **The provision of high quality professional development at the division and school level.** The district provides high quality systematic professional development at the district and school levels. The Quality Assurance Review Team noted that district leaders and building leaders participated in Learning Focused training. At the request of the principals, this training was provided to all teachers and instructional staff in the district. Additional professional development opportunities have been provided in Balanced Literacy; Write for the Future, and Thinking Maps, in addition to skills required for improved use of technology and use of benchmark assessments. The focus in this area has led to higher levels of effective teaching which will result in greater academic gains for the students of Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools.
11. **Frequent, ongoing communication with stakeholders, accomplished through a variety of means, to ensure that parents and the community have access to information about student achievement and the work of the schools and the school division.** As evidenced by their frequent, on-going methods of communicating with stakeholders, the division ensures that parents and the community have access to information about student achievement and the work of the schools and the school division. Examples of tools used for communication include: the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools website, employment of a division Communication Specialist, radio talk shows, the superintendent's publication of *End of Month Notes*, the superintendent's monthly column in the *Daily Press*, weekly notes to school board members, the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools Insta-Mail Services, televised school board meetings, monthly meetings with community and business partners, and meetings with the presidents of the Parent Teachers Associations.

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 effectiveness of the school district. The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools will be held accountable for making progress on each of the recommendations noted in this section. Two years following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these recommendations. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the recommendations.

1. **Develop a working relationship with the retirement community in order to access their extensive body of knowledge and to garner greater support of the school division.** As evidenced by interviews with community stakeholders, there is a large and growing retirement population that does not currently have children or grandchildren attending the Williamsburg-James City County Public School Division. An increased involvement of this population could lead to improved community perception. Encouraging the retirees to volunteer in the schools and to participate as guest speakers will allow students to take advantage of their vast knowledge and skill set and will also establish a more positive relationship between the retirement community and the school division.
2. **Develop a systematic plan for surveying members of all groups and effectively using resulting data, thus providing greater stakeholder input.** Through review of artifacts and interviews with parents, students, and community members, the team noted a lack of evidence substantiating systematic involvement of all stakeholder groups. When all stakeholder groups are represented in providing input and feedback regarding district decisions, there is a stronger feeling of ownership and greater support for the division and schools.
3. **Monitor strategies to close the achievement gap while maintaining high expectations for students and ensure that no group of students is overlooked regardless of achievement.** During interviews with the superintendent, superintendent's leadership team and administrative staff, the achievement gap and graduation rate of minority students were identified as concerns. Standard of Learning assessments (SOL) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) data on the website and in the Quality Assurance Report supported the concern, showing significant gaps (14% in reading, 20% in math and 22% in science) between black and white students. There have been improvements in these scores over the past two years; however, the gaps among the subgroups continue. It is recommended that the effectiveness of implementing the research-based strategies be monitored and evaluated for implementation fidelity and effectiveness over time as practices become institutionalized. Improvement teams need to consider additional data when developing plans that are comprehensive and effective.
4. **Establish a process for systematically securing input from all stakeholders, including students.** During interviews with the superintendent and stakeholders, it was evident that there was not a process or practice in place to secure feedback from parents, community members, and students. During interviews with community stakeholders, parents, and

students, it was evident that communication from the superintendent and the schools was extensive. The groups also reported that when they had specific questions there was a rapid response. However, there was no perception or evidence that the division sought input on issues during the planning stage or after implementation of initiatives. There was ample evidence through artifacts of communications from the district office, schools, and the website of the one-way communication. There was one example of seeking feedback on the vision, mission, and beliefs; however, this was done electronically and not all stakeholders were aware nor did all have access to technology. Stakeholders had a great deal of positive feedback for the schools but also shared some insightful ideas that could benefit the system and students.

5. **Create a K-12 model for school improvement plans that clarifies and consistently uses the components of the process of continuous improvement, i.e., vision, profile, plan (including strategies), and results. Each school's improvement plan should align with the division's Strategic Plan.** Evidence reviewed by the Quality Assurance Review Team demonstrated a lack of consistency across the district's schools in the contents of the individual planning documents. Development and implementation of a more formal, collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the system with the expectations for student learning will more effectively guide future improvement efforts. The development of a K-12 model for school improvement plans should be structured in a way which results in a continuous plan to address the four components of the continuous improvement process. The vision of becoming a national leader can be enhanced by working to ensure standardization of plans individualized to the needs of each school and aligned to the division's strategic plan.

Next Steps

The school district should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on student performance and the effectiveness of the school division.
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 division's efforts to improve student performance and division 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 district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides online resources, research, handbooks, and tools to assist school districts and their schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for assistance in accessing these resources.

Celebrating Accreditation

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

Summary

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

Standard Reports

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it commits to a purpose and direction that is shared system-wide. The leadership establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the system's vision that is supported by system and school personnel and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and district effectiveness. The system's vision guides allocations of time and human, material, and fiscal resources.

Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools is a vibrant, enthusiastic school division in a community that is growing rapidly. The current superintendent of Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools began his tenure four years ago. The centralized administrative reorganization that he initiated began the transition away from site-based management that was implemented under the direction of previous superintendents.

The superintendent has led the division in the adoption of statements of vision and mission, which guides the work of the school division. Prior to adoption by the school board, an electronic survey was conducted to solicit responses from administrators, staff, and the community-at-large. The survey was placed on the division web page for email response. The survey results did not indicate sufficient consensus for changing the wording of either the vision or mission statements. After review and discussion with the board, administrative council members, school leadership teams, staff members, and stakeholders in the community, the school board adopted the vision and mission statements.

The review team found strong evidence in interviews with division-level administrators and principals, school leadership teams, faculty, students, parents, and community stakeholders that the vision and mission of WJCCPS serves as the basis not only for the allocation of resources, but also for educational program design and school/division improvement goals.

The review team noted several practices deserving of recognition:

- The vision, mission, and core beliefs statements are communicated, understood, and enthusiastically shared by all stakeholders interviewed.
- The strategic plan that was in place at the time of the superintendent’s arrival included 129 objectives, with the complexity making it difficult to guide the division. Following the adoption of the mission and vision statements, the strategic plan was pared down to include eight annual improvement goals.
- The mission and vision statements direct the allocation of resources, evidenced by improvements in the academic program, improvements in student learning, maintenance of competitive compensation packages, and the implementation of the multi-year technology plan.

The team offers the following suggestion for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a systematic process to survey stakeholder groups on a regular basis to determine their perceptions regarding the quality and effectiveness of the district and to have input on the development of district-wide goals.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Williamsburg-James City County Public School Division has met the accreditation requirements for the Vision and Purpose standard.

Governance and Leadership

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has leaders who are advocates for the system’s vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders function with clearly defined authority and responsibility and encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for system and school improvement among stakeholders. The system’s policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

The Williamsburg-James City County Public School Division has written policies and procedures that promote the effective operation of the school system and support its vision, purpose, beliefs, and goals. A seven-member board of trustees governs the Williamsburg-James City County Public School Division. Five members are elected by single member districts and two are appointed members. The board meets twice monthly, once for a regular meeting and once as a work session.

The board members demonstrate support and trust of the administrative team by allowing the superintendent to operate the district without political interference. Board members receive training and instruction regarding board powers, policies, school laws of the state and educational research and trends through the Virginia School Board Association and the National School Board

Association. The board has the assistance of legal counsel as needed and secures adequate insurance to protect the financial stability of the district. The board and administration have been exemplary in providing funds for meeting the needs of the system.

The superintendent serves as the chief executive officer of the school system. He and his administrative team are responsible for regulations, policies, and procedures that support the vision, mission, and beliefs of the system. The superintendent communicates through newsletters, meetings with principals and other staff members, presentations at various organizations, and a comprehensive website. The superintendent and central office supervisors are frequently visible in the schools and are there to assist school staffs in achieving the mission of the schools.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The superintendent and administrative team directly target professional development for the district and ensure that professional development occurs at the school level. All professional development is targeted at the strategic plan initiatives.
- The Superintendent's Leadership Team monitors the implementation and progress of the district and school improvement plans as well as teaching and learning strategies.
- An impressive analysis and compilation of student achievement data are provided to teachers. Using this data, teachers collaborate and are involved in decisions which guide the operations of the schools.
- The superintendent personally analyzed student NCLB data, delivered the results to the schools, and discussed the results with the principals and faculties.
- The superintendent communicated a high priority of being personally accessible as evidenced by meeting with PTA leaders monthly and scheduling regular meetings with other community stakeholders.
- Transparency is a hallmark of the central office in all aspects of governing the school division.
- There is strong evidence based on staffing and support personnel assignments that the division provides direction, assistance, and resources that align and support all parts of the system in meeting student performance goals.

The team offers the following suggestion for improvement in this standard area:

- As evidenced in interviews with the board, the superintendent, and stakeholders, there are no systematic processes in place for seeking parent, community, and student feedback. Current practices of using Internet survey tools exclude certain critical, at risk stakeholders from high stakes assessments. Therefore, the QAR Team suggests that the division establish a process for systematically securing input from all stakeholders, including students.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Highly Functional** indicating that the Williamsburg-James City County Public School Division has met the accreditation requirements for the Governance and Leadership standard.

Teaching and Learning

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The system ensures that teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process; provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations; and give students feedback to improve their performance.

Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools has a genuine commitment to student academic success. Interviews revealed that instructional leaders at both the division and school levels provide leadership that focuses on sustained growth in student learning and school improvement. The curriculum is based on state and national standards which are aligned with instructional practices. This vertical and horizontal alignment exists across the division and is strengthened by data based instructional decisions. The school division adopted Research-Based Instructional Strategies and Building Background Knowledge. Extensive division-wide professional development was provided to all teachers, and strategies are to be used in all core subjects and reflected in lesson plans.

It is clear that Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools is making the effort to prepare students for the 21st century. The gathering and analyzing of data has become important to the division and all stakeholders in this time of accountability. Through Advanced Placement classes, Career Pathways, student support specialists, and Child Study and Literacy Teams, students are challenged to think critically and to become lifelong learners.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The superintendent provides strong academic leadership for learning.
- A Director of Technology, Supervisor of Instructional Technology, computer classroom teachers, and instructional technology resource teachers are available to all schools and continue to be a priority for the division's technology initiative.
- Student progress monitoring allows identification of those who need additional assistance through tutoring opportunities and remediation.
- The QAR Team recognizes that the division initiatives of Response to Intervention (RTI), time management at the secondary level and the transitional initiatives that are being addressed in stages through cohort study groups as positive moves to engage more stakeholder input, decrease the fears of rapid change, and provide for in-depth understanding of the issues.
- Pacing guides and curriculum maps are utilized and are essential to effective classroom instruction.
- The use of data notebooks is made available to teachers so that instructional strategies are initiated immediately to meet the needs of individual students.

The team offers the following suggestion for improvement in this standard area:

- Gather data beyond student achievement when developing plans to address the achievement gap. This data needs to be considered by school leadership teams to develop effective and comprehensive school improvement plans.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Williamsburg-James City County Public School Division has met the accreditation requirements for the Teaching and Learning standard.

Documenting and Using Results

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

Impact Statement: A school system is successful in meeting this standard when it uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly-defined performance measures. The assessment system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, identify gaps between expectations for student learning and student performance, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine interventions to improve student performance. The assessment system yields timely and accurate information that is meaningful and useful to system and school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in understanding student performance, system and school effectiveness, and the results of improvement efforts.

The superintendent, central office staff, administrators, and teachers utilize an extensive review of data to impact the instructional program for students in Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools. Virginia Standards of Learning assessment data, local reading benchmark test data, Advanced Placement (AP) scores, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), The Preliminary SAT (PSAT), and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) subgroup data are included in the analysis. The school leadership teams, central office staff members, and teachers use the data to identify how best to serve the individual needs of students and to ultimately impact the classroom teacher’s instructional focus. The newly developed K-8 benchmark assessments (reading) are given at the end of each nine-week period. The data from these benchmark tests are used to inform the instructional practice and to prepare students for the Virginia Standards of Learning Tests.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The superintendent disseminated and explained the AYP test results in a faculty meeting at each school in September.
- The department of Accountability, Assessment, and Research provides extensive training on how to interpret and utilize specific student test data.
- The division has implemented research-based instructional strategies as a major focus of their three-year professional development initiative.
- The division documents data from similar school districts to compare student performance.
- Data are openly shared with faculty members.

The team offers the following suggestion for improvement and growth in this standard area:

- Develop a model for the K-12 school improvement planning document that clarifies and consistently uses the components of the process of continuous improvement.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational** indicating that the Williamsburg-James City County Public School Division has met the accreditation requirements for the Documenting and Using Results standard.

Resource and Support Systems

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that: enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, meets special needs, and complies with applicable regulations. The system employs and allocates staff well-qualified for their assignments. The system provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The system ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations.

The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools employs a staff of 1625 individuals charged with providing a quality educational experience to 10,137 students. The division has a well-defined recruitment and employment process led by the human resources department.

Professional development efforts have been funded and strengthened over time and are continuous for all levels of employees. Teachers receive recertification points in accordance with state guidelines. Tuition assistance is also provided as financial support for advanced study. This division provides a significant number of support personnel and a comprehensive array of programs designed to complement classroom learning.

Teachers, parents, building and district administrators, and community members are engaged in a budgeting process designed to determine budgetary allocations. The budgetary process is interactive with short and long term budget projections of need. The process addresses needed personnel, educational resources, technology, and capital improvement.

The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools Division maintains physical facilities that are well-maintained and in excellent condition. The district has focused on providing significant technological equipment, services, and support personnel to prepare students for life and work in the 21st century.

The division and each school prepare crisis management plans with appropriate training for all stakeholders. The division is the first in Virginia to employ Rapid Response technology in conjunction with local law enforcement and fire safety departments. Additionally, the maintenance department is moving from potentially toxic chemicals for cleaning to green chemicals.

Support systems and personnel are provided to ensure services in the areas of special education, alternative education, health, counseling, social work, school psychology, parental involvement, nutrition and wellness, multicultural diversity, and student conduct.

James City County Parks and Recreation has before- and after-school care and summer camps at each elementary and middle school in Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools Division. There is also a city, county and division partnership responsible for maintenance of the grounds.

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The division has made a determined effort to provide up-to-date technology in classroom equipment for student use and in teacher tools to support student achievement.
- The division has responded to data analysis by providing quality professional development that supports stated goals and equips teachers to better meet the needs of students.
- Instruction specialists have been added to the central office staff, and content coaches have been provided at the school level to foster student learning.
- Central office staff members support teachers by being in classrooms on a regular basis.
- The division responds to disaggregated data by providing personnel to address the needs of subgroups.
- The division places strong emphasis on maintaining low pupil-teacher ratios.

The team offers the following suggestion for improvement and growth in this standard area:

- Develop a plan to expand opportunities for collaboration with the area's growing retirement population to foster support for schools as well as for division initiatives.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level **Highly Functional** indicating that the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools Division has met the accreditation requirements for the Resource and Support Systems standard.

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

STANDARD: The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has the understanding, commitment, and support of stakeholders. System and school personnel seek opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership among stakeholders to help students learn and advance improvement efforts.

The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools uses its district web site as the primary vehicle for disseminating information to the 1625 employees who support the students and schools. The website is constantly evolving and features a public side and a comprehensive Intranet for staff members. The public side features stories of interest, community quick links, school board policy, survey information and special projects, historical news stories, information links to each school,

and the board of education in addition to teaching and learning resources, departmental websites, and employment opportunities.

The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools operates under a strategic plan that originated in 2007. Processes involved a broad range of stakeholders, including parents, business leaders, elected officials, and staff from central office and from schools, thus ensuring the system's responsiveness to community expectations and stakeholder satisfaction. Following the board of education's adoption of the strategic plan, each school used the district plan as a guide to develop school improvement plans. This next level of planning also included additional stakeholders at each school. The visiting team had an opportunity to interview a number of participants who reflected on their enthusiasm for the process as well as on the positive work that has resulted from the process. The strategic planning document along with board of education agendas and minutes are available to the community on-line and via television and have been accessed by various stakeholders as reported to the team.

Through interviews, the Quality Assurance Review Team learned of additional examples of stakeholder involvement through ad hoc committees, PTA's, school committees, and special focus and study groups. The board of education includes staff and community in a number of issues including technology initiatives, the school calendar, and future initiatives.

Varied data sources including parent and staff surveys are used for decision-making. Faculty surveys are used to influence professional development topics, a practice much praised by classroom teachers. *Edline* is used by schools and district level administrators to inform parents, teachers and stakeholders of current updates and information. The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools is increasing its use of email and teacher websites to communicate with parents on a variety of issues.

The team had an opportunity to receive commendations from parents and staff regarding progress in developing improved communication with the diverse community served by the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools. Cultural programs, interdisciplinary learning units, and special meeting opportunities have enhanced relationships between schools and this group of stakeholders. This improvement has resulted in the inclusion of more economically challenged parents in school activities as well as in the overall achievement of at promise students.

Volunteer opportunities exist at each level of the system. In this community, the schools take great pride in offering parents, as well as other stakeholders, opportunities to be involved in curricular and extra-curricular activities as evidenced by statements made in meetings with stakeholders.

The review team noted several practices deserving of recognition:

- The superintendent sets a high standard of visibility by being in schools frequently and by his participation in school PTA meetings, study groups, and focus groups.
- The division's goal of transparency is supported by its efforts to keep stakeholders well-informed on all issues, reports, decisions, and events through a variety of media.
- The Education Foundation does a valuable service in securing community support for division initiatives.

The team offers the following suggestion for improvement and growth in this standard area:

- Design a systematic plan for securing input, at the division level, from all stakeholder groups, including students.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the Stakeholder Communications and Relationships standard.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the system with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained and the system and its schools demonstrate progress in improving student performance. New improvement efforts are informed by the results of earlier efforts through analysis of student performance, system effectiveness, and assessment of the improvement process.

The Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools Division clearly articulates its vision of creating lifelong learners, critical thinkers, and responsible citizens. Data collection and analysis provide the evidence that the student learning needs are being met and the achievement gap is narrowing between current and expected student performance levels. The process is a systematic plan implemented by the division which establishes guidelines that individual schools follow when developing school improvement plans. The division ensures that school personnel are provided professional development and technical assistance to implement interventions and achieve improvement goals.

Upon examining the data, each school creates a systematic plan for school improvement based on the analysis of data and works toward the attainment of the vision and purpose of the division. Individual schools, with the input from teachers, establish measurable objectives which are outlined in each school's improvement plan and allow each school to reflect and self-assess the results. All school improvement plans are reviewed by the two executive directors for elementary and secondary instruction. The plans are also the basis for principal evaluations.

Division curricula are mandated at all grade levels, and content-based courses are accompanied by pacing guides. Early release time is provided for school personnel to participate in professional growth and development in the following areas: research-based instructional strategies to improve delivery of instruction, building background knowledge through direct vocabulary instruction and school-wide reading strategies, common planning time, and use of benchmark and common assessments.

The school division communicates the results of improvement efforts to its stakeholders through the use of televised board meetings, school report cards, website, newsletters, superintendent monthly newsletter, and radio broadcasts. The superintendent's practice is transparency in all data to highlight progress, needs, and areas of improvement.

The review team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The division provides a culture of continuous improvement focused on student achievement which is data-driven and researched-based. Continuous improvement is anchored by data analysis.
- The division staff has an unrelenting focus on teaching and learning.
- The division has a strong emphasis and focus on data including the use, understanding, and application of data to drive division improvement.
- The division engages in a culture of continuous school improvement based on student achievement.
- The central office staff is committed to sustaining and supporting division initiatives.
- Evidence has been provided that each school's plan for continuous improvement includes a focus on increasing learning for all students and closing gaps between current and expected students' performance levels.

The team offers the following suggestion for improvement and growth in this standard area:

- Develop a model for the K-12 school improvement planning document that clarifies and consistently uses the components of the process of continuous improvement.

Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools Division has met the accreditation requirements for the Continuous Improvement standard.

Quality Assurance Findings

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

Documentation and interviews reveal that the district utilizes highly effective quality assurance procedures to ensure that each school meets and complies with state and federal requirements, as well as AdvancED accreditation standards. These include frequent school site visits by the superintendent and central office staff, staffing and resource allocations consistent with AdvancED standards, professional evaluation system, and frequent monitoring of formative assessment data as well as comprehensive analysis of summative assessment data and recently updated walk-through techniques.

Principals submit their school improvement plans and school professional development plans to the two Executive Directors for Instruction after the plan is developed by the schools' leadership teams and faculties. These plans become part of the evaluation of principals during their annual evaluation which is conducted by the superintendent and the executive directors for instruction. Principals relate target areas of the plan and discuss which goals were met and areas which may need to be addressed. Principals share their preliminary goals for the year based on an analysis of the schools data.

Strengths

- District instructional leadership provides regular support in the schools.
- Frequent review of data provides the opportunity to adjust and refocus improvement efforts throughout the year.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

- Develop and implement an annual process for ensuring that the schools are in compliance with the AdvancED standards to the same extent that the district is in compliance with the district standards. District accreditation requires that the district monitor the schools' compliance with the AdvancED standards for schools.

Conclusion

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

The team identified several recommendations for improvement that the school district will need to address. Two years following this review, the school district 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 Dr. Gary S. Mathews and Dr. Regina Yitbarek, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS CASI accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

Dr. Billy K. Floyd, Team Chair, (South Carolina) currently serves as Director of the South Carolina Council on Accreditation and School Improvement and as a Consultant for District for the South Carolina School Boards Association. Some of his prior experiences include superintendent, curriculum director; high school and junior high school principal; assistant principal; and math teacher.

Dr. Terry Caldwell, Vice-Chair, (Virginia) currently serves as the Director of Support Services in Bristol Virginia Public Schools. Prior to assuming this position, Dr. Caldwell has served as the ETS “PATHWISE” Mentor Training Program, Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinator, Ninth Grade Transition Team Coordinator and special education teacher. He is a member of Phi Delta Kappa International, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Association of Secondary Principals, and has served in a leadership capacity with the Virginia High School League Coaches Association.

Dr. Trish Beason (South Carolina) currently serves as the Coordinator of K-12 Special Education Curriculum and Instruction, Accountability and ADEPT with Spartanburg School District One in Campobello, South Carolina. Prior to assuming this position, Dr. Beason served as Middle School Curriculum Coordinator, District Assessment Coordinator, high school assistant principal and teacher of special education.

Cindy Crance (Virginia) currently serves as the Director of Instruction for Rockbridge County Schools. Prior experiences include high school and elementary special education teacher and elementary principal.

Judy Powell (South Carolina) is a retired public school educator with thirty-five years of experience. Her previous professional experiences include serving as principal of Walhalla Elementary School, assistant principal at James M. Brown Elementary School, guidance counselor (elementary and middle school), and teacher at the middle and high school levels. In addition, Ms. Powell has served as an adjunct teacher for Winthrop and Furman Universities and is currently an AdvancED Reader Reviewer.

Dr. K. David Smith (Virginia) currently serves as superintendent of the Bath County Public Schools. Some prior experiences include Director of Gifted Education, Bedford County, Virginia, high school principal, elementary principal, secondary assistant principal/athletic director, and instrumental music teacher/director of bands.

Simone M. Terry (Virginia) currently serves as Director of Curriculum and Instruction with the Isle of Wight County Schools in Virginia. Prior to this, she served as supervisor for science K-5 with Newport News Public Schools, principal, director of the magnet program and teacher of biology with Newport News Public Schools.

Vera Abbott-Young (Virginia) currently serves as an elementary principal in Prince George County. Some of her experience has been as a teacher in special education and elementary education, an assistant principal for four years and now a principal for nine years. The 36 years in education has consisted of 32 years in public education and four years in private schools.

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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