Montgomery County Schools

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TO: Board of Education

FROM: Dale Ellis

DATE: December 3, 2012

SUBJ: INFORMATION ITEM (AdvancED Official Report)

Attached is the official report from AdvancED. It offers a more detailed view of the external review process that took place in October. The main "Powerful Practices" I wish to highlight are as follows:

1. Alignment of district strategic plan, department plans, and school improvement plans that allows flexibility for site-based decisions to achieve accountability for desired, positive results.
2. The system deploys strategic resource management that prioritizes fiscal needs, monitors implementation, and evaluates effectiveness.
3. The district has established and maintains a comprehensive student assessment system (i.e. PDSA, predictive/formative assessments).
4. Data is used as the primary driver of student instruction.

The prioritized Opportunities for Improvement are recommended as follows:

1. Parent Engagement must be improved.
2. Training to support digital/technological learning environments.
3. Additional support staff (contingent upon available budget)

Plans will be, and/or are in the process of being developed for each of the OFI's listed here.

I am available to answer any questions you might have.

AdvancED

External Review

Montgomery County Schools

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Date: October 14, 2012 - October 17, 2012

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Introduction to the External Review Process

Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools, and designed primarily to distinguish schools adhering to a set of educational standards. Today the accreditation process is used at all levels of education, and is recognized for its ability to effectively drive student performance and continuous improvement in education.

Institutions seeking to gain or retain accreditation must meet AdvancED standards specified for their institution, demonstrate high levels of or improvement of student performance if applicable, and provide evidence of stakeholder satisfaction with the operation of the institution. The accreditation standards focus on conditions and processes within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards, student performance, and stakeholder feedback.

Institutions participate in an External Review by a team of highly qualified evaluators who examine the institution's adherence and commitment to the accreditation criteria. The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation as it energizes and equips the leadership and stakeholders of an institution to achieve higher levels of performance and address those areas that may be hindering efforts to reach desired performance levels. External Review is a rigorous process that includes examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of instruction, learning, and operations.

The AdvancED External Review Team used the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators and related criteria to guide its evaluation, looking not only for adherence to standards, but also for how the institution functioned as a whole and embodied the practices and characteristics of quality.

Using the evidence at their disposal, the AdvancED External Review Team arrived at a set of findings contained in this report. The report is presented in three sections: Findings, Conclusion, and Addenda.

Part I: Findings

The Findings section presents the External Review Team's evaluation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators. It also includes Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement identified by the External Review Team, observations of the Learning Environment, as well as Required Actions.

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

Standards help to delineate what matters. They provide a common language through which an education community can engage in conversations about educational improvement, system effectiveness, and achievement. They serve as a foundation for planning and implementing improvement strategies and activities and for measuring success. AdvancED's Standards for Quality were developed by a committee comprised of effective educators and leaders from the fields of practice, research, and policy who applied professional wisdom, deep knowledge of effective practice, and the best available research to craft a set of robust standards that ensure excellence and continuous improvement. The standards were reviewed by internationally recognized experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research.

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, conclusions concerning Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards, and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team. Indicators are evaluated and rated individually by the External Review Team using a four-level performance rubric. The Standard Performance Level is the average of indicator scores for the standard.

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction
Purpose and direction are critical to successful institutions. A study conducted in 2010 by the London-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that "in addition to improving performance, the research indicates that having a sense of shared purpose also improves employee engagement" and that "...lack of understanding around purpose can lead to demotivation and emotional detachment, which in turn lead to a disengaged and dissatisfied workforce."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution commits to a shared purpose and direction and establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the institutions' vision that is supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

Standard	Standard Performance Level

The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.		2.75
Indicator		**Source of Evidence**	**Performance Level**

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	•District purpose statements - past and present •Copy of strategic plan referencing the district purpose and direction and its effectiveness •Superintendent, staff, teacher, parent, and student interviews	3
1.2	The system ensures that each school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	•Examples of written stakeholder communications or marketing materials that portray the school purpose and direction •Mid-year and end-of-year review sessions	3
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	•Examples of schools' continuous improvement plans •The district strategic plan •Statements of shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning	2
1.4	Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	•The district strategic plan •The district data profile •Examples of schools continuous improvement plans	3

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Develop, monitor and document a well-defined planning process, including procedures, timelines and participant input, for reviewing each school's purpose for success.
Monitoring the process of establishing and implementing a vision and mission for each school will ensure fidelity and an alignment with the district level commitment to continuous improvement.

1.2

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

Governance and leadership are key factors in raising institutional quality. Leaders, both local administrators and governing boards/authorities, are responsible for ensuring all learners achieve while also managing many other facets of an institution. Institutions that function effectively do so without tension between the governing board/authority, administrators, and educators and have established relationships of mutual respect and a shared vision (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998). In a meta-analysis of school leadership research, Leithwood & Sun (2012) found that leaders (school and governing

boards/authority) can significantly "influence school conditions through their achievement of a shared vision and agreed-on goals for the organization, their high expectations and support of organizational members, and practices that strengthen school culture and foster collaboration within the organization." With the increasing demands of accountability placed on institutional leaders, leaders who empower others need considerable autonomy and involve their school communities to attain school improvement goals. Leaders who engage in such practices experience a greater level of success (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Similarly, governing boards/authorities that focus on policy-making are more likely to allow school leaders the autonomy to make decisions that impact teachers and students and are less responsive to politicization than boards/authorities that respond to vocal citizens (Greene, 1992).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has leaders who are advocates for the institution'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 encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders. The institution's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.		3.17
Indicator		**Source of Evidence**	**Performance Level**

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	•Professional development plans •System Policies, process for oversight of fiscal management	4
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	•Proof of legal counsel •Governing authority training plan •Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest •Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies	3
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	•District strategic plan •Stakeholder input and feedback •Examples of school improvement plans •Plan, Do, Study, and Act (PDSA) Continuous Improvement Model	4

2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	•Examples of decisions in support of the schools' continuous improvement plans •Examples of decisions aligned with the district's purpose and direction •Examples of collaboration and shared leadership •Examples of decisions aligned with the district's strategic plan •Examples of improvement efforts and innovations in the educational programs •Professional development offerings and plans •School-level interviews, Community Advisory Meeting Minutes, Superintendent's Advisory Council	3
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	•Minutes from meetings with stakeholders •Examples of stakeholder input or feedback resulting in district action •Involvement of stakeholders in district strategic plan •School-level interviews with school improvement teams	2
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation •Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation •Job specific criteria	3

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. Alignment of system strategic plan, department improvement plans, and school level improvement plans ensure that a process exists to meet the goals for achievement.
    Schools and departments must have the decision-making flexibility if they are to be held accountable for achieving continuous improvement. The school system affords them the autonomy needed to make decisions relative to identified continuous improvement needs and they use a common language for discussing continuous improvement to ensure that all parties are in-sync during the process.

2.3

2. Transparency in communication exists between the school board and   2.4
superintendent and the central office leadership and school leadership which
fosters a culture consistent with the system'ÂÂs purpose and direction.
Communication structures in place, such as Superintendent'ÂÂs Advisory
Councils. quarterly coaching sessions with principals, positive board member and
parent interview feedback regarding the superintendent performance of his duties,
and school level interview feedback about system level support are indicative an
alignment of systems actions with its stated purpose and direction.

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Seek-out and implement best practices that show promise for achieving more   2.5
parent engagement for effectively supporting the system's purpose and direction.
Efforts are made to communicate with parents, but additional opportunities for
parent engagement for shaping decisions, working on school improvement efforts,
and serving in more leadership roles are needed.

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

A high-quality and effective system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher
effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their
highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has
on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership"
(Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of
quantifiable and intangible characteristics, which include strong communication skills, knowledge of
content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The school's curriculum and instructional program
should develop learners' skills that lead them to think about the world in complex ways (Conley, 2007)
and prepare them to have knowledge that extends beyond the academic areas. In order to achieve these
goals, teachers must have pedagogical skills as well as content knowledge (Baumert et al, 2010). The
acquisition and refinement of teachers' pedagogical skills occur most effectively through collaboration and
professional development. These are a "necessary approach to improving teacher quality" (Colbert et al,
2008). According to Marks, Louis, & Printy (2002), school staff that engage in "active organizational
learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study
conducted by Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective schools, "supports
teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to
provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that
promotes student learning and educator quality.

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world
that a successful institution 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. Teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning
process. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world
situations. Teachers give students feedback to improve their performance.

Standard	Standard Performance Level

The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.		2.75
Indicator		**Source of Evidence**	**Performance Level**

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The system's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	•Course or program descriptions •Student work across courses or programs •Lesson plans •Posted learning objectives •Course, program, or school schedules •Descriptions of instructional techniques •PDSA Continuous Improvement Model, Interviews with superintendent and curriculum team	2
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	•Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum •Profile of educational model or delivery system •A description of the systematic review process for curriculum, instruction, and assessment	3
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	•Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource •Student work demonstrating the application of knowledge •Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the approved or prescribed instructional strategies and programs •Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation •Findings from supervisor formal and informal observations •Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool	2

3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	•Supervision and evaluation procedures •Documentation of collection of lesson plans, grade books, or other data record systems •Examples of improvements to instructional practices resulting from the evaluation process •Administrative classroom observation protocols and logs •Professional development offerings and plans tied to the prescribed education program, instructional strategies, developmentally appropriate practices, and student success	3
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	•Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings •Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration •Common language, protocols and reporting tools •Professional development funding to promote professional learning communities •Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees •Evidence of informal conversations that reflect collaboration about student learning	3
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	•Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance •Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction	3
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	•Records of meetings and informal feedback sessions •Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff •Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to district and school beliefs and values about teaching and learning	3

3.8	The system and all of its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of their children's learning progress.	•List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days •Calendar outlining when and how families are provided information on child's progress •Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance •Performance-based report cards	3
3.9	The system designs and evaluates structures in all schools whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports that student's educational experience.	•Description of formalized structures for adults to advocate on behalf of students •Interviews with school and district-level staffs	2
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	•Sample report cards for each program or grade level and for all courses and programs •District quality control procedures including the monitoring of grading practices across all schools •Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting •Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices •Interviews with school and district-level staffs	3
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	•Evaluation tools for professional learning •District professional development plan involving the district and all schools •District quality control procedures showing implementation plan for professional development for district and school staff •Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs •Interviews with school and district-level staffs	3

| 3.12 | The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students. | •Data used to identify unique learning needs of students

•Training and professional learning related to research on unique characteristics of learning

•List of learning support services and student population served by such services

•Schedules, lesson plans, or example student learning plans showing the implementation of learning support services

•Interviews with school and district-level staffs | 3 |

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

Institutions, regardless of their size, need access to sufficient resources and systems of support to be able to engage in sustained and meaningful efforts that result in a continuous improvement cycle. Indeed, a study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Pan, 2003) "demonstrated a strong relationship between resources and student success...both the level of resources and their explicit allocation seem to affect educational outcomes."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, to meet special needs, and to comply with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staffs who are well qualified for their assignments. The institution provides a safe learning environment for students and staff. The institution provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.	2.63
Indicator			**Source of Evidence**	**Performance Level**

4.1	The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ, and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, and educational programs.	•Assessments of staffing needs •District quality assurance procedures for monitoring qualified staff across all schools •Survey results •Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff for the district and schools •Documentation of highly qualified staff •District budgets or financial plans for the last three years •Mentor logs, Beginning Teacher Support Plan, External Audit Reports, Interviews with District Leadership Team	2
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs, and system operations.	•Examples of school schedules •District strategic plan showing resources support for district •Alignment of district budget with district purpose and direction •Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources •Examples of school calendars •Alignment of school budgets with school purpose and direction •Superintendent's Presentation, external audit report, assorted artifacts, interviews with school-level leadership teams	3
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	•School safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes •Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments •Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements •Example systems for school maintenance requests •Self Assessment and Executive Summary Reports, Interviews with central office and school custodial staff and facilities director, observations during school visits.	3

4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	•District quality control procedures showing the monitoring of compliance with district expectations for school facilities, learning environments •District strategic plan showing the areas of budget, facilities, quality control, and other strategic systems •Audit Reports, Assorted Artifacts, District Leadership Team Interviews, School-level interviews, Self-Assessment and Executive Summary Reports	3
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	•Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information •Data on media and information resources available to students and staff •District education delivery model intended for school implementation including media and information resources to support the education program •Central office and School-level Interviews	3
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	•Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model •District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level •Policies relative to technology use at the district-level and school-level	3
4.7	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	•Interviews with school and district-level staffs, parents, and other artifacts	2
4.8	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	•Description of referral process •List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning •Description of IEP process •System's executive summary, self-assessment, interviews with parents, students, teachers and central office staff	2

Powerful Practices	*Indicator*

1.   The system demonstrates strategic resource management through the review of individual improvement plans across all sectors by departments at the central office, and by the superintendent.   **4.4**

The system has adopted an approach and deployment model that explores ways to prioritize fiscal needs, monitor implementation of actions and evaluate their effectiveness. The system discovered additional ways for saving money including an energy management coordinated by a trained energy manager. This resulted in both reducing the systemâs carbon footprint and saving approximately $643,000 or 19% of their energy budget.

Opportunities for Improvement	*Indicator*

1.   Reassign staff as needed and available to students of sub-populations to address their social, emotional, and unique educational needs.   **4.7**
One social worker for the entire school system is not adequate to meet the social and emotional needs of students, especially those in sub-populations. The counseling ratio at one of the high schools is over 250 to 1. Instructional facilitators often double as an informal counselor at the school and other school needs that arise. Implementation of this opportunity for improvement should provide a lower caseload for the one social worker, provide needed counseling/guidance services for all students, and improve the quality of service through lower pupil to counselor ratios.

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

Systems with strong improvement processes are moving beyond anxiety about the current reality and focusing on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, that is, data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, & Wohlstetter (2007) from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California indicated that data can shed light on existing areas of strength and weakness and also guide improvement strategies in a systematic and strategic manner (Dembosky et al., 2005). The study also identified six key strategies that performance-driven systems use: (1) building a foundation for data-driven decision making; (2) establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement; (3) investing in an information management system; (4) selecting the right data; (5) building school capacity for data-driven decision making; and (6) analyzing and acting on data to improve performance. Other research studies, though largely without comparison groups, suggested that data-driven decision making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Lafee, 2002; McIntire, 2002).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures. The system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine strategies to improve student performance. The institution implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained, and the institution demonstrates progress in improving student performance and institution

effectiveness.

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	•Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model •Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local or school assessments on student learning and school performance •Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free •Survey results •Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness •Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols •Superintendent's blog, progress monitoring calendar, stakeholder interviews	3

5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	•Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning •Examples of data used to measure the effectiveness of the district systems that support schools and learning •District quality control procedures that monitor schools in effectively using data to improve instruction and student learning •Examples of changes to the district strategic plan based on data results •List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning •Written protocols and procedures for data collection and analysis •Stakeholder interviews and other artifiacts	3
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	•Policies and written procedures specific to data training •Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data •Needs assessment results, and stakeholder interviews	3
5.4	The school system engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	•Examples of use of results to evaluate continuous improvement action plans •Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data •Evidence of student growth •Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning •Observations and stakeholder Interviews	3

5.5	System and school leaders monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders.	•District quality control procedures for monitoring district effectiveness •Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals •Examples of district marketing tools and websites that cite student achievement results or that make promises regarding student achievement •District quality control procedures for monitoring information about student learning, systems that support learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals •Stakeholder interviews and other artifiacts	3

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. Montgomery County Schools has established and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.   5.1
    Curriculum review week, predictive assessments, formative/summative assessments, and PDSA and other artifacts provide evidence of a clearly defined and comprehensive assessment system. One of the the primary benefits of such a system is that it provides data to inform instruction and the other being a tool to monitor the effectiveness of the system in achieving the learning goals and objectives in its strategic plan.

2. Support personnel use data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans to increase opportunities for differentiated instruction that addresses unique learner needs.   5.2
    Interviews and a review of supporting documentation revealed clear examples of how the system uses data to inform instruction. The practice allows the system to plan and deliver instruction to better meet individual needs of all students via differentiated instruction and other pedagogies that target unique learner needs.

3. Montgomery County Schools' Leadership Team monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support students learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.   5.5
    The system's website, artifacts, open school board meetings, superintendent's community meetings (dinners), written communication plan, correspondence with parents showing how to read assessment results, quarterly review of school improvement plans, and mid-year review of district strategic plans all contribute the ability and effectiveness of the system to monitor and communicate comprehensive information regarding continuous improvement to stakeholders.

Learning Environment

Every learner should have access to an effective learning environment in which she/he has multiple opportunities to be successful. The Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT) measures the extent to which learners are in an environment that is equitable, supportive, and well-managed. An environment where high expectations are the norm and active learning takes place. It measures whether learners' progress is monitored and feedback is provided and the extent to which technology is leveraged for learning.

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External review team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a 4 point scale with 4=very evident, 3=evident, 2=somewhat evident, and 1=not observed. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the 7 learning environments included in ELEOT.

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT)

Environments	*Level*
Enter the Equitable Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.3
Enter the High Expectations Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.5
Enter the Supportive Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.8
Enter the Active Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.8
Enter the Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.6
Enter the Well-Managed Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.9
Enter the Digital Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	1.8

Part II: Conclusion
Summary of the External Review

In off-site and on-site review sessions, the AdvancED External Review Team examined artifacts and evidence provided by the institution. During the on-site portion of the review, the team reviewed additional artifacts, collected and analyzed data from interviews, and conducted observations.

The school system was well-prepared for the on-site external review which spanned 3 1/2 days. Throughout the visit the Montgomery County School System responded to all of the team's queries and requests and based on the teams review and triangulation of data, the system demonstrated an honest appraisal of itself and the way it shared information.

The External Review Team engaged in many activities before and during the on-site review. It studied the system's Executive Summary, Self-Assessment, and browsed the system's website in preparation for the on-site visit. During the on-site visit the team listened to presentations from the superintendent and staff that described the state of the system and how it approached and completed its Self-Assessment process. During the superintendent's presentation he profiled the school system by highlighting its mission and vision, the challenges facing the system and how the system is responding to those challenges via its strategic plan. He further profiled student achievement, student attendance, student discipline, fiscal responsiveness, teacher retention, and facilities.

The ERT interviewed thirty-six (36) administrators, seventy-nine (79) teachers, forty-four (44) parents/business partners, eighty-seven (87) students, and seven (7) board members to gain additional insight and perceptions of stakeholders regarding the school system's adherence to AdvancED standards and the effectiveness of the system in meeting its continuous improvement goals. Additionally, the team visited 6 of the system's schools including its alternative learning center. During the school visits the team reviewed school operations, observed instructional practices, and examined the learning environment that further enhanced its data collection processes.

Finally, the team synthesized the data collected and engaged in deliberations to frame its external review report and provide helpful feedback to help the system continue its improvement.

Using the evidence collected, the team engaged in dialogue and deliberations concerning the degree to which the institution met the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators.

As the ERT reviewed artifacts and engaged in discussions/interviews with stakeholders several over-arching themes emerged. Among them were:

*The existence of a systemic culture of learning that permeates the entire school system with a relentless focus on student learning where student performance and learning climates have emerged a strong core values

*The changes in leadership in the system over the past few years have led to a more focused and deliberate approach to continuous improvement through the use of the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) model, classroom walk-throughs (CWT), and instructional facilitators (coaches). The leadership changes have created a laser-like focus on student achievement.

*A strong sense of collegiality, community, and collaboration throughout the system

*A need for increased cultural sensitivity in the planning and delivery of instruction for all minority groups and when interacting with minority families.

*Inadequate student support services particularly in the areas of social work, guidance services, and special populations.

*A need for continued professional development focused on increasing teachers' digital teaching skill-set in order to create learning appropriate to course and subject area content.

Several of the over-arching themes, while notable, did not rise to the level of powerful practices, required actions, or opportunities for improvement primarily because a few may have fiscal implications. However, the team felt it important to identify the themes so that they may/can serve as catalysts for improvement when resources are available to meet the identified needs.

During the on-site review, members of the External Review Team evaluated the learning environment by observing classrooms and general operations of the institution. Using data from these observations, the team evaluated the quality of instruction and learning that took place classified around seven constructs or environments: equity, high expectations, support, engagement, progress monitoring and feedback, management, and use of technology.

A broad definition of environment is a condition or setting. As used by AdvancED, learning environment means the context in which student learning occurs with a construct as identified above.

As the ERT examined learning environments, it collected "evidence" as to whether or not students are engaged in or experiencing an environment that is conducive to learning that focuses on a number of important themes including equity, high expectations, support of learning, active learning, progress monitoring and provision of feedback, well-managed, and digital.

All of the constructs within the overall learning environment were rated above average with the exception of the use of technology (digital learning). The team found a wealth of current hardware and a sufficient technology infrastructure but it did not appear to lead to a high level of quality use of instruction to present new ways that students create their own learning. The team noted, in general, that teachers were not, in a consistent manner, effectively using the technology to promote higher order thinking or greater constructivist use among students for independent creative inquiry. At the time of the visit, the ERT noted low level activities like academic games, answering questions on the Accelerated Reader, or drill and practice. Overall, the team observed minimal use of technology as a teaching tool or use by students as a learning tool.

The ERT extends its appreciation for the excellent hospitality, support, and professionalism displayed by the Montgomery County School System. The team respects and acknowledges efforts the system has expended to improve the quality of its educational program and offers its congratulations for the progress made toward maintaining district accreditation as a quality system.

The ERT recommends RE-ACCREDITATION of the Montgomery County Schools System for a new five-year term with the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. Develop, implement, and evaluate structures that provide for long-term interaction with individual students that build strong relationships over time with the students and adults in the schools.

   Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.9

   These structures should allow school employees to gain significant insight into each student and serve as an advocate for the student'ÂÂs needs relative to learning, thinking, and life skills. Annual evaluation of these structures is very important to ensure that they are achieving their stated goals and objectives.

Part III: Addenda

Next Steps

The institution 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 Powerful Practices section to maximize their impact on the institution.
3. Develop action plans to address the Required Actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the Required Actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
5. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Required Actions. Institutions are required to respond to all Required Actions. The Required Actions should be completed before the Accreditation Progress Report is submitted. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to monitor and ensure that the system has implemented the necessary actions to complete the Required Actions. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the completion of the Required Actions and the resulting improvement.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the External Review, the Team submits the final report to AdvancED for review and for action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and upon the institution. Upon receiving its accreditation, the institution should share its achievement with internal and external communities.

About AdvancED

In 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), both founded in 1895, along with the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form AdvancED: one strong, unified organization dedicated to education quality. In 2011, the Northwest Accreditation Commission (founded 1917) joined NCA CASI and SACS CASI as part of AdvancED. AdvancED is the world's largest education community, representing 30,000 public and private schools and systems across the United States and in 75 countries worldwide and educating 16 million students. The Northwest Accreditation Commission joined the AdvancED network in 2011.

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI share research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help educational institutions continuously improve.