

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
West Branch-Rose City Area Schools**

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

Quality Assurance Review Report

Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI	3
Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review	4
Summary of Findings	5
Commendations	6
Required Actions	6
Next Steps	8
Standards for Accreditation	10
Standard 1. Vision & Purpose	10
Standard 2. Governance & Leadership	11
Standard 3. Teaching & Learning	13
Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results	15
Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems	17
Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships	18
Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement	20
Quality Assurance Findings	22
Conclusion	23
Appendix	24
Quality Assurance Review Team Members	24
AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems	24

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

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

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

Summary of Team Activities. The Quality Assurance Review Team is led by an AdvancED certified 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.

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

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

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the NCA CASI Michigan State Office (NCA-CASI-MI), a division of AdvancED, visited West Branch-Rose City Area Schools on 05/02/2010 - 05/05/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 15 administrators, 43 teachers, 7 support staff, 28 parents and business partners, 23 students, and 3 Board of Education members for a total of 119 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 5 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documenting and Using Results
5. Resource and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

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

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

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the West Branch-Rose City Area 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 district has sustained a Career and Technical Education program that is highly valued and has established strong business and community partnerships which provide students with real life application opportunities.**

The stakeholders of West Branch-Rose City Area Schools describe their vision as preparing students to be successful after high school in whatever direction they take. Parents described students being prepared for college and two-year post secondary schooling, as well as being well prepared to stay and work in the West Branch-Rose City community. Community stakeholders and business partners describe graduates of Ogemaw Heights High School as being a step ahead of other graduates. This evidence reflects the pride and confidence that stakeholders have in the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program.

The CTE program has been the means for establishing many successful partnerships with the business and post secondary education communities. Examples are seen in the building trades program which has built the Humane Society Center and is currently building the Center for Aging. These buildings illustrate the service to the community that the program provides. Additionally, the program has established partnerships with many contractors. Students learn and work with different trades and contractors during the course of their studies.

The CTE program has established a similar relationship with the medical community and two area colleges. These organizations have made donations of equipment that support the CTE program and, in the case of several computer labs, support for all students.

The Career and Technical Education program effectively fulfills the district's vision and provides many opportunities for the district and community to leverage resources and expertise toward achieving the vision of successful students.

- **The district has implemented an extended day program at the elementary and middle schools and an academic center program to assist students at the high school.**

The extended day program at the elementary and middle schools and the academic center at the high school demonstrate the district's commitment to student success. At the elementary level, the extended day program is possible because students take the bus early with the secondary students, evidence that the support services share in the vision of the district. Students are appreciative of these programs and, at all levels, expressed that their school cares about them as people and is helping them to achieve.

The extended day program and the academic center ensure that students have the skills needed to be successful. Both programs strengthen the relationships between the district and its stakeholders.

Required Actions

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions

for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall effectiveness of the school district. The West Branch-Rose City Area Schools will be held accountable for making progress on each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the required actions.

- **Implement common assessments in all curricula and develop a plan to collect, analyze, and use assessment results to inform instruction, guide curriculum decisions, and monitor student performance.**

The district's assessment matrix consists primarily of state-required assessments except at the high-school level where the EXPLORE and PLAN assessments are used to plan instructional programs that would ensure success on the state-required ACT test. The elementary schools have been involved in Reading First and are accustomed to using assessments such as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) in a formative fashion. The district has just begun to develop common assessments. Stakeholders referred to these as common assessments, quarterly assessments, end of unit assessments and end of course assessments. Common assessments are being developed in the elementary schools in mathematics and in language arts, math, and science at the middle level. At the high school, the stakeholders discussed the development of end of unit and end of course assessments.

Common assessments provide for an effective means of monitoring continuous progress. Common assessments have the potential to inform instructional practices and establish benchmarks for progress. The results of common assessments when communicated to stakeholders in a meaningful way ensures that they share in the accountability of the district. Comparing student performance on the other assessments in the district's assessment matrix with the performance of comparable schools ensures stakeholders that the district is holding itself accountable to achieving at all levels.

- **Develop a district-wide communication plan that provides information, data, goals, and achievements in a manner that is easily accessible and understandable, continuing to explore every possibility to reach all stakeholders in the district regardless of location.**

The district involves stakeholders through service on school improvement committees and the Curriculum Council. Parents are also involved in the many events that the schools host ranging from parent nights at the elementary school to athletic and music events at the secondary level. Schools use newsletters and websites to communicate with parents. The district has begun implementing Parent Connect which allows parents and students to see their grades and attendance online. When asked how they knew the schools were performing well, the district stakeholders said they either read about it in the paper or go to the district website.

The district is large in geographical area and rural in some parts. High speed internet is available only in areas where cable television is available; otherwise, stakeholders must use dial up access to the internet. This fact combined with the fact that some families do not have computers make the newspaper the primary communicator of academic performance.

The district makes extensive use of committees and involves stakeholders in most of the committee work. The Standards Assessment Report was completed in this fashion with involvement from parents, the community, and even students. The district has a Curriculum Council that provides guidance and processes for reviewing and changing curriculum.

The design and implementation of a system that involves stakeholders in the activity of schooling provides for support. Focusing communication on the expectations for learning and student performance ensures that the vision is shared by all and is meaningful to all stakeholders.

- **Develop and implement a systematic process for monitoring continuous improvement efforts that includes a plan for internal review to ensure the institutional integrity of the process. Essential elements of the process should include a plan for documenting and communicating results to all stakeholders.**

There is a District School Improvement Committee, and each school has a School Improvement Committee. These committees are made up of staff, parents, and community stakeholders. The district has a template for school improvement that each school follows, and each school reports to the district committee. The district school improvement plan includes the goal of meeting or exceeding the state average on the state assessments. In addition, there is a goal for each academic area. The goals are not written as SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) and in some cases may not be measurable.

The school improvement efforts are largely guided by external forces such as the state department of education and Title I. The district will be able to monitor continuous improvement by determining their own measures of performance in addition to the required measures. This will allow the district to communicate performance to stakeholders in a manner that is understandable to the stakeholders and will provide the district an opportunity to monitor quality rather than having external review groups be the monitor.

Designing and implementing a systematic means of focusing and evaluating the district's vision that involves stakeholders ensures their support. Systemic factors are enhanced when the district monitors the fidelity to the processes and identifies its own performance goals beyond the expectations of external groups. This ensures quality rather than compliance and drives the continuous improvement process.

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

Next Steps

The school district should:

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

Resources

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

Celebrating Accreditation

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

Summary

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

Standards for Accreditation

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

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

Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

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

Description:

The vision and mission for the West Branch-Rose City Area Schools was established in collaboration with district and community stakeholders approximately 18 to 20 years ago. Data from interviews reveal the district's mission is understood and can easily be expressed and described by students, parents, community members, and district personnel throughout the school system.

The district has included either the district or building mission statement in some publications including board agendas, school building handbooks, parent newsletters, district/building websites; and it is also displayed in some offices, schools, and classrooms. However, the mission statement was not visible systemically throughout the district. Interviews with stakeholders indicate the vision and mission provide a shared purpose and direction for the district that is understood and supported by stakeholders.

The district school improvement team meets on a regular basis and includes representatives from all stakeholder groups. This group assisted with the development of district goals that are aligned with the district's vision, mission, and are based on student need. However, the district school improvement plan's goals are not written as SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely). In addition, school improvement teams have been established at each school building within the district. The development of school improvement plans for all school buildings are facilitated by the principals and are based on specific areas of need aligned with the district goals. The goals included in each school's plan provide specific strategies and objectives for improvement, but not all goals are stated in SMART goal format.

Each year an annual report is prepared by the district that includes data for the district, schools, students, and the community. This report is shared with stakeholders, board members, and made available on the district's website. The annual reports for 2008-2009 were reviewed by the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team. The district develops and continuously maintains a profile of the system, its students, and the

community. Additionally, profile data is included in the district improvement plan and is used in the development of the goals that are included in this plan. However, a review of the artifacts and interview data reveals that stakeholder perceptions are not solicited on an annual basis systematically (processes) and systemically (infused throughout the district in everything they do).

The district ensures that the system's vision and purpose guide the teaching and learning process and the strategic direction of schools, departments, and services. While some interviewees report they participate in periodical reviews of the district mission and vision, the QAR team found no evidence that there is a systematic process in place to review and revise the vision and mission annually.

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

- School and community stakeholders have a shared sense of purpose.
- Student needs are the primary focus of the district.

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

- Develop a process for a systematic review of the district's vision and mission.
- Review system-wide goals and create stronger linkages and operating plans at the both the building and department levels that parallel district goals to solidify a systematic and systemic improvement process.
- Develop a process to obtain stakeholder perception data annually and use this data to update the district profile of the system.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the West Branch-Rose City Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

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

Description:

A review of artifacts and interview data reveals that the district has policies and procedures in place that recognize and preserve the executive, administrative, and leadership authority of the administrative head of the system. Several stakeholders indicated that while there is an open-door policy to communicate that flows up and down throughout the system, everyone is expected to follow the chain of command. Board of education members also serve on district and school committees.

The district has established board policies and administrative procedures to ensure compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws, standards, and regulations. Furthermore, these policies and procedures have been communicated in board policy manuals, in staff and student handbooks, and in a variety of locations on the district website.

District leadership implements policies and procedures that provide for the orientation and training of the governing board. This has historically been done in the past through membership and conference attendance sponsored by the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB). Although the district has

determined an alternate priority for these funds, the district board and superintendent are committed to providing new board members orientation and training through experienced board member mentoring and superintendent meetings, dialogue, and written communications.

The QAR team identified multiple methods that the district employs to build public support, secure resources, and act as a steward of the system's resources. Furthermore, the district creates and supports collaborative networks of stakeholders to support system programs. This is evidenced by seeking business partnerships to share facility space, constructing service organization facilities, recruiting volunteers for mock interviews, and presenting at local service organizations. Initiatives such as the above offset facility costs for the district, may expand services for students within the system, and strengthen the community support and ties to the school system.

The district maintains access to legal counsel for advisement and information about legal requirements and obligations. In addition, the QAR team was advised that the district maintains adequate insurance or equivalent resources to protect its financial stability and administrative operations.

The district has leadership that provides for analysis and review of student performance and school effectiveness. The QAR team did not review documentation that described the district's efforts to analyze or review system effectiveness. However, a review of artifacts and interview data reveals that the district is in the emerging stages of systematic and systemic analysis and review of student performance and school and system effectiveness.

West Branch-Rose City schools have been impacted by the economic climate in Michigan and, as a result, have worked hard to ensure there are sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement the curriculum and support the needs of all students, as evidenced through interviews and review of artifacts.

A District School Improvement Committee has been created to oversee the district improvement process. The district committee is comprised of the superintendent, principals, board members, teachers, support staff, community leaders, and two parent representatives from each building school improvement team. This committee meets on a bi-monthly basis and has made the commitment to developing a systematic and systemic approach to improvement as evidenced by seeking AdvancED district-level accreditation. A review of artifacts and interviews indicated that the committee has developed district goals and areas of concentration based on student needs.

In the past, surveys of stakeholders were conducted, but review of the interview data indicates the district assesses and addresses community expectations and stakeholder satisfaction anecdotally and informally. However, stakeholders reported wide support and overall satisfaction for the school's efforts toward educational programming, performance, and improvement efforts. There is a deep sense of community and shared responsibility by school officials and parents for the school's progress. Parents and community members reported that the schools' open-door policies are indicative of the district's genuine desire to promote participation, responsibility, and ownership.

The district has evidence of an evaluation system for employees, and contracts with district personnel outline a process and timeline for evaluations. The protocols used in evaluating district personnel, however, varied by administrator and school level. The QAR team determined that the district is emerging toward a systematic and systemic evaluation system for employees that provides for the professional growth of all personnel that aligns with the goals identified by the school improvement plan.

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

- The district has demonstrated a commitment to professional growth for employees by providing

abundant training opportunities inside and outside the district.

- District support services provide systemic analysis and review of performance and effectiveness.
- It is evident the district has worked diligently to create and support collaborative networks of stakeholders to support system programs including CTE, business partnerships, advisory committees, and representation on district and building-level school improvement teams.

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

- Develop a process to ensure that goals, policies, procedures, review of student performance, and review of effectiveness are consistent among all buildings and departments in the school system.
- Develop a comprehensive district-wide professional development plan for all employees.
- Develop a process to obtain stakeholder perception data annually and use this data to guide decision-making.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the West Branch-Rose City Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

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

Description:

The district implements a curriculum based on the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCE) and High School Course Expectations (HSCE) that provides opportunities for students to acquire requisite knowledge and skills. A district Curriculum Council, comprised of administrators, teachers, and stakeholders has overseen the alignment of the K–12 curricula. This committee, led by a full-time curriculum director, meets 4–5 times per year as evidenced by agenda and meeting minutes. A Curriculum Council Handbook has been developed that describes the council membership, responsibilities, and curriculum change process and curriculum review schedule. This committee ensures that the curriculum is reviewed and revised at regular intervals. Pacing guides have been developed for all classes across all grade levels that clearly define the GLCE and HSCE. Teachers are beginning to develop common formative assessments in math, English language arts, and science.

All teachers reported that they have been trained in differentiated instruction helping them to target instruction around diverse learning styles. It was unclear to the QAR team how effective or the extent of the implementation of this approach. Professional development has been provided in research-based instructional practices such as Six + 1 Traits Writing. However, the Six Traits process has not been fully implemented.

Elementary and middle school teachers have implemented Response to Intervention (RtI) to support students needing additional instruction. Extended day programs at the elementary and middle school provide support to students needing additional help in reading and mathematics. Study sanctuary is an after school setting to support students with homework. Students in the high school receive additional help in academic center. The K-3 grades continue to implement the Reading First program during a protected 90-minute instructional block. Students are regularly assessed and monitored to provide appropriate

reading instruction and intervention. Literary coaches assist teachers with the program's implementation. The high school is organized around the block schedule but plans to return to a traditional six-period day next year.

The QAR team reviewed evidence of class data packets containing achievement information on individual students, which are compiled for each teacher each school year. This information has been helpful in providing a smooth transition of students from teacher to teacher and building to building. Transition activities are also provided for parents and students as students transfer to other buildings. The schools have engaged in Positive Behavior Support (PBS) or similar activities, such as life skills, that promote a system-wide climate that enhances student learning. The schools continue to develop instructional technology strategies, increase the acquisition of some technology such as Smart Boards, and develop courses that provide students with experience in applying technology skills. The high school's Career and Technical Education program is highly valued by staff and community members. This program provides students with classes and applied learning experiences in building trades, health occupations, machine shop, CAD-CAM (Computer Aided Drafting and Computer Aided Manufacturing), business, and agricultural-science. Interviews revealed a mix of opinions by stakeholders and staff members regarding the emphasis on support and programming for college prep students. Significant business partnerships have been developed which support the school and provide students with real life experiences in the community.

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

- The Positive Behavior Support system has been well implemented to create a positive learning and teaching environment for all.
- Extended day programs, study sanctuary, and academic center are opportunities that provide students with additional academic help and support.
- Data packets, provided to each teacher, have informed the staff of essential student performance information and have helped in making smooth transitions for students through the system.
- Establishment of the Curriculum Council and full-time curriculum director has resulted in a fully aligned, articulated K–12 curriculum.
- The Reading First program is well embedded and has been a model for assessing, monitoring, and developing interventions for reading.
- The CTE program is highly valued and has established strong business and community partnerships which provide students with real life application opportunities.

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

- Establish a schedule and process to create common formative assessments that measure the intended K–12 curriculum.
- Support the schools in fully implementing, assessing, and monitoring the Six Traits Writing program.
- Research best practice strategies that are aligned to student and curricular needs, that increase the engagement of students in the learning process, and are systemic across the system.
- Review the Career and Technical Education program in relationship to appropriate college preparatory emphasis and planning.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the West Branch-Rose City Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

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

Description:

The QAR team found several themes involving the use of assessments in the district. One theme is the number of external assessments and the reporting cycle of the assessments. Since the assessments are so varied across grade levels and there is a significant time lag in obtaining results, disconnects are created involving making timely adjustments to instructional practices. Schools are developing common assessments in language arts, math, and science. The development of common assessments should make performance meaningful to the student and inform the instructional practices.

The second theme is the need for training involving analysis of data. The QAR team heard comments related to the amount of data collected and available but heard very clearly the need for training in analysis of the data for school improvement. Leaders and staff members stated that the district is data rich, but not data literate.

The West Branch-Rose City School District has an assessment matrix that includes the following assessments:

- Kindergarten--Gates-MacGinitie
- Kindergarten-Grade 4--DIBELS
- Grade 1-7--Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)
- Grade 3-9--Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP)
- Kindergarten-Grade 7--End of Year (EOY) Reading
- Kindergarten-Grade 4--Quarterly Math
- Grade 5-7--EOY Math
- Grade 8--ACT EXPLORE
- Grade 9--Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED)
- Grade 10--ACT PLAN
- Grade 11--Michigan Merit Exam (MME)

Assessments along with report cards and progress reports are used to make decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Elementary teachers reported using assessment data to form reading groups and to make changes to these groups as needed throughout the year. At the middle school, staff utilizes the Exam View tool to monitor student progress in some classes, as documented by QAR team interviews and review of artifacts. They also use assessments to assess and re-teach based on individual student results and to offer the extended day program for additional instruction. The high school uses assessment data to place students in appropriate math and science courses. The district also uses a student data packet to transfer student achievement data to the student's next year teacher. Interviewees indicated the student packet which is a paper copy of assessment data will be available electronically in the future through a program called Data Director. Teachers felt the conversion from paper to "anytime access" would be an advantage when addressing individual student academic needs.

It was unclear to the QAR team if there is a systematic process in place at the district level to analyze instructional and organizational effectiveness K-12. The district's annual report and the individual

school's improvement report to the District School Improvement Committee comprises the monitoring process.

Communication methods include the state-required annual report for the district, newsletters, e-mails, community meetings, board meetings, and a district website. The district has also implemented the use of Parent Connect for student progress reporting purposes at the secondary level. This program is web-based and provides multiple forms of information to stakeholders. Students and parents are able to view student grades, assignment history, and attendance history. The Parent Connect system is a secured data record system requiring usernames and passwords in order to access information.

The district provides trend data of the MEAP and MME grade levels for 2007-08 and the 2008-09 school years as is required by the state and Title I program. However, the QAR team could find no trend data from "like" school systems that would give comparison data related to student achievement. It was unclear to the QAR team how the limited trend data is used to make decisions regarding the effectiveness and reliability of the instructional program.

The district uses results of the MEAP, MME, and ACT assessments to report growth in student performance. High school staff stated that the EXPLORE and PLAN assessments are used to identify student needs in preparation for the ACT.

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

- The district has created an assessment matrix which clearly indicates the grade level and timing of assessments.
- The district has implemented a data packet of assessment information that follows students to their next teacher.
- The district is beginning to develop common assessments in language arts and math in the high school and for math in the elementary and middle school. Some science assessments are also being developed.

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

- Implement common assessments in all curriculum areas.
- Develop a district process to analyze instructional and organizational effectiveness.
- Systemically implement the data warehouse program, Data Director.
- Collect and compare five-year trend data from comparable school districts.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the West Branch-Rose City Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

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

Description:

The West Branch–Rose City Area School District promotes the hiring of highly qualified teachers and support staff. Due to the financial climate in the state of Michigan, they may have challenges ahead as they assign professional and support staff based on system needs.

The district has ensured that there are a sufficient number of staff members to meet the vision and purpose of the school system. It was noted by the QAR team that Title I monies are used to help with lowering class size. Continuing to provide support services to meet the needs of all students was communicated, and support services are coordinated with the home, school, and community.

The district has worked to maintain its facilities and resources. Many stakeholders commented on the pride that they share in the ability to “do what we can with so little.” Again due to budget constraints, it is difficult to conduct long-range budgetary planning. Proper budgetary procedures and audited accounting measures are followed.

Crisis management plans and other emergency plans were reviewed as artifacts by the QAR team. When interviewing staff, the team found they are aware of the plans and how to implement them in case of a crisis or emergency.

The district provides funds for professional development. The QAR team determined that all staff are given opportunities to improve their skills through professional development with a particular emphasis on writing using the 6 + 1 Traits method. A writing coach is currently in place and available to all. Literacy coaches are also in place.

The team did not see a written professional development plan in the artifacts. An articulated plan for professional development provides a district with purposeful, rigorous, and relevant professional development K-12. Plans that coordinate building-level professional development in line with district goals promote systemic and systematic growth.

Staff and patrons identify technology as a strength. The district has been fortunate that business contacts have enabled the schools to upgrade their technology labs through donations. Exploring ways to support and upgrade the technology infrastructure is increasingly important in today's global high-tech society.

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

- The district has maintained literacy coaches and counselors.
- The district has maintained occupational therapists/physical therapists.
- The school buildings are clean and well maintained.
- The district is doing its best to maintain programs with what they have available financially.
- Business partnerships support the school with money and resource donations.

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

- Coordinate building-level professional development in line with district goals.
- Focus on keeping programs intact despite financial constraints.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the West Branch-Rose City Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

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

Description:

The West Branch-Rose City Area Schools promotes and supports relationships with stakeholders and community members. Stakeholder relationships are fostered and valued by the district, and stakeholders feel informed.

Enabling stakeholders to increase their knowledge of the vision and mission statements, by posting statements in highly visible areas that are frequently utilized, was observed to be emerging.

A calendar of school activities and events is available on the district's website and throughout the community to encourage participation and involvement. Parents and other community members regularly volunteer their time to support school activities. Stakeholders share their knowledge and experience by serving on the school improvement committees at the school and district level. The purpose of these committees is to guide the schools and the district toward continuous improvement, and members are given an opportunity to give meaningful input into decisions that advance improvement efforts.

Stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide their input on the district's Standards Assessment Report (SAR). Expectations for student learning and reports of student performance are shared with stakeholders in a variety of ways. Stakeholders indicated that they do not always know how the district compares on standardized tests to like-size districts or buildings in the area. Data displays were not observed in the buildings, and stakeholders did not report providing student performance information in newsletters. Data bulletin boards and other forms of public displays in the school buildings provide opportunities for stakeholders to view comparisons and observe data.

Newsletters, the website, and the local newspaper are utilized to share district practices with stakeholders. Parent, student, and staff handbooks are available at each school and on each school's website. Conferences with teachers are encouraged, scheduled throughout the year, and help to keep parents informed of student progress. Parent Connect, a grade reporting program, is used by the district's secondary schools and permits parent access to grades, assignment history, discipline records, and attendance records. Parents are able to interact via e-mail and telephone with their child's teacher, and are welcomed at committee meetings and monthly school board meetings.

Interviews with stakeholders reveal there is an open-door policy at the schools for parents and the community. Stakeholders speak highly of the district and indicate an overall positive attitude towards the district. Conducting regular perception surveys will provide the district with the necessary data needed to

indicate stakeholder satisfaction on school improvement and annual reports. Parents and students are invited to “family nights” at many of the buildings, and they are well attended and valued.

Parents have opportunities to provide input on various other committees such as Career and Technical Education advisory boards, Curriculum Council, Parent/Teacher Organizations (PTO), Special Education Support Group, and a variety of booster groups. The district recognizes that communication is a vital area in regards to school improvement efforts.

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

- The district has developed a strong relationship with the surrounding communities they serve, providing businesses and community members with a place to turn to for social activities, collaboration, and training. This has resulted in support for the vision and mission, and a genuinely positive feeling and source of pride for the communities of West Branch and Rose City.
- The district fosters community collaboration and values their relationships with stakeholders in both communities.
- Stakeholders routinely stated that the district has an open-door policy in regards to expressing opinions, ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Board members, administrators, teachers and support staff are viewed as accessible, approachable, and collaborative.
- Parents have online access to grades and report cards at the secondary level.

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

- Systematically, throughout the district, annually initiate stakeholder perception surveys to provide data in regards to student, staff, and parent satisfaction with the district’s climate, instruction, leadership, and safety. Data that is collected and analyzed should be shared with district stakeholders, noted in district and building school improvement plans, and included in the annual reports.
- Display mission and vision statements on the district and school websites, in the entries of each building, and common areas frequented by the general public.
- Increase parent participation on committees to strengthen the opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership to support student learning, systemically throughout the district.
- Communicate with stakeholders in a manner that provides information, data, goals, and achievements in a manner that is easily understandable, and continue to research every possibility to reach all stakeholders in the district regardless of location and/or socio-economic status.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the West Branch-Rose City Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description:

The district has developed a district improvement plan that includes all of the core curricular areas and other goals such as critical thinking and writing. The plan sets a goal of meeting or exceeding the state requirements for the Michigan Education Assessment Program. The plan correlates well with the activities of the Curriculum Council, but may be too broad a scope for continuous improvement and is not in SMART goal format (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely).

The district template for school improvement requires that parents and community stakeholders are involved in the process. Comments from parents and community stakeholders indicate that they were involved in the improvement process beyond just attending meetings. The district used a similar process when completing the Standards Assessment Report. The team heard from high school students that some were selected to participate in the standards assessment, and parents who also participated commented on how interesting the student insights were.

All stakeholders expressed an understanding of the district vision by relating to preparing students for success after high school. Stakeholders affirmed that the district prepares students to enter a two-year post secondary program, an apprenticeship, or trade training in addition to being prepared for college. Business partners described Ogemaw Heights' graduates as standing out among others when seeking employment. When asked if stakeholders receive communication regarding performance data, most referred to the annual report in the newspaper or the district website. Continuous improvement is sustained when stakeholders are informed of performance results and have a clear understanding of the goals.

Stakeholders cited many elements included in the professional development section of the plan such as Comprehensive School Reform and Reading First, grants the district had received years ago. These initiatives had an impact on the school plans and even resulted in the development of teacher leaders. They also form a starting place for continuous improvement. Based on observations and teacher comments, these practices have been embedded into instruction. Data in the district improvement plan included two years of trend data. The team could not determine if these strategies were continuing to demonstrate improvement in student performance.

The district provided staff development to teacher leaders through the Central Michigan University while involved in the Comprehensive School Reform. The district has a commitment to providing professional development and is an active participant in the activities of the Intermediate School District of Crawford, Ogemaw, Oscoda, and Roscommon (ISD-COOR). At the building level, the schools have established department meetings, faculty meetings, and grade-level meetings in addition to the school improvement committee. Interviews with teachers left the team questioning which group is leading the continuous improvement and if the district template for school improvement is being implemented in a systemic fashion.

Teachers at all schools mentioned that a common assessment movement was starting in the district. Some teachers referred to common assessments, others to quarterly assessments, or end of unit assessments. Some teachers even referred to formative assessments that might be used to alter instruction. Common

assessments provide a focus on student performance and improvement of instruction that provides a foundation for continuous improvement.

Some key components of continuous improvement are: 1) analyzing trend data; 2) identifying new improvement efforts; and 3) ensuring fidelity of practice. Based on the school visits, stakeholder comments, and artifact review by the team, fidelity to district practice would benefit from the development of a process to ensure that school improvement plans go beyond alignment to monitoring instructional practices identified in the district school improvement plan.

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

- The district has developed a Curriculum Council Handbook and process that involves stakeholders.
- The district has developed a template for school improvement plans using a district improvement team.

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

- Design a process to ensure that district goals are measurable, and student performance is assessed using trend data and comparable school data.
- Monitor school improvement efforts to ensure that district improvement goals are embedded into school and classroom practices.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the West Branch-Rose City Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

Quality Assurance Findings

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

Description

The district understands that school improvement requires revisiting plans. The district schedules two school improvement meetings a year. School-based improvement teams also meet twice a year. The leadership and teachers at the school level described additional meetings focused on school improvement that occur during department, grade level, and faculty meetings.

The district template for school improvement provides a framework alignment of goals and processes. This template also serves as a beginning point for the other reports such as Title I plans that each school is required to do in order to receive funding. This streamlining of activities ensures that work is not duplicated, but runs the risk of expanding the focus of school improvement.

The district has been involved in several external audits. Reading First at the elementary level included many visits from review teams and audits for compliance. Title I also includes on-site visits and requires very specific plans. Changes in the Title I requirements present annual challenges to the district which have led the district to seek efficiency by adopting the AdvancED process.

The state-required annual report is the primary means for reporting student performance used by the district. Each individual school reports on student performance related to school goals. Each school reports results to the District School Improvement Team and the school board. Stakeholders receive information regarding student performance from the local newspaper and the district website. The state-required data from MEAP constitutes the majority of the data.

The Standards Assessment Report process provided the district with a means for assuring that the AdvancED standards are met. The district involved board members, parents, community members, and students in the process of assessing the standards.

Strengths

- The involvement of parents, community members, and students in the standards assessment process ensures that the district accurately assesses adherence to the AdvancED standards.

Opportunities

- Develop and implement a systematic process for monitoring continuous improvement efforts that includes a plan for internal review to ensure the institutional integrity of the process. Essential elements of the process should include a plan for documenting and communicating results to all stakeholders.

Conclusion

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

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

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

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Mr. John Williams, Chair (Crown Point Community School Corp)
- Mrs. Deborah Juriga, Vice Chair (Michigan NCA)
- Mrs. Christine Beardsley, Team Member (Oscoda Area Schools)
- Gary Wiseman, Team Member (Paris Independent School District)
- Mr. James Dell, Team Member (Durand Area Schools)
- Mr. Jim Garner, Team Member (Syracuse Elementary School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

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.