



External Review

Palmyra Junior Senior High School

Palmyra District O R 1

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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 school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.		2.67	
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accreditation Report •Examples of communications to stakeholders about the school's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook) •Observations •Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the school's purpose •Interviews •Documentation or description of the process for creating the school's purpose including the role of stakeholders •Purpose statements - past and present •The School Community Partnership for Essential Planning 	3
1.2	The school's leadership and staff 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •Observations •The school's statement of purpose •Accreditation Report 	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.3	The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Observations•The school data profile•Agenda, minutes from continuous improvement planning meetings•Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders•Interviews•Accreditation Report•The school continuous improvement plan	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 school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.		3.67	
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Observations •Student handbooks •Governing body policies, procedures, and practices •Staff handbooks •Accreditation Report •Interviews •Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions 	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accreditation Report •Communication plan to inform all staff on code of ethics, responsibilities, conflict of interest •List of assigned staff for compliance •Assurances, certifications •Interviews •Governing body training plan •Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies •Communications about program regulations •Observations •Governing body policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest •Governing code of ethics 	4
2.3	The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Roles and responsibilities of school leadership •School improvement plan developed by the school •Accreditation Report •Stakeholder input and feedback •Maintenance of consistent academic oversight, planning, and resource allocation •Communications regarding board actions •Survey results regarding functions of the governing body •Observations •Interviews •Board policies 	4

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.4	Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Examples of collaboration and shared leadership•Survey results•Observations•Interviews•Accreditation Report•School improvement plan	3
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan•Accreditation Report•Observations•Interviews	4
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation•Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation•Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice and student success noted•Observations•Job specific criteria•Representative supervision and evaluation reports•Interviews•Math templates	4

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. School leadership has engaged all stakeholders in establishing the school's purpose and direction.

2.5

The district took the initiative to address strengths and areas of need by organizing and planning a School Community Partnership for Essential Planning for Stakeholders. The establishment and work of this 40 member task force was instrumental in the review of the purpose and direction the district is taking in the future. The resulting strategic plan has provided focus and direction for the district and schools. Participants expressed the value of the process and the work of this task force. Providing the opportunity for stakeholders to have a voice in the purpose and direction of the school's mission has been identified as a strong practice in moving the school forward. The result of this planning committee has helped the board to determine and prioritize long-term goals.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Review and revise current grading policies for consistency, Kindergarten through 12th grade.

2.1

Policy and practice should support a uniform grading policy that focuses on consistent grading practices from classroom to classroom. Students expressed concerns that teachers used different grading practices to determine student grades. Students felt that this inconsistency allowed grades to not always be reflective of student learning. They also mentioned that a weighted grading system should be discussed in the high school. Assessment of student learning that reflects student achievement is critical to a strong learning environment.

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 school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.			2.67
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The school'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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Course schedules •Course descriptions •Observations 	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Curriculum guides •Observations •Interviews •Accreditation Report 	3
3.3	Teachers engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Teacher evaluation criteria •Professional development focused on these strategies •Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource •Interviews •Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool •Accreditation Report •Interdisciplinary projects 	2
3.4	School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Documentation of collection of lesson plans and grade books •Supervision and evaluation procedures •Interviews •Examples of improvements to instructional practices resulting from the evaluation process •Administrative classroom observation protocols and logs •Accreditation Report 	3
3.5	Teachers participate in collaborative learning communities to improve instruction and student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Examples of cross curricular projects, interdisciplinary instruction, and classroom action research project •Accreditation Report •Common language, protocols and reporting tools •Observations •Interviews 	2
3.6	Teachers implement the school's instructional process in support of student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Observations •Interviews •Accreditation Report 	2

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the school's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accreditation Report •Observations •Survey results •Interviews 	2
3.8	The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Observations •Survey results •Interviews •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 •Accreditation Report •Parental/family/caregiver involvement plan including activities, timeframes, and evaluation process 	3
3.9	The school has a formal structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •List of students matched to adult advocate •Accreditation Report •Survey results •Interviews •Observations •Curriculum and activities of formal adult advocate structure •Master schedule with time for formal adult advocate structure •8 to Great program 	4

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Observations•Survey results•Sample report cards for each grade level and for all courses•Interviews•Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting•Powerschool data	2
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Interviews•Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs•Accreditation Report	3
3.12	The school provides and coordinates learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Observations•Interviews•Accreditation Report•Data used to identify unique learning needs of students	3

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The school provides services that address affective and cognitive needs of all students.

3.9

Specialized school personnel are available to work with students to address affective and cognitive needs of all students. Each specialist follows a systematic process to work directly with staff, students, and parents, monitoring individual student needs and providing support when there are issues of concern. When issues, such as bullying, surface, one of the specialists will assume the responsibility to address the issue with an individual and/or conduct/provide training for others who would be directly associated with the issue. Each specialist maintains records to monitor services and conduct follow-up to referrals and program evaluation and makes a conscious effort to address the unique needs of students. Systematic and systemic support services, followed with appropriate follow-up, are effective school-wide when they address the needs of all students. The comprehensive K-12 character education program is an example of the support provided all students. In the elementary, the 2nd Step program and Character Counts has been successfully implemented. At the Jr./Sr. High building, the implementation of the 8 to Great program was praised by both students and parents as a worthwhile program. One student stated that he looks forward to the 8 to Great activity weekly.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Implement a formal process for collaborative learning communities across grade levels and content areas.

3.5

Some faculty members participate in an informal collaboration process. Discussions of data, examination of student work, reflection and peer coaching sometimes occur. By all staff participating in a formal process, accountability will insure that learning will occur. Frequent collaboration across grade levels and content areas will enhance student learning.

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 school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.		3.14	
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.1	Qualified professional and support staff are sufficient in number to fulfill their roles and responsibilities necessary to support the school's purpose, direction, and the educational program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Observations •Survey results •Interviews •Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff •Accreditation Report •Assessments of staffing needs •Documentation of highly qualified staff •Board policies 	4

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accreditation Report •Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources •Survey results •School schedule •Interviews •Alignment of budget with school purpose and direction •Observations •School calendar 	3
4.3	The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Observations •Survey results •Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Documentation of emergency procedures such as fire drills, evacuation and other emergency procedures. •Safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes •Crisis management guidelines and safety plans 	3
4.4	Students and school personnel use a range of media and information resources to support the school's educational programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interviews •Budget related to media and information resource acquisition •Accreditation Report •Survey results •Observations •Data on media and information resources available to students and staff •Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information 	3

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.5	The technology infrastructure supports the school's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure•Assessments to inform development of technology plan•Survey results•Policies relative to technology use•Interview with technology coordinator	4
4.6	The school provides support services to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Student assessment system for identifying student needs•Survey results•Accreditation Report•Interviews•Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education•List of support services available to students•Observations•Student handbooks	3
4.7	The school provides services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning•Accreditation Report•Survey results•Description of referral process•Interview with counselor and special education staff	2

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The development and implementation of a comprehensive, collaborative, professional development plan for teachers to ensure a successful implementation of the one-to-one iPad was created in conjunction with the updating of the school's technology infrastructure.

4.5

In preparation for the implementation of the one-to-one iPad initiative, the school identified professional development as a key to the success of the initiative along with the updating of the technology infrastructure. The school was not interested in providing the teachers with the iPad and two days of "sit and get" training but wanted to individualize the training to meet the competency level of each teacher. Building on the school's strong relationship with Educational Service Unit 4, a partnership was forged. Using the strengths of the ESU technology team, a professional development plan was developed that consisted of one day general iPad training for all teachers and then days where individual teachers worked with the technology team to answer their questions and receive one on one training geared to their level of expertise. These individual teacher days were set after the teachers had time to explore how the iPad may be used in their classrooms to increase student performance. This individualized approach was well received by the teachers as it met them at their ability level. By using this approach, the school prepared their teachers for a foundation that will lead to a successful implementation.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Formalize and administer a needs assessment to validate and improve technology needs and services.

4.4

A local technology plan was not apparent at the school. The school has a technology committee, focusing on immediate services, but does not have a planned, long-range plan to anticipate future technology services. The present infrastructure supports the present use of technology, which includes computer carts shared at grade levels, and staff access to computers, interactive whiteboards, and document cameras. Providing the opportunity to monitor technology needs provides opportunities for continuous updating services to meet the teaching, learning, and operational needs of all stakeholders.

2. Implement a needs assessment to determine the student career choices to help develop and strengthen a career academy.

4.7

The current program has limited student participation, based upon interviews with the counselor and high school principal. The school should support students in being both college and career ready.

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 (Dembo 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 school implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.	2.8

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The school establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accreditation Report•Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols•Observations•Survey results•Interviews•Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local assessments on student learning and school performance•Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free•MAPS results, data retreats, and Powerschool	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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Survey results•Interviews•Written protocols and procedures for data collection and analysis•Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning•Observations•Accreditation Report	2
5.3	Professional and support staff are trained in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Policies specific to data training•Interviews•Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data•Observations•Accreditation Report	2

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Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.4	The school engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Student surveys•Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning•Accreditation Report•Evidence of student readiness for the next level•Evidence of student growth•Observations•Evidence of student success at the next level•Interviews	3
5.5	Leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Observations•Survey results•Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals•Accreditation Report•Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups•Interviews•Powerschool, Voice newspaper articles, Monday parent email, and website articles	4

Powerful Practices

Indicator

1. The school provides multiple ways for parents to stay informed of their children's learning progress. Parents are very involved and are aware of the learning that takes place in the school.

5.5

The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress. Use of Powerschool, Monday grade report emails, newsletters, local newspaper and test scores being mailed keeps families informed on their student's education. The Elementary Boosters, science fair, president reports and volunteer opportunities allow families opportunities to get engaged in their child's education. This was made evident through the parent interviews.

Opportunities for Improvement

Indicator

1. Compile, analyze, and apply trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions.

5.2

Data sources included limited to no comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, the effectiveness of programs, and organizational conditions. Data sources collected will display trends in student learning, instruction, effectiveness of programs, and organizational conditions. All staff will be involved in the systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and applying learning from all data sources.

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.

ELEOT

<i>Environments</i>	<i>Level</i>
A. Equitable Learning Environment	2.23
B. High Expectations Environment	2.22
C. Supportive Learning Environment	2.53
D. Active Learning Environment	3.0
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.49
F. Well-Managed Learning Environment	3.08
G. Digital Learning Environment	2.21

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 Palmyra-Bennet Public Schools, consisting of Palmyra Elementary and Jr. /Sr. High School, external reviews began on Sunday, April 14, 2013, at 5:00 p.m. at a hotel located in Lincoln, NE with an external team meeting. The team joined the school's steering committee for dinner and introductions later that evening. The team returned to the hotel to complete planning activities for day one of the review. These activities included review of the agenda, the ELEOT process, development of interview questions, and the first rating of indicators.

The external review officially began at 8:00 a.m. on Monday, April 15th, and concluded with an external report on Tuesday, April 16th, at 3:30 p.m. The two days consisted of classroom observations using the ELEOT, stakeholder interviews, and artifacts review. Completing the indicator ratings two more times and an abundance of team discussion and deliberation centered on identifying required actions, opportunities for improvement, and powerful practices.

The school was very well prepared for the external review. The Accreditation Report was submitted in a timely manner. Other artifacts were made available to the external team either via the workspace, as attachments to emails, or on a flash-drive. The school administration met twice with the lead evaluator prior to the review. Additional communication took place via emails and phone calls. The lead evaluator communicated with the external team via emails and phone calls.

The Palmyra-Bennet schools completed its self-assessment and were very honest with its ratings. All certificated staff had the opportunity to complete the SA. The results were analyzed by the steering committee.

The school's steering committee consisted of administration, teacher representatives, special education teacher, technology, and school improvement chair. This committee presented the principal and standards overview presentation on Monday morning. Educational Service Unit #4 professional development staff was present for the school presentation. The external team had opportunity to ask questions of the committee and had them highlight strengths and areas in need of improvement.

Throughout day one, the external team divided the majority of their time between observing classrooms and interviewing stakeholders. At the Palmyra-Bennet schools, the team members interviewed administration, teachers, students, board member, parents, support staff, and technology staff for a total of 48 individuals.

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.

Three themes emerged as powerful practices during the review. The review team was very interested in the process referred to as the School Community Essential Planning Process. The schools reaffirmed their mission and belief statements through this community and school committee of 40 individuals that met over a two year period. As a result of this committee, the board of education has formally adopted five goals and associated action plans. As a final step of this process, the committee provided criteria for a district vision statement draft which will be approved this summer. This vision statement drives everything the schools does now and into the future. The parents that participated in this process had nothing but positive comments about the process and their involvement. They felt that it was well worth their time and effort, and the schools listened to their ideas. The team was impressed that even though through this process a full audit of school facilities will be completed, the focus of the schools does not stop there. All decisions will be based upon the vision and mission created by this process which supports improved student learning.

The second theme was the K-12 character education program that has been implemented. The elementary utilizes the Character Counts program and Second Step curriculum for grades K-6. At the Jr./Sr. High building, grades 7 and 8 use the Second Step curriculum which places an emphasis on educating students to help them make good choices, avoid temptations to bully other students, and understand peer pressure. Grades 7-12 provide instruction through 8 to Great. This program provides students with knowledge related to self-confidence, self-respect, respect for others, responsibility, positive attitude, and goal setting. Students reported that they look forward to their 8 to Great time every Wednesday. They believe that it is giving them interpersonal skills that they can use now and when they have graduated. A goal is to have all teachers trained in the 8 to Great curriculum.

Strong parent communication is the third strength that was identified as a pervasive theme in both buildings. Parents reported that they believe that through Powerschool, Monday morning emails, phone calls, newsletter, newspaper articles, school website, and personal contact, the school does a great job of communicating with parents and keeping them informed of school activities. Parents reported that this has improved over the past two years.

A future strength for the school will be their technology and how they are embracing the one-to-one iPad initiative that was implemented in February. The external team saw the students and staff just beginning to understand and use the iPads daily in classes. Once the teachers have a better understanding of how to use the technology in their classrooms, student progress will increase.

Opportunities for improvement all fall in the area of fine tuning. The school would benefit from reviewing their curriculum and developing a written preK-12 curriculum that would be aligned both vertically and horizontally. Once the curriculum has been revised, the interpreting of student data needs to be reviewed and revised so teachers know how to use the data to identify trends and instructional practices. To provide time for teachers to discuss curriculum and student data, the schools need to research implementing a formal process for collaborative learning communities to be instituted.

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.

The external team observed a total of 29 classrooms between the two buildings. The well-managed learning environment was rated the highest at both buildings with the team noting that the students were well behaved in the classrooms and all other school environments. The mutual respect between students and teachers was very obvious to the external team. The students demonstrated this through their interactions with the teachers and their classmates. Both buildings have implemented a comprehensive character education program, and the team believes that the student behavior and relationships reflect the success of this initiative.

The second theme that emerged was in the area of digital learning. At the Jr./Sr. High school, the team observed that the students were using the iPads as instructional tools in the majority of the classes, and the team believes that this will only increase over time as teachers receive additional professional learning concerning the use and integration of the iPad into the classroom. At the elementary building, the use of digital tools by the students was not observed as frequently. A supportive learning environment rated second at the elementary building. Students demonstrated a positive attitude about their classroom and learning and were observed taking risks without fear of negative feedback.

The Palmyra-Bennet Schools did an excellent job in preparing for the external review. Their preparation made the review run smoothly. The schools, during the review, provided the external team with outstanding accommodations. The team wants to thank the administration, board members, and staff for their hospitality during the review. The external review team recommends that Palmyra Elementary and Palmyra Jr./Sr. High School be granted a new five-year term of accreditation by the NCA/AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Required Actions

1. Review, revise, and implement a Pre-K systemic and systematic continuous improvement process.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 1.3

Based on interviews, observations, and artifacts, the school has many of the continuous improvement pieces in place but a systematic process, preK-12, is not operational. The school's continuous improvement process will become sustainable and imbedded when a systemic and systematic process has been implemented and communicated.

2. Develop and implement a written PreK-12 curriculum, in all core subjects, aligned with the Nebraska State Standards horizontally and vertically, and include a timeline for review and revision.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.6

External Review

Palmyra Junior Senior High School

Math curriculum has been aligned to Nebraska State Standards with some PreK-12 collaboration based upon interviews and artifact evidence. Through collaboration, both horizontally and vertically, of all grade levels, PreK-12, the school will develop a unified and cohesive curriculum in all core subjects that will guide and direct instruction.

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.

External Review

Palmyra Junior Senior High School

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.