Report of the External Review

for

Platte County School District #1

1350 Oak Street

Wheatland, WY, 82201
US

Mr. Dennis Fischer, Superintendent

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Introduction to the External Review

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 student performance 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.

Findings

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

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. Before implementation, 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, identification of Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards (if appropriate), and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team.

The AdvancED Standards and Indicators are the first of three primary areas of evaluation for AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. Using indicator-specific performance levels, the External Review Team evaluates the degree to which the institution meets each indicator on a scale of 1 to 4. The scores assigned to the indicators are averaged to arrive at a single score. This score, along with scores from evaluations of student performance and stakeholder feedback, will be used to determine the accreditation status of the institution.

Average Indicator Score for this Institution	2.09

Standard 1: The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

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 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 that are aligned with the institutions' vision and supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

Standard 1			
The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The system engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a system-wide purpose for student success.	- Interviews - District purpose statements - past and present - Survey results - Examples of communications to stakeholders about the district's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook) - Minutes from meetings related to development of the district's purpose and direction - Accreditation Report	2.0
1.2	The system ensures that each school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	- Survey results - Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the schools' purpose statements - Examples of school purpose statements if different from the district purpose statement - Accreditation Report - Observations - Interviews	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.3	The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	• Observations • Interviews • Examples of schools' continuous improvement plans • Survey results • Accreditation Report • Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs • Statements of shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning • The district strategic plan	2.0
1.4	Leadership at all levels of the system implement a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	• Interviews • Accreditation Report • Examples of schools continuous improvement plans • Survey results • Professional development plans and implementation timelines on topics related to equity, organizational effectiveness, and improved instruction and programs • Observations • The district strategic plan	2.0

Powerful Practices	*Indicator*
1. The committed leadership at individual schools effectively guide the teaching and learning processes of the schools.	1.4

Interviews with school leadership and teachers revealed that principals are highly engaged in guiding the instructional processes at each school. Observations of activities and interactions between principals, students, and teachers supported the finding that principals monitor and support instructional practices, the quality of the educational atmosphere, and work deliberately to sustain school settings that are supportive of student engagement and learning.

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Implement a formalized process that ensures representation of all stakeholders in the systematic review, revision, and communication of the system-wide Purpose and Direction to guide the continuous improvement of student performance.   1.1

    Interviews with a variety of internal and external stakeholders and the review of artifacts revealed limited involvement of stakeholders in the development and communication of the district's purpose. The team found little evidence of community involvement in the process. The district often uses one person to represent several stakeholder groups. Interviews revealed the perception that most final decisions are made by a few individuals at the district level with little input from the schools and communities.

Standard 2: The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.

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 educational institution leadership research, Leithwood and 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 their 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 communities to attain continuous 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 institutional 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's experience gained through evaluation of best practices has indicated 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 2			
The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and system effectiveness.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.	• Interviews • Observations • Professional development plans • Student handbooks • Accreditation Report • District operations manuals • Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions • School handbooks	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	• Governing authority minutes relating to training • List of assigned staff for compliance • Governing authority training plan • Assurances, certifications • Accreditation Report • Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies • Observations • Interviews • Governing authority policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest • Governing code of ethics	3.0
2.3	The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	• Communications regarding governing authority actions • Examples of school improvement plans • Roles and responsibilities of school leadership • Roles and responsibilities of district leadership • Observations • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Survey results regarding functions of the governing authority and operations of the district • Stakeholder input and feedback • Agendas and minutes of meetings	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.4	Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.	• Professional development offerings and plans • Interviews • Survey results • Observations • Accreditation Report • The district did not provide adequate evidence for this indicator. Additionally, during stakeholder interviews there was no evidence that this process was in place.	2.0
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.	• Accreditation Report • Minutes from meetings with stakeholders • Examples of stakeholder input or feedback resulting in district action • Interviews • Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys • Survey responses • Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan • Involvement of stakeholders in district strategic plan • Observations • The district did not provide a communications plan.	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.	- Interviews - Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation - Accreditation Report - Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation - Job specific criteria - Observations - Representative supervision and evaluation reports - Limited supervision and evaluation documentation. No evidence that the Evaluation process informs the pd plans.	2.0

Powerful Practices	**Indicator**
1. The climate and culture at schools are conducive to learning and improving student performance.	2.4

Observations at all schools in the district revealed high expectations for student behavior as well as respect and concern for one another. Classrooms are safe, welcoming environments in which students were willing to ask questions, engage in discussions and activities, and strive to meet the expectations of their teachers.

Opportunities for Improvement	**Indicator**
1. Develop a policy and procedure review process that is aligned with the Purpose and Direction of the district.	2.1

Difficulties in communication and logistical coordination of calendars, resources, and events were evident to the team and described by stakeholders at all levels. Establishment of policy and procedure is a central function of the district which should equitably inform, coordinate, support, and guide operations across the district.

Standard 3: The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.

A high-quality and effective educational 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 that include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The institution'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, J., Kunter, M., Blum, W., Brunner, M., Voxx, T., Jordan, A., Klusmann, U., Krauss, S., Nuebrand, M., & Tsai, Y., 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, J., Brown, R., Choi, S., & Thomas, S., 2008). According to Marks, Louis, and Printy (2002), staff members who engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective institutions "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 that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning. The curriculum 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 3
The system's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning across all grades and courses.

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The system's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	• Interviews • Course, program, or school schedules • Course or program descriptions • Survey results • Lesson plans • Observations • Teacher evaluation criteria relating to prescribed instructional designs and proprietary practices • Posted learning objectives • Descriptions of instructional techniques	2.0
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	• Common assessments • Standards-based report cards • Surveys results • Observations • Interviews • Curriculum writing process	2.0
3.3	Teachers throughout the district engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	• Student work demonstrating the application of knowledge • Surveys results • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Observations	2.0
3.4	System and school leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	• Accreditation Report • Documentation of collection of lesson plans, grade books, or other data record systems • Surveys results • Interviews • Observations	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.5	The system operates as a collaborative learning organization through structures that support improved instruction and student learning at all levels.	• Observations • Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees • Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings • Survey results • Professional development funding to promote professional learning communities • Interviews • Evidence of informal conversations that reflect collaboration about student learning • Accreditation Report	2.0
3.6	Teachers implement the system's instructional process in support of student learning.	• Observations • Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance • Survey results • Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction • Interviews	2.0
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the system's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	• Records of meetings and informal feedback sessions • Interviews • Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.8	The system and all of its schools engage families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keep them informed of their children's learning progress.	- Performance-based report cards - Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance - Survey results - List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days - Interviews	2.0
3.9	The system designs and evaluates structures in all schools whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the student's school who supports that student's educational experience.	- Curriculum and activities of structures for adults advocating on behalf of students - Survey results - Interviews - List of students matched to adults who advocate on their behalf - Observations - Master schedule with time for formalized structure	3.0
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.	- Interviews - Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices - Survey results - Accreditation Report - Sample report cards for each program or grade level and for all courses and programs - Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting	3.0
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	- District professional development plan involving the district and all schools - Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs - Accreditation Report - Interviews	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.12	The system and its schools provide and coordinate learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	• Schedules, lesson plans, or example student learning plans showing the implementation of learning support services • Interviews • Observations • Data used to identify unique learning needs of students	2.0

Powerful Practices	*Indicator*
1. Qualified, dedicated, and committed teachers care about and advocate for their students.	3.9

Stakeholders report that the district's strength is in their highly qualified professional and support staff and that teachers and staff care about and advocate for their children. Students confirmed that the best thing about their schools is their teachers. This strongly supports the purpose, direction, and culture across the district in support of learning and sets the stage for high performance.

Opportunities for Improvement	*Indicator*
1. Utilize data to identify levels of individual student performance and engage students in differentiated learning opportunities designed to meet the unique learning needs of all students.	3.1

Data from over 100 classroom observations indicates an average score of 2.23 on the ELEOT observation referencing differentiated learning opportunities and activities that meet student needs within the learning environment   Although differentiation was observed in many classrooms, it was not consistently evident across all classrooms.   This data indicates that a system-wide process should be integrated into the Professional Learning Community framework for the analysis of individual student data to identify need and support differentiation.

Standard 4: The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.

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, D., Rudo, Z., Schneider, C., & Smith-Hansen, L., 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 the 30,000 institutions in the AdvancED network that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, meets special needs, and complies with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staff members 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 members to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard 4			
The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.1	The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ, and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, and educational programs.	- Accreditation Report - Survey results - District budgets or financial plans for the last three years - District quality assurance procedures for monitoring qualified staff across all schools - School budgets or financial plans for last three years - Interviews - Assessments of staffing needs - Documentation of highly qualified staff	2.0
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs, and system operations.	- Observations - Examples of school schedules - Accreditation Report - Survey results - Examples of school calendars - Interviews - District strategic plan showing resources support for district	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.3	The system maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	• Observations • Accreditation Report • Example systems for school maintenance requests • Survey results • Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements • Example school records of depreciation of equipment	2.0
4.4	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.	• Survey results • Interviews • Policies, handbooks on district and school facilities and learning environments • Accreditation Report • Observations	2.0
4.5	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.	• Observations • Survey results • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Data on media and information resources available to students and staff	2.0
4.6	The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	• Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model • Survey results • District technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure for the district-level and school-level • Assessments to inform development of district and school technology plans • Accreditation Report • Interviews • Observations	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.7	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	• Observations • Interviews • Student assessment system for identifying student needs • Survey results • Accreditation Report • Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education • List of support services available to students	2.0
4.8	The system provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	• Survey results • Accreditation Report • Description of IEP process • Observations • Interviews • Description of referral process	2.0

Opportunities for Improvement	*Indicator*
1. Update and align the district technology plan with the Purpose and Direction to address the issues of technology infrastructure, replacement of out-date equipment, and equity of access and technology resources at all schools for all students. The external review team noted first hand that some schools and buildings have insufficient infrastructure and funds to support technology. Some schools have little technology to support instruction and learning. Staff interviews and the experiences of the team revealed technology problems that hamper access to data and effective use in the classroom.	4.6
2. Develop a systematic procedure to ensure that funding, personnel, materials, and support are appropriate and equitable for all students. Many Stakeholders do not perceive educational programs to be challenging or equitable for their children. District-level decisions appear to have created budgeting issues that limit the ability of some schools to provide sufficient resources. Some schools and buildings have insufficient infrastructure and funds to support technology. There exists a lack of resources at some schools to provide media and information services.	4.2

Standard 5: The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.

Systems with strong improvement processes move beyond anxiety about the current reality and focus on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, i.e., data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, and Wohlstetter (2007) from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California indicated that data can shed light on existing areas of strength and weakness and also guide improvement strategies in a systematic and strategic manner (Dembosky, J., Pane, J., Barney, H., & Christina, R., 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 institutional 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).

Through ongoing evaluation of educational institutions, AdvancED has found 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 5
The system implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and system effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The system establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	• Brief description of technology or web-based platforms that support the education delivery model • Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols • Interviews • Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local or school assessments on student learning and school performance • Observations • Brief description of learning management systems or data management systems that support the effective use of student assessment results, school effectiveness, and district effectiveness • Accreditation Report • Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free	2.0
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.	• Examples of data used to measure the effectiveness of the district systems that support schools and learning • Observations • Accreditation Report • List of data sources related to district effectiveness • Survey results • Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning • Interviews • List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning	2.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.3	Throughout the system professional and support staff are trained in the interpretation and use of data.	• Accreditation Report • Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data • Documentation of attendance and training related to data use • Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data • Interviews	2.0
5.4	The school system engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	• Interviews • Accreditation Report • Evidence of student readiness for the next level • Evidence of student growth • Evidence of student success at the next level	2.0
5.5	System and school leaders monitor and communicate comprehensive information about student learning, school performance, and the achievement of system and school improvement goals to stakeholders.	• Minutes of meetings regarding achievement of student learning goals • Accreditation Report • Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals • Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups • Interviews	2.0

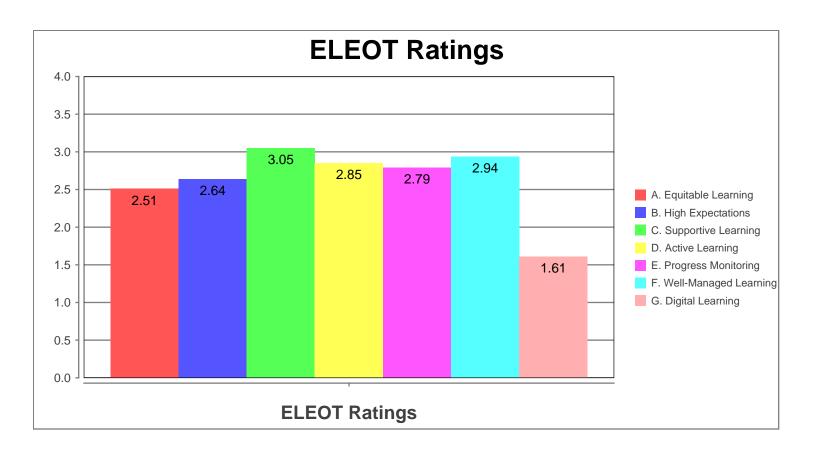| *Opportunities for Improvement*	*Indicator*
1. Provide training for all personnel in the use of data to guide learning activities and processes that are specific to the role of the individual. The external review team found that while teachers and administrators have been supplied training on the use of data, support staff have not been included in this training. For all learning activities to be as successful as possible, they must be guided by information and decisions based on data.	5.3

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 four-point scale. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the seven learning environments included in ELEOT.

ELEOT Ratings

	Value
A. Equitable Learning	2.51
B. High Expectations	2.64
C. Supportive Learning	3.05
D. Active Learning	2.85
E. Progress Monitoring	2.79
F. Well-Managed Learning	2.94
G. Digital Learning	1.61

ELEOT Ratings

Student Performance

Student Performance on assessments is the second of three primary areas of evaluation for AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. Institutions are asked to collect and analyze student performance data, then submit the data and the analyses to the External Review Team for review. The External Review Team evaluates the quality of the assessments used by the institution, the degree to which the institution properly administered the assessments, analyzed and acted on the results, and the overall performance of students using a set of rubrics. Results of that evaluation are reported below.

Student Performance Evaluation	
Evaluative Criteria	Performance Level
Assessment Quality	3.0
Test Administration	3.0
Quality of Learning	2.0
Equity of Learning	2.0

Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholder Feedback is the third of three primary areas of evaluation in AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. The AdvancED surveys are directly correlated to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators; they provide not only direct information about stakeholder satisfaction but also become a source of data for triangulation by the External Review Team as it evaluates indicators.

Institutions are asked to collect and analyze stakeholder feedback data, then submit the data and the analyses to the External Review Team for review. The External Review Team evaluates the quality of the administration of the surveys by institution and the degree to which the institution analyzed and acted on the results. Results of that evaluation are reported below.

Stakeholder Feedback Evaluation	
Evaluative Criteria	Performance Level
Questionnaire Administration	3.0
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	3.0

Individual Institution Results

AdvancED requires internal and external stakeholders from each individual institution within the system to evaluate their institution on the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools, student performance, and stakeholder feedback. The following table provides the results of those self-analyses. Higher scores indicate higher perceived performance on each of the measures. The range of possible scores for each of the institutions within the system are 1 (low performing) to 4 (high performing).

Institution	Indicator Averages	Questionnaire Administration	Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	Assessment Quality	Test Administration	Quality of Learning	Equity of Learning
Chugwater Elementary School	2.88	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Chugwater High School	2.88	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Chugwater Junior High School	2.88	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Glendo Elementary School	2.73	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0
Glendo High School	2.73	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0
Glendo Junior High School	2.73	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0
Libbey Elementary School	2.82	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.0
West Elementary School	2.79	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	2.0
Wheatland High School	2.67	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.0
Wheatland Middle School	2.91	3.0	2.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	2.0

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 Platte County School District #1 External Review (ER) team convened at the hotel in Wheatland, Wyoming on Sunday, October 13 and moved to the Central Office to begin work there. It had been determined a few days before the visit that the hotel could not accommodate the evening work sessions until after 7pm. The decision was made to conduct all team work sessions at the Central Office. The team had previously spent time together in training and preparation during a conference call. Standard assignments, schedules, and other logistic matters were planned. The team arrived in Wheatland informed and ready to work.

On Monday morning the superintendent and various personnel made presentations to the team designed to further inform them of the operations of the district and how the system supports schools and the education of children. An additional day was included in this External Review so that team members could spend sufficient time in the classrooms to develop a full picture of teaching and learning. The team conducted 278 interviews among:
- 10 Administrators
- 44 Teachers
- 25 Support Staff
- 125 Students
- 5 Board of Trustees
- 69 Parents

The team conducted 118 classroom observations utilizing the Effective Learning Environments Observations Tool (ELEOT) which describes learning processes in seven categories related to learning. The team was satisfied that they were able to develop a clear picture of learning across the district.

The district was prepared for the External Review in many aspects. The Lead Evaluator had worked closely with the district Director of Instruction and Assessment to develop the schedule, plan the logistics of the visit, and prepare to present artifacts and evidence to the team that describe the operations of the district.   Though many digital artifacts were made available to the team ahead of time via website and password access, some documents such as records of teacher observations and other Wyoming assurances were not immediately available. This suggested to the team a lack of systemic processes to support the accreditation effort and district wide processes. The district office worked with team members during the second day to identify and deliver the appropriate documentation as required. Eventually these were produced to support the statements and indications of evidence that the district had provided in the Accreditation Report.

Of significance during this visit was the fact that two elementary schools and the district high school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the second year and are designated "In Improvement" status by the state of Wyoming Department of Education. District and school personnel are cognizant of the academic needs in meeting

state requirements for AYP in Language Arts at the elementary level and mathematics at the high school level. Trend data indicate an increase in the percent of student proficiency at these schools, but the schools were not able to meet the substantial increase required from the state department, which had established new target scores six months after the completion of the state assessments- Proficiency Assessment for Wyoming Students (PAWS), and ACT. During conversations with staff, the team confirmed that interventions are in place to address these academic needs and monitor student achievement. These steps are documented in school improvement plans and minutes of school level professional learning communities, (PLC).

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.
The newly developed Purpose and Direction of the district to "Reach the Peak" was approved by the school board in August, 2013. Interviews revealed limited involvement of stakeholders in this process. These interviews and the review of survey results provided by the district indicate the culture of the school district to be one of minimal collaboration and shared decision making involving internal and external stakeholders. The new purpose has not been communicated clearly to the schools or communities.

The superintendent's motto of "Better Today and Better Tomorrow" was not mentioned at any of the schools. Schools currently have a vision and mission, but the team did not find a policy that clearly guides the schools in the process of reviewing and revising their purpose to mesh with the district's new purpose. According to stakeholders, schools have been "operating as silos" for years and have not been supported in a systems approach to continuous improvement. Interviews with faculty and staff during school visits revealed the belief that the strength of the school district has been and continues to be at the local school level. The team found all stakeholders to be supportive of the culture and beliefs about teaching and learning, particularly at the school level.

The district has a continuous improvement plan; interviews and the review of artifacts revealed almost no involvement of school-level or community stakeholders in the development of the plan. Furthermore, communication of the district plan did not allow the schools sufficient time to align their goals with those of the district. School-level and community stakeholders voiced their concern about the governing board and district leadership's lack of transparency. Evidence indicates that the superintendent and school board have begun to revise policy but have not yet implemented these policy revisions systemically to ensure overall effective administration and equitable operation of the school district and its schools. The team often heard that there is little follow-through with policy issues or when concerns are voiced by stakeholders.

The team found that stakeholders agree that the strength of the district is the highly qualified professional and support staff, reporting that teachers and staff care about and advocate for their children.   The district supports various strong programs in the schools. Outlying schools demonstrate strong agriculture/FFA programs. Centrally located schools offer strong extra-curricular programs. All schools participate in character education programs such as PBIS, DARE, Character Counts, and GEAR UP Wyoming.

Many Stakeholders do not perceive educational programs to be challenging or equitable for their children. They agree that district-level decisions appear to have created budgeting issues that limit the ability of some schools to provide sufficient staff. At times, staffing decisions have seemed questionable or inequitable. In a small elementary school staff was reduced by one, resulting in a combination K/1st grade class. Teachers, parents, staff, and

administration all report that they do not believe this is in the best interest of students. Parents state that they voice their concerns but no one listens at the district level. Stakeholders report the elimination of media specialist positions, and current staffing utilizes paraprofessionals rather than media specialists. Counseling and other support services are very limited, particularly in the outlying schools. Additionally, district-wide Instructional Facilitators (IFs) were reduced by one for the 2013-2014 school year. External review team members questioned this situation given the reimbursement models in the state of Wyoming for services provided. The absence of extra-curricular opportunities in the outlying schools was identified by stakeholders as an additional concern. However, it appears that this opportunity could have been provided if a sufficient number of students demonstrated a commitment to these programs.

Evidence and interviews revealed that autonomy is provided at the local schools to make curricular and program decisions. It is the perception of both internal and external stakeholders that this autonomy comes at the expense of systemic support for continuous improvement regarding teaching and learning; i.e., technology, personnel, support of school level initiatives, etc. The team noted first hand that some schools and buildings have insufficient infrastructure and funds to support technology. School personnel underscored the lack of resources to provide media and information services such as periodicals, non-fiction materials, and other reading materials that are needed to support the purpose and direction of the schools. Although district staff acknowledge that they are attempting to remedy this problem, the situation causes interference with the educational programs and system operations of the district.

The system's curriculum provides learning experiences and opportunities for most students to develop learning skills, thinking skills, and life skills. The team found evidence that the curriculum is not provided equitably for all students, does not appropriately challenge students, nor is it consistent in schools across the system. Teachers engage the majority students through implementation of instructional strategies and interventions that require students to apply knowledge, collaborate with peers, and self-reflect, but the systemic implementation of a rigorous and challenging curriculum was not evident. High or consistent levels of differentiation of instruction across grade levels or content areas were not observed. These findings are corroborated by the ELEOT observation findings. The team did not see evidence that students are identified in the area of gifted and talented.

System and school leaders monitor instructional practices utilizing select portions of the McREL teacher evaluation process. This piecemeal implementation was found to hinder the effectiveness of the instrument and the fidelity with which it is implemented across the district. The team also found little evidence that it is used to assess the needs for professional development to ensure continuous improvement in student performance.

District-wide teams are making efforts to analyze a range of data sources. This effort is not yet evident across the system. The district has purchased and implemented Silverback, a data warehouse, to allow staff immediate access to data. The team noted that efforts should include using data to inform program evaluation and to improve organizational conditions that support learning including alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment. The team noted also that while teachers and administrators have been supplied training on the use of data, support staff have not been included. Staff interviews and the experiences of the ER team revealed technology problems that hamper access to data to support student learning.

Buildings and facilities across the district, regardless of age, are clean, safe, and well maintained. All but the high school and Central Office were observed to have new security systems, controlling access to each building.

Cameras and intercoms are present at designated doors to allow access, only after being admitted by the main office staff. This was done recently in response to school incidents throughout the nation. Some buildings do not have emergency evacuation routes posted though this is required under Wyoming statute.

Given the multitude of systemic issues regarding district decision making concerning resource allocation, the ER team concluded that a system for tracking, evaluating, and improving the operational processes around building maintenance is crucial to the improvement of systemic operations. A strategic resource management plan that includes long-range planning to support learning and the purpose and direction of the system is indicated.

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 Review team conducted 118 classroom observations utilizing the AdvancED Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool which provides a range of information concerning the classroom conditions that support learning. The following are excerpts and analyses from the observations across the district:

- Strong, positive interactions between students and teachers
- Students strive to meet the expectations of their teachers
- Differentiation is not consistent across the district
- Higher order thinking skills were generally not observed
- Limited use of exemplars
- Students interact respectfully with school personnel and peers
- Friendly, welcoming, well maintained learning environments
- Instructional activities tend to be large group and teacher-centered
- Pockets of excellence in student engagement
- Limited use of technology by students
- Students expressed and demonstrated that learning experiences are positive
- Students are comfortable in asking questions and participating in classroom activities

The External Review team engaged in a highly collaborative process to understand and analyze the situation of the district. The Required Actions and Opportunities for Improvement provided in this report have been carefully constructed by the team to identify important factors affecting student performance and areas of challenge for the district and leave specific actions the district will take to improve.

In summary, the team identified the weakness in systemic operations supporting high student performance as the crucial limiting factor for the district. The school district should:

1. Embrace ownership of the Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement with a concentration on addressing the Required Actions identified by the External Review Team;

2. Develop a shared focus on the use of school district data to support an ongoing continuous improvement process;

3. Develop annual and measurable goals for the Board of Education;

4. Develop annual and measurable goals for the Superintendent;

5. Plan for continuous improvement by identifying specific objectives for obtaining each of these goals; and

6. Monitor these goals oriented assessments on a quarterly basis for accountability and measurement of progress.

In the past, accreditation reviews resulted in an accreditation recommendation on status. Labels such as advised, warned, probation, or all clear were used to describe the status of a school relative to the criteria.   Beginning with school year, 2013-14, AdvancED is introducing a new framework to describe the result of an accreditation review. Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduces an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ). The IEQ is comprised of three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) use of resources to support and optimize learning. Therefore, your institution will no longer receive an accreditation status. Instead, your institution will be accredited with an IEQ score. In the case where an institution is failing to meet established criteria, the accreditation will be under review thereby requiring frequent monitoring.

The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and Indicators; the Analysis of Student Performance; and the Engagement and Involvement of Stakeholders. Within each domain institutions will be able to connect to the individual performance levels that are applied in support of the AdvancED Standards and evaluative criteria. Within the performance levels are detailed descriptors that can be a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Required Action as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected Indicator.

The IEQ provides a new framework that recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement. Your institution's IEQ is the starting point for continuous improvement. Your actions for improvement that have a positive impact will be reflected in your IEQ score.

IEQ Institutional Score: 217

Teaching and Learning Impact: 219
(Standards 3 and 5; Student Performance Criteria)

Leadership Capacity: 225
(Standards 1 and 2; Stakeholder Engagement Criteria)

Resource Utilization: 200
(Standard 4)

Based on the findings from the review of evidence, the External Review Team recommends that Platte County School District #1be accredited, pending further review and final action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission. The External Review team congratulates the district for the achievement of this important step in the

improvement of performance of Platte County School District One students.

Improvement Priority

1. Align school board goals, policies, work, and actions with Purpose and Direction to support achievement of student performance goals and maintain the course in continuous improvement, effectively support the superintendent and system leadership in defining and reaching performance goals, ensure transparency in all operations to increase stakeholder knowledge, trust, and engagement in increasing student performance, promote improvement of system operations in support of teaching and learning, and comply with state, federal, and accreditation mandates with fidelity.

   Related Indicator(s) or Assurance(s):
   2.1 The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.

   Description:
   Evidence indicates that the superintendent and school board have begun to revise policy but have not yet implemented these policy revisions systemically to ensure overall effective administration and equitable operation of the school district and its schools. The team often heard that there is little follow through with policy issues or when concerns are voiced by stakeholders.

2. Develop a program evaluation process to guide alignment of system resources and processes with Purpose and Direction, maintain the course in the improvement of student performance, and guide system responsibilities to reduce costs, streamline operations, and improve student performance.

   Related Indicator(s) or Assurance(s):
   5.2 Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions that support learning.

   Description:
   While various levels and sources of data to guide the direction of the system and decision making are available, little evidence was found that the district utilizes these sources of data to guide program assessment and evaluation, evaluate organizational effectiveness, or to continuously improve conditions that support increasingly higher student achievement and performance. In addition, the perceptions by stakeholders of inequities in resources and support of schools indicate the need for processes to evaluate all programs and initiatives and how these support the Purpose and Direction of the district.

3. Identify specific leadership strategies aligned with the Purpose and Direction and expectations for student performance and build systems to ensure equity of all resources at every school supporting all students, effective two-way communication with all stakeholders, and engage all stakeholders in the improvement of student performance.

Related Indicator(s) or Assurance(s):

1.3 The school leadership and staff at all levels of the system commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.

Description:

Interviews with stakeholders revealed their perceptions that inequities exist in resource allocation across the district. These perceptions are aggravated by the lack of transparency in the allocation process. Decisions are made at the system level concerning various levels of resources such as personnel and technology but the justifications for these are seldom provided to stakeholders.

4. Review the purpose and direction of the district and chart a clear concise course for continuous improvement of student performance and engage all stakeholders in the process.

   Related Indicator(s) or Assurance(s):

   2.5 Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.

   Description:

   The newly developed Purpose and Direction of the district to "Reach the Peak" was approved by the school board in August, 2013. Interviews revealed limited involvement of stakeholders in this process. These interviews and the review of survey results provided by the district indicate the culture of the school district to be one of minimal collaboration and shared decision making involving internal and external stakeholders. The new purpose has not been communicated clearly to the schools or communities.

5. Review, revise, and communicate expectations for student performance with specific growth goals and defined strategies, steps, and objectives to meet these goals.

   Related Indicator(s) or Assurance(s):

   3.2 Curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the system are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.

   Description:

   The system's curriculum provides learning experiences and opportunities for most students to develop learning skills, thinking skills, and life skills. The external review team found that the curriculum is not provided equitably for all students, does not appropriately challenge all students, nor is it consistent in schools across the system.

Addenda

The External Review Team

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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 addressing 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 appropriate state, national, and/or international levels 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 that confers accreditation 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, and 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 (NWAC) that was founded in 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.

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

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