

Report of the External Review Team for Educational Service Unit #1

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Date: March 19, 2017 - March 22, 2017



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Introduction

The External Review is an integral component of AdvancED Performance Accreditation and provides the institution with a comprehensive evaluation guided by the results of diagnostic instruments, in-depth review of data and documentation, and the professional judgment of a team of qualified and highly trained evaluators. A series of diagnostic instruments examines the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the capacity of leadership to effect continuous improvement, and the degree to which the institution optimizes its use of available resources to facilitate and support student success. The results of this evaluation are represented in the Index of Education Quality (IEQ™) and through critical observations, namely, Powerful Practices, Opportunities for Improvement, and Improvement Priorities.

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 specific to their institution type, demonstrate acceptable levels of student performance and the continuous improvement of student performance, and provide evidence of stakeholder engagement and satisfaction. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the conditions, processes, and practices within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness.

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 Standards were developed by a committee comprised of talented 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 define institutional quality and guide continuous improvement. Prior to implementation, an internationally recognized panel of experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research reviewed the standards and provided feedback, guidance and endorsement.

The AdvancED External Review Team uses AdvancED Standards, associated indicators and criteria related to student performance and stakeholder engagement to guide its evaluation. The Team examines adherence to standards as well as how the institution functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics expected of an accredited institution. The Standards, indicators and related criteria are evaluated using indicator-specific performance levels. The Team rates each indicator and criterion on a scale of 1 to 4. The final scores assigned to the indicators and criteria represent the average of the External Review Team members' individual ratings.

The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation. It energizes and equips the institution's leadership and stakeholders 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 the in-depth examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with all stakeholder groups, and extensive observations of learning, instruction, and operations.

Use of Diagnostic Tools

A key to examining the institution is the design and use of diagnostic tools that reveal the effectiveness with which an institution creates conditions and implements processes and practices that impact student performance and success. In preparation for the External Review the institution conducted a Self Assessment that applied the standards and criteria for accreditation. The institution provided evidence to support its conclusions vis a vis organizational effectiveness in ensuring acceptable and improving levels of student performance.

- an indicator-based tool that connects the specific elements of the criteria to evidence gathered by the team;
- a student performance analytic that examines the quality of assessment instruments used by the institution, the integrity of the administration of the assessment to students, the quality of the learning results including the impact of instruction on student learning at all levels of performance, and the equity of learning that examines the results of student learning across all demographics;
- a stakeholder engagement instrument that examines the fidelity of administration and results of perception surveys seeking the perspective of students, parents, and teachers;
- a state-of-the-art, learner-centric observation instrument, the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (eleot™) that quantifies students' engagement, attitudes and dispositions organized in 7 environments: Equitable Learning, High Expectations, Supportive Learning, Active Learning, Progress Monitoring and Feedback, Well-Managed Learning, and Digital Learning. All evaluators must be trained, reach acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability, and certified to use this research-based and validated instrument.

The External Review Team's findings and critical observations are shared in this report through the IEQ™ results as well as through the identification of Powerful Practices, Opportunities for Improvement, and Improvement Priorities.

Index of Education Quality

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 AdvancED Standards and other evaluative criteria. Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, AdvancED introduced a new framework to describe the results of an accreditation review. Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduced an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ™). The IEQ™ comprises three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the capacity of leadership to guide the institution toward the achievement of its

vision and strategic priorities; 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 and demonstrated improvement.

The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and associated indicators, the analysis of student performance, and the engagement and feedback of stakeholders. Within each domain institutions can 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 serve as a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report and building on their Powerful Practices, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Opportunity for Improvement and Improvement Priority as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected indicator(s).

The IEQ™ provides a new framework that recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement. An institution's IEQ™ is the starting point for continuous improvement. Subsequent actions for improvement and evidence that these have had a positive impact will raise the institution's IEQ™ score.

Benchmark Data

Throughout this report, AdvancED provides benchmark data for each indicator and for each component of the evaluative criteria. These benchmark data represent the overall averages across the entire AdvancED Network for your institution type. Thus, the AdvancED Network average provides an extraordinary opportunity for institutions to understand their context on a global scale rather than simply compared to a state, region, or country.

It is important to understand that the AdvancED Network averages are provided primarily to serve as a tool for continuous improvement and not as a measure of quality in and of itself. Benchmark data, when wisely employed, have a unique capacity to help institutions identify and leverage their strengths and areas of improvement to significantly impact student learning.

Powerful Practices

A key to continuous improvement is the institution's ability to learn from and build upon its most effective and impactful practices. Such practices serve as critical leverage points necessary to guide, support and ensure continuous improvement. A hallmark of the accreditation process is its commitment to identifying with evidence, the conditions, processes and practices that are having the most significant impact on student performance and institutional effectiveness. Throughout this report, the External Review Team has captured and defined Powerful Practices. These noteworthy practices are essential to the institution's effort to continue its journey of improvement.

Opportunities for Improvement

Every institution can and must improve no matter what levels of performance it has achieved in its past. During the process of the review, the External Review Team identified areas of improvement where the institution is meeting the expectations for accreditation but in the professional judgment of the Team these are Opportunities for Improvement that should be considered by the institution. Using the criteria described in the corresponding rubric(s) to the Opportunity for Improvement, the institution can identify what elements of practice must be addressed to guide the improvement.

Improvement Priorities

The expectations for accreditation are clearly defined in a series of the rubric-based AdvancED Standards, indicators and evaluative criteria focused on the impact of teaching and learning on student performance, the capacity of the institution to be guided by effective leadership, and the allocation and use of resources to support student learning. As such, the External Review Team reviewed, analyzed and deliberated over significant bodies of evidence provided by the institution and gathered by the Team during the process. In the professional judgment of the Team as well as the results of the diagnostic process, the Team defined, with rationale, Improvement Priorities. The priorities must be addressed in a timely manner by the institution to retain and improve their accreditation performance as represented by the IEQ™. Improvement Priorities serve as the basis for the follow-up and monitoring process that will begin upon conclusion of the External Review. The institution must complete and submit an Accreditation Progress Report within two years of the External Review. The report must include actions taken by the institution to address the Improvement Priorities along with the corresponding evidence and results. The IEQ™ will be recalculated by AdvancED upon review of the evidence and results associated with the Improvement Priorities.

The Review

Educational Service Unit # 1 serves a six-county area that contains 22 school districts serving 12,500 students and consists of 3,000 square miles. The External Review Team consisted of five members, three from Nebraska and one from Michigan and one from North Dakota. Two members of the team are currently administrators of education service units in Nebraska and North Dakota. All team members brought diverse experiences from both educational service agencies and local school districts. The team consisted of former superintendents as well as teachers and administrators in a variety of positions with experience in service agency consulting and administration.

The External Review Team first came together through a virtual meeting two weeks prior to the review. All members completed required training. Prior to arrival in Wakefield Nebraska, Team members reviewed the Standards Assessment Report, and the artifacts that totaled over 300 items provided by the agency on Google Docs.

The Lead Evaluator had numerous telephone and email contacts with system personnel, including the ESU #1 Administrator to arrange the logistics for the review. Six of the agencies 22 constituent districts as well as three of the agency's special program centers were visited by team members during the review. In selecting and

scheduling local district visits, the Lead Evaluator and agency administrator could select both the largest district in the service area as well as the smallest.

The team met for the first time on Sunday, March 19, at the Cobblestone Hotel in Wayne, Nebraska. Each member brought questions and insight into the individual standard that was assigned. Members also shared their initial evaluations of each Indicator and Standard.

On Monday, the team interviewed staff members, toured the facility and interviewed board members, staff, and local district administrators of districts that were not scheduled for visits. In addition to local district interviews, there were also interviews of stakeholders that included state department of education members as well as parents and community members. The agency provided some interviews through the use of the Zoom distance communication program allowing interviews that were quite a distance from the agency offices.

On Tuesday, the team divided into three groups and visited three districts in the morning and three in the afternoon. Each of those visits began with the local district superintendent, central office administrators (where available), teachers, and, in some cases, students. Visits also included the special education and pre-school programs operated by the agency. Both Monday and Tuesday evenings provided time for the team to review and update their review artifacts, evidence, and evaluations of the indicators. The team then began the writing of the final report and Exit Report presentation. On the fourth and final day of the review, the team finished its report and presented the Exit Report at a called board meeting.

The External Review Team wishes to thank the staff of ESU #1 for their hospitality and the thoroughness of preparing their Internal Review, gathering of artifacts, and careful planning of the logistics. The leadership of the agency also provided facilities for team meetings and meals that assisted the team in its work. The use of surveys and providing the many artifacts in the Google Docs format assisted the process and provided for all necessary logistics.

The External Review Team commends the ESU #1 staff and community for their thorough and careful preparation for the External Review. The Self Assessment process used by the agency spanned twelve months and involved a wide variety of staff members in an evaluation of the agency. Staff members were provided a means for their input in development of action plans for each of the agency's goals. The team noted the open and candid approach to the agency's internal evaluation. Areas of strength and challenge were identified with appropriate evidence. Interviews with staff and constituents revealed a clear alignment between the evaluation of each standard and indicator.

Stakeholders were interviewed by members of the External Review Team to gain their perspectives on topics relevant to the institution's effectiveness and student performance. The feedback gained through the stakeholder interviews was considered with other evidences and data to support the findings of the External Review. The following chart depicts the numbers of persons interviewed representative of various stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Interviewed	Number
Superintendents	14
Board Members	5
Chief Executive Officer/President	1
Administrators	30
Instructional Staff	15
Support Staff	10
Students	8
Parents/Community/Business Leaders	3
Total	86

Results

Teaching and Learning Impact

The impact of teaching and learning on student achievement is the primary expectation of every institution. The relationship between teacher and learner must be productive and effective for student success. The impact of teaching and learning includes an analysis of student performance results, instructional quality, learner and family engagement, support services for student learning, curriculum quality and efficacy, and college and career readiness data. These are all key indicators of an institution's impact on teaching and learning.

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 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.

Institutions 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 3 - Teaching and Assessing for Learning

The agency's services and programs support the educational needs of its constituent schools/systems through meaningful professional learning experiences.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
3.1	The agency provides equitable, relevant and targeted support programs and/or services for all schools/systems.	3.00	3.20
3.2	The agency monitors its programs and services to measure effectiveness and to guide ongoing adjustments in delivery.	2.80	2.34
3.3	Agency staff provide professional learning opportunities that engage practitioners in their learning.	3.00	2.87
3.4	The agency uses collaboration as an essential operating principle in the development and delivery of its services and programs.	3.00	2.93
3.5	All agency staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	3.00	2.45
3.6	The agency's support services meet the unique learning needs of its constituent schools/systems.	3.80	2.95

Standard 5 - Using Results for Continuous Improvement

The agency implements a comprehensive evaluation system that generates a range of data about the effectiveness of the agency and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
5.1	The agency establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive evaluation system.	2.80	2.18
5.2	Professional and support staff throughout the agency continuously collect, analyze and use a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data related to program evaluation and organizational conditions.	3.00	2.01
5.3	The agency's leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about learning and the achievement of agency improvement goals to stakeholders.	2.80	2.34

Findings

Improvement Priority

Establish a comprehensive framework to evaluate program and service innovations by establishing clear objectives with pre and post metrics.

(Indicator 3.2, Indicator 5.1)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.2

Evidence and Rationale

Interviews with staff and constituent district personnel consistently documented the range of programs and customized services that were innovative. A review of evidence and interviews with stakeholders indicated that the agency currently has several effectiveness measures in place including service usage and attendance at professional development events. Additionally, teachers are surveyed following professional development asking if they liked the training, plan to use it, and what training they would like in the future.

However, there is currently no formal process in place to determine the cost benefits in terms of time and effort devoted to developing and delivering programs and services; nor is there a means to determine the impact of training on classroom practice. Schools that were served by programs indicated they each had processes in place to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development, programs, and/or initiatives; such as, measuring increases in student growth, performance, and documenting consistency of use of instructional strategies. For example, stakeholders indicated they have developed walk through tools for use following instructional improvement training like the Marzano program. Staff at the local level further noted their willingness to share their internal measures of effectiveness with agency staff.

Additional suggestions from stakeholders included the potential use of pre and post measures for documenting strategy usage before and after training. Instructional rounds are currently in use in several schools for teacher discussion and feedback. However, consistent measurement tools and benchmarks of impact have not yet been developed.

When service agencies identify program goals, benchmarks, and commensurate costs when initiating programs and services, they serve as role models for their constituents. However, it is when agencies can identify the impact as well as a cost benefits analysis of what they do, that their importance, credibility, and effectiveness are clearly established and validated with those they serve.

Opportunity For Improvement

Identify model practices observed in schools and communicate the information to all district principals and superintendents within the agency's service area.

(Indicator 5.3)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 5.3

Evidence and Rationale

Interviews with local district staff members described how agency staff are constantly in and out of schools on a regular basis. A review of local district contact time provided verification of that description. Local school staff and leaders indicated a desire to share successful initiatives with peers both agency wide as well as state wide; but, currently had not secured an opportunity to do so. During another interview, the team heard from a superintendent who was interested in learning about successful practices from peers. Agendas from the two principal meetings held this year documented a 20 minute session for a principal roundtable discussion at one of the meetings.

Innovative practices that result in improved teaching and greater student success are a priority both in terms of time and resources. While individual leaders may research model practices to address individual building needs, it is powerful to be able to share successful practices with peers and colleagues. This networking allows important learning to be shared about how a specific practice was implemented and the impact on student success. This could include what worked and what might be changed for the next time.

Powerful Practice

Educational Service Unit #1 is committed to meeting the needs of all constituents in the districts and schools it supports with a program that is know as the Continuum of Support that uses data gathered to measure success and challenges.

(Indicator 3.6)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 3.6

Evidence and Rationale

The agency uses surveys, needs assessments, and requests to support and provide meaningful learning experiences in schools. Both administrators and teachers have indicated that the agency does whatever it takes to meet the needs of the schools. Through targeted interviews with school administrators, it is very clear that the agency designs professional development that is specific to meet the individual needs of the schools.

The agency is very thoughtful in determining what they can provide to the schools. The continuum of support is an exemplar practice that clearly demonstrates how the agency provides follow through to assist in the implementation of interventions and initiatives that documents both success and program elements that need further development.

During staff interviews, agency staff freely documented both successful programs as well as those programs that failed to achieve the program objective. Agency staff pointed out the importance of learning from programs that "didn't work" and that the continuous improvement program of the agency was focused on making these situations as "learning opportunities."

A planned approach to follow up through evaluation provides a continuum that builds a culture of trust and collaboration that impacts student and staff learning.

Leadership Capacity

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress towards its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its institutional purpose and direction, the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives, the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways, and the capacity to enact strategies to improve results of student 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 more than 32,000 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.

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 1 - Purpose and Direction

The agency maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commits to providing programs and services, active learning, and high expectations for professional practice as well as shared values and beliefs.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
1.1	The agency engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate an agency purpose.	3.00	2.55
1.2	The agency leadership and staff at all levels commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs that include provision of relevant and targeted educational programs and services, equitable support, active engagement in learning, application of knowledge and skills, and high expectations for professional practice.	3.60	3.09
1.3	Leadership of the agency implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support learning.	3.00	2.47

Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership

The agency operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and agency effectiveness.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and support practices that ensure effective administration of the agency.	3.00	3.03
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	3.00	3.17
2.3	The governing body ensures that agency leadership has the autonomy to meet established goals and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	3.60	3.58
2.4	Leadership and staff throughout the agency foster a culture consistent with the agency's purpose and direction.	3.20	3.08
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the agency's purpose and direction.	3.00	2.75
2.6	The agency's supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice.	3.00	2.49

Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic

Stakeholder Feedback is the third of three primary areas of evaluation in AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. The AdvancED surveys (student, parent, and teacher) are directly correlated to the AdvancED 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, survey results, and the degree to which the institution analyzed and acted on the results.

Evaluative Criteria	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
Questionnaire Administration	4.00	3.46
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	4.00	3.10

Findings

Opportunity For Improvement

Evaluate and adapt the current supervision and evaluation process to document improved professional practice within the organization.

(Indicator 2.6)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 2.6

Evidence and Rationale

A review of artifacts found an evaluation system for staff that assesses professional practice at the agency. The team was provided a brief verbal description of how the agency utilized a framework, and did find evidence of supervision and evaluation rubrics used throughout the entire organization, The team found that the rubrics used do not, in some cases, meet the specific expectations for each position. The team was shown an “evaluation system screenshot” with additional information, however, did not see evidence of how the overall process and expectations are outlined for probationary and permanent staff. The team also did not see evidence of how classified staff or leadership positions were evaluated. While the team could infer growth and advancements within the agency based on supervision and evaluation of staff, specific evidence of improved professional practice was not provided.

A formal process outlining the supervision and evaluation of professional practice is a vital component of continuous improvement. Providing a consistent framework and having the expectation to utilize the same process throughout the organization is critical. Sharing expectations of professional practice with all staff throughout the agency can be examined on a continual basis to ensure student learning and organizational

effectiveness are a part of the process. Documentation of evidence demonstrating how the supervision and evaluation process improves professional practice should be a priority.

Powerful Practice

Leadership and staff at all levels commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs that include the provision of relevant and targeted educational programs and services, equitable support, active engagement in learning, application of knowledge and skills, and high expectations for professional practice.

(Indicator 1.2, Indicator 2.4)

Primary Indicator

Indicator 1.2

Evidence and Rationale

The External Review Team observed that the shared values and beliefs of the agency, “Leadership, Innovation and Service,” are prominently displayed in the entryway of the facility. These words articulate the philosophy of the agency staff and leadership as evidenced in interviews with administrators and educators from each district as well as agency board members. These stakeholders used words such as “tailored” and “personalized” to describe the services provided by the agency.

Being responsive to the needs of individual districts creates a climate of equity of service and support. In its mission and vision, the agency states a commitment to its responsibility for student achievement. The commitment that constituent district staff members mentioned in all interviews was found in the work done throughout the service area with programs like the data literacy initiative. Effective use of data is a common goal in districts within the agency. The results of proper data analysis processes provide educators with insights for effective instruction. Goal setting and progress monitoring using multiple data sources have become common practice under the leadership of the agency staff. Results, as observed by artifacts, prominently show that local districts are actively working to improve student achievement. Through data literacy a district can better identify its current reality and strategically plan for growth and student success.

“Leadership, Innovation and Service” describe the culture throughout the agency. Stakeholder comments such as, “...model of leadership...” that, “...invites us to be better without telling us what we ought to do,” describes the approach that agency leadership and staff use in their work with member schools. Artifacts demonstrate ongoing professional learning of all agency staff to address the needs of member schools. Innovative approaches address various needs and circumstances found in schools (e.g. use of technology to address distance issues, online learning opportunities through Canvas, and data collection and analysis practices.) Additionally, artifacts demonstrate school-site service agency personnel are advancing and/or adding to their skill set in response to the needs of the special populations in the schools they serve. This all points to how this service agency lives its mission, vision, and purpose.

Continuous improvement is dependent upon the understanding and implementation of effective and consistent data collection and analysis practices. Providing schools with these tools supports their capacity and responsibility for student growth and achievement. Supporting the continuous improvement process with

research-based professional learning opportunities, effective and tailored innovations, as well as supportive and informed guidance through leadership and collaboration is how service agencies support the ultimate success of each and every student school, and district.

Resource Utilization

The use and distribution of resources must be aligned and supportive of the needs of an institution and the students served. Institutions must ensure that resources are aligned with the stated mission and are distributed equitably so that the needs of students are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes an examination of the allocation and use of resources, the equity of resource distribution to need, the ability of the institution to ensure appropriate levels of funding and sustainability of resources, as well as evidence of long-range capital and resource planning effectiveness.

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 more than 32,000 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 and ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard 4 - Resources and Support Systems

The agency provides resources, programs and services that support its purpose and direction for all constituent schools/systems.

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
4.1	The agency 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 agency.	3.00	3.12
4.2	Material and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the agency.	3.20	3.20
4.3	The agency maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all.	3.40	3.30
4.4	The agency demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the agency.	3.20	2.52
4.5	The agency provides, coordinates, and evaluates the effectiveness of programs and services delivered to constituent schools and systems.	2.80	2.36

Indicator	Description	Review Team Score	AdvancED Network Average
4.6	The agency provides technology infrastructure and equipment to support the teaching, informational, and operational needs of the agency and the schools/systems it serves.	3.20	3.01

Conclusion

ESU #1 is an educational service agency that is very focused on supporting its 22 constituent school districts covering 2,926 square miles and includes 11,956 students and 1,157 teachers. The agency focuses on service and its mission of "Leading, Innovating and Servicing" the needs of a population that is comprised of 44% of the students identified for free and reduced lunch.

As noted by the Index of Educational Quality (IEQ) the team observed several exemplary practices and strategies that could serve as a model for educational service agencies. Noted among those practices were financial support for initiatives in local districts that make a difference for students. The focus of the agency's leadership on measured progress in the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), the curriculum alignment, and instructional improvement program are noted as process elements that have impacted the schools in the service area, resulting in positive improvement of student achievement.

Within those practices is the assumption by agency leadership and governing board that the agency has the responsibility to have a direct impact on student performance and success. A review of student data reveals a positive trend line that accounts for a positive impact that ESU #1 has attained in its performance.

The overall theme observed through interviews and artifacts demonstrated a total responsibility for student success within the service area. Results clearly demonstrated the impact of the mission and vision of the agency. That focus has led to the recognition that there are diverse needs among constituent districts and has resulted in a service orientation that is tailored and customized to individual districts and schools.

The team visited six of the twenty-two districts while interviewing staff in the remaining districts. Visits were conducted in the largest district, the smallest district, the highest achieving districts, and the schools with the greatest challenges. While service plans varied across the service area, one theme was clearly articulated, personnel from all districts reported a strong belief with data that the ESU #1 meets the needs of students, staff and community with exemplary practices.

Another theme that was quite apparent was that the focus that agency staff members have created to continually measure academic progress for student success. Resources are allocated based on individual system needs and service goals are customized. The relationship fostered between staff and constituents creates a culture of trust, positivity, and collaboration. Surveys of stakeholders indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the way the agency leads and services the needs of its constituents.

Challenges that face the agency are how to continually respond to the challenges facing the twenty-two local districts that are served, while still providing innovative approaches to continue the current improvement trend that is resulting in student success. This improvement trend is identified by both the Nebraska State Assessment (NeSA) program and the service area wide use of the Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP) that the agency supports in all of its districts and schools.

Another challenge facing the agency is the development of capacity in its constituents to use program and

process data to make decisions regarding changes, adaptations of programs, and the delivery of services. While the agency collects a great deal of performance data, the ability to aggregate these data, identify effective innovations, and share those results throughout the service area to assist those schools in further need of development is an on-going challenge. Within that challenge is the need to continue to customize program requests while maintaining a degree of standardization in order to control costs.

The Improvement Priorities developed by the External Review Team are designed to take the agency to the next level of growth and improvement. Great progress has been made to provide assistance in the use of data analysis reviews that provide evaluative products to measure growth and change.

The single Improvement Priority developed by the External Review Team is designed to take the agency to the next level of growth and improvement. This Improvement Priority is designed to sustain an approach that has brought great praise for the agency while providing a road map to increase the organizational effectiveness through continued leadership and innovation.

A comment during interviews that was heard repeatedly during interviews with constituent district personnel revealed the observation that local districts have developed a climate of interdependence. "ESU #1 is our central office, and we need them to share those promising practices and support our overall goals, we learn from each other and are willing to help each other."

The Improvement Priority and the Opportunities for Improvement create the ability to continue the excellent work that the agency provides.

Improvement Priorities

The institution should use the findings from this review to guide the continuous improvement process. The institution must address the Improvement Priorities listed below:

- Establish a comprehensive framework to evaluate program and service innovations by establishing clear objectives with pre and post metrics.

Accreditation Recommendation

Index of Education Quality

The Index of Education Quality (IEQ™) provides a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of indicators and evaluative criteria. A formative tool for improvement, it identifies areas of success as well as areas in need of focus.

The IEQ™ comprises three domains: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) the use of resources and data to support and optimize learning.

The overall and domain scores can range from 100-400. The domain scores are derived from: the AdvancED Standards and indicators ratings; results of the Analysis of Student Performance; and data from Stakeholder Feedback Surveys (students, parents, and staff).

	External Review IEQ Score	AdvancED Network Average
Overall Score	316.92	278.94
Teaching and Learning Impact	302.22	268.48
Leadership Capacity	330.91	293.71
Resource Utilization	313.33	286.27

The IEQ™ results include information about how the institution is performing compared to expected criteria as well as to other institutions in the AdvancED Network. The institution should use the information in this report, including the corresponding performance rubrics, to identify specific areas of improvement.

Consequently, the External Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission that the institution earn the distinction of accreditation for a five-year term. AdvancED will review the results of the External Review to make a final determination including the appropriate next steps for the institution in response to these findings.

Addenda

Team Roster

Member	Brief Biography
Mr. Michael A Bugenski	<p>Mike Bugenski is the former director of the Michigan NCA/AdvancED Office and recently was a District Improvement Facilitator on staff at Michigan State University, College of Education, K-12 Outreach. Previously he was an adjunct professor at Oakland University (Michigan) in the educational doctoral program. He is a former secondary teacher and coach, principal, district superintendent, consultant for strategic planning and Leadership Training for 3 Educational Service Agencies in Michigan, Associate Director, Michigan Association of School Administrators and Executive Director, Michigan Institute for Educational Management.</p>
Dr. Tanya Hilligoss	<p>Tanya Hilligoss, Ph.D., serves as the Outreach Director at the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired (NCECBVI). She works collaboratively with teachers of the visually impaired and school administrators statewide through professional development activities and consultation. Dr. Hilligoss also serves as the Coordinator for the Nebraska Deaf-Blind Project.</p> <p>Dr. Hilligoss previously served as a Supervisor of Special Education for a large school district in Nebraska, overseeing programs for students with vision impairments, hearing impairments, deaf-blindness, transition, and coordinating special education summer school services for the district. She has held positions as a program specialist/consultant for a regional program serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing, teacher for the deaf, and special education teacher. Dr. Hilligoss has taught classes at the post-secondary level.</p>
Dr. David E Gullatt	<p>David E. Gullatt, Ph.D, is a graduate of Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, LA and the University of Kansas at Lawrence. He served 29 years as a supervisor of administration and curriculum, an elementary and secondary principal, and a mathematics teacher within the public schools of Louisiana. For 15 years following those assignments he held teaching, administrative, and supervisory positions in higher education at both Northwestern State University (LA) and Louisiana Tech University. Dr. Gullatt has served as Program Head, Department Head, and Dean of the College of Education at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, LA, retiring in 2012. He has written 35 professional, juried publications in educational leadership and made 40 national and international presentations. For the past 11 years he has served on SACS, NCA, and NWAC AdvancED System Accreditation visits as Lead Evaluator for over 80 system, digital, corporate, and diagnostic accreditation visits. Presently Dr. Gullatt is Vice-Chair of the Louisiana SACS-CASI Council and is a field representative for AdvancED in Louisiana. He also provides professional development services to various states in the area of educational leadership. Dr. Gullatt is a certified AdvancED Professional Development Trainer and is also certified to lead Early Learning school visits. He presently serves as an adjunct professor of educational leadership and doctoral research at Louisiana Tech University and is a Turnaround School Specialist in Louisiana.</p>

Member	Brief Biography
Dr. Julia K. Allen	<p>Julia Allen is the ESU #19 Administrator for the Omaha Public Schools. She earned her B.S. degree in elementary education and special education from Creighton University. While attending the University of Nebraska at Omaha, she earned her M.S. degree in special education and subsequently an endorsement in educational administration. She completed her Ph.D in Assessment, Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Julia has been both a general education and special education elementary teacher, a Student Services Administrator and Director of Special Education in the Omaha Public Schools. Her previous accreditation experience has been as an external team member for Educational Service Unit #3 in Omaha and Educational Service Unit #4 in Auburn.</p>
Marilou Jasnoch	<p>Currently, Marilou Jasnoch is the Assistant Director of the Professional Learning Department at Educational Service Unit #3 (ESU #3), Omaha, Nebraska. Marilou continues with her roles and responsibilities as an education consultant and the assessment services coordinator. Past roles and responsibilities include Director of Nebraska State Writing Assessment and secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teacher. Marilou has a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction, a Bachelors in ELA, and an endorsement in High Ability Learner (HAL) education, and Education Leadership. Marilou is a member of various education organizations and committees including ASCD, Learning Forward, Data Cadre member (State Initiative), and is a member of the ESU Coordinating Council (ESUCC) Planning Team. Marilou has experience as an External Visitation Team member.</p>
Ms. Janet O'Hara	<p>Janet O'Hara is the Director for the Red River Valley Education Cooperative, and a part-time instructor at the University of North Dakota. She has worked in education for the past 19 years as a teacher, technology specialist, and coordinator in both Minnesota and North Dakota. She is a Google Certified Innovator and a Google Certified Trainer</p>

Next Steps

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with 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. Consider the Opportunities for Improvement identified throughout the report that are provided by the team in the spirit of continuous improvement and the institution's commitment to improving its capacity to improve student learning.
4. Develop action plans to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward addressing the Improvement Priorities.
5. Use the report to guide and strengthen the institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
6. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Improvement Priorities. Institutions are required to respond to all Improvement Priorities. 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 address the Improvement Priorities. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the responses to the Improvement Priorities and the resulting improvement.
7. Continue to meet the AdvancED Standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

About AdvancED

AdvancED is the world leader in providing improvement and accreditation services to education providers of all types in their pursuit of excellence in serving students. AdvancED serves as a trusted partner to more than 32,000 public and private schools and school systems – enrolling more than 20 million students - across the United States and 70 countries.

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 became part of AdvancED.

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. The Accreditation Divisions of AdvancED share research-based quality standards that cross school system, state, regional, national, and international boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified and consistent process designed to engage educational institutions in continuous improvement.

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