School Accreditation: An Opportunity for Administrator Professional Development

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School accreditation is generally viewed as a means of assuring quality in terms of programs, personnel, services, and operations. Accreditation in P-12 schools is generally conducted by state agencies and/or non-profit organizations. One prominent non-profit organization, AdvancED, is now "involved with 23,000 public and private schools and districts in 30 states and 65 countries and serving nearly 15 million students. This organization is generally considered one of the world's largest educational communities and the recent creation of AdvancED is the beginning of a new journey in the century-long histories of 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), and the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE). Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI will transition from setting standards for their respective regions to establishing unified quality standards for education in a global society. In essence, the transformation is from regional accreditation to a global system of accreditation, continuous improvement, and research." (Welcome to AdvancED. Advancing excellence in education worldwide. 2007)

AdvancED Standards

Schools seeking accreditation through AdvancED must meet standards, engage in continuous improvement, and host quality assurance reviews at specified intervals. The seven standards guiding the process were developed using input from the contributing organizations (NCA CASI, SACS CASI, NSSE), research, practitioners, and education experts. They include the following:

Standard 1: Vision and Purpose

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

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

The school provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.

Standard 3: Teaching and Learning

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

Standard 4: Documenting and Using Results

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

Standard 5: Resources and Support Systems

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

Standard 6: Stakeholder communication and Relationships

The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Standard 7: Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance. (AdvancED, 2006)

Administrators and Student Achievement

School accreditation (and related school improvement initiatives) involves all stakeholders in the process. While each stakeholder is critical, this article focuses on the role of the building administrator (principal) in improving student achievement (continuous improvement or quality). Clearly, school principals have an impact on the most important outcome, student achievement, and school district leaders (superintendents) provide the leadership for those building leaders. In a series of research projects conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), Waters and Marzano (2006) review compelling information about the school principal from their earlier studies as well as the major findings regarding the role of the Superintendent. Meta-analyses of school leadership data revealed that principal leadership does have notable effects on student achievement. In addition, they established 21 responsibilities of principals that when fulfilled in a skillful manner, positively affect student achievement. To meet the 21 responsibilities, there are 66 practices that more specifically outline the actions needed. Finally, they found that strong leaders do not necessarily positively affect student achievement. Strong leadership in itself cannot accomplish growth in student learning.

Just as a principal affects student learning (including but not limited to supervision of the teachers), school superintendents have the ability to impact student achievement (through supervision of their building principals.) Waters and Marzano (2006) noted from their research that district level leadership matters, especially when the superintendent focuses on goal setting. Also, length of tenure correlates with student achievement in a positive way and student achievement is enhanced when there is a 'defined' autonomy for principals. ('Defined' autonomy allows administrators flexibility within the boundaries defined by district goals.)

Elements of the AdvancED approach to school accreditation, then, can clearly be connected to research-based successful school leadership functions. School leaders, with support from the district office, can engage in practices that align with the processes of accreditation and promote engagement with the teaching staff. When superintendents adhere to non-negotiable goals related to student achievement and classroom instruction, school principals will enact behaviors that lead to goal achievement.

An Example of Integrating Administrator Professional Development with Accreditation Processes

This article proposes there is an opportunity for aligning the accreditation processes and the administrator's (the principal's) practices through the integration of the AdvancED Standards into the administrator's professional development (evaluation) plan. An example of how this might be accomplished is found in a district located in the Midwest (with buildings accredited through AdvancED), that has piloted the practice of incorporating AdvancED standards into the building principal's evaluation system. Leaders in the district met and discussed how their role could enhance accreditation efforts and determined where they were most influential. As a result, they agreed to use all seven standards as a focus for providing feedback on their annual performance evaluations but selected only some of the most prominent indicators from each standard as they relate to building level leadership. Rubrics were developed to assist in providing feedback to the building principals. A format similar to the one used in quality assurance reviews was used to construct the rubrics. The district determined what would constitute the varying levels of performance and modified the suggested lists of possible artifacts to align more with their own schools. For Standard IV, the list of artifacts is much more specific and unique to the pilot district. These are performances required by the district and were not negotiable nor optional. Examples of the rubrics piloted by this Midwestern district are found in Tables 1-7.

While the pilot included the use of all seven AdvancED Standards, districts and schools might wish to select only a few or reconsider the indicators they wish to examine. Schools considering the use of accreditation standards for professional development will also want to determine what role these standards will play within the comprehensive evaluation system. The pilot district uses the rubrics (found in Tables 1-7) to collect data for the quality assurance reviews conducted by AdvancED. The district also considers the information from the rubrics when examining performance levels of the principals and provides feedback for improvement. The degree to which the standards guide the evaluation system for principals would need to be discussed and negotiated based on current recommendations for professional development and research-based practices leading to continuous school improvement. It is likely the use of these standards would never supplant any evaluation system entirely but be used as an additional source of information to guide professional development associated with performance evaluations. Furthermore, the range of stakeholders involved in determining the evaluation/professional development process would need to be determined. District leaders may wish to include a wide range of perspectives (teachers, principals, central office staff, community members, parents) in development of guidelines or may prefer only a select few representing essential decision makers.

Conclusions

Successful accreditation and school improvement require the full participation of the building principals. Superintendents may be able to integrate accreditation processes into a building principal's professional development by assessing the achievement of the various indicators for each of the standards and providing support and direction based on the outcomes. By integrating accreditation standards, research-based effective practices will be reinforced, school teaching faculty will observe effective leadership being modeled, and important data can be collected to both provide evidence for the quality assurance review but also for targeted school change. In the end, everyone

benefits.....udents achieve at higher levels, teacher perform more effectively by using data to make decisions on instruction, principals promote environments that enhance student and faculty success, superintendents build districts where a culture of continuous improvement is the norm, and most importantly, communities have schools that excel.

Table 1: Standard I – Vision & Purpose

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

INDICATORS In fulfillment of this standard, the school:	Ratings a. Not Evident b. Emerging c. Operational d. Highly functional	Number of Artifacts 0 Artifacts 1-2 Artifacts 3-4 Artifacts At least 1 Artifact per indicator
1.1 Establishes a vision for the school in collaboration with its stakeholders		
1.2 Communicates the vision and purpose to build stakeholder understanding and support		
1.3 Identifies goals to advance the vision		
1.5 Ensures that the school's vision and purpose guide the teaching and learning process		
1.6 Reviews its vision and purpose systematically and revises them when appropriate		

		Total number of artifacts:
Date completed:		

Artifacts/Documentation

1) Vision and/or purpose statement

2) List of beliefs and/or core values

3) Surveys/evaluation instruments and results

4) Annual and long-range goals

5) Stakeholder perception data

6) Minutes of school board and/or stakeholder groups

7) Written policies/procedures of stakeholder involvement in development of vision, purpose and goals

Newsletters containing information about vision and purpose 😎

9) Minutes of stakeholder groups regarding analysis and use of data

10) Other

Table 2: Standard II – Governance & Leadership

STANDARD: The school provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.

INDICATORS In fulfillment of this standard, the school:	Ratings e. Not Evident f. Emerging g. Operational h. Highly functional	Number of Artifacts 0 Artifacts 1-2 Artifacts 3-4 Artifacts At least 1 Artifact per indicator
2.1 Establishes policies and procedures that provide for the effective operation of		

the school		
2.4 Employs a system that provides for analysis and review of student performance and school effectiveness		
2.5 Fosters a learning community		
2.6 Provides teacher and students opportunities to lead		
2.7 Provides stakeholders meaningful roles in the decision-making process that promote a culture of participation, responsibility and ownership		
2.10 Implements an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel		
		Total number of artifacts:
Date completed:		

Artifacts/Documentation

1 Staff and/or student handbooks

2 Surveys/evaluation instruments on school effectiveness

3 Goal setting information

4 Informal/formal observations

"Two or more classroom visitations, one of which shall be 15 minutes or longer (or 30 minutes if requested in writing by the teacher at the pre-evaluation meeting) for each employee prior to completion of the Employee Evaluation form. The total cumulative time for all classroom visitations shall not be less than 40 minutes." (Negotiated Agreement, Item 29.A.3.)

5   Observation conference notes

6   Final evaluation

7   Program and/or project descriptions

8   Other

Table 3: Standard III – Teaching & Learning

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

INDICATORS In fulfillment of this standard, the school:	Ratings i. Not Evident j. Emerging k. Operational l. Highly functional	Number of Artifacts 0 Artifacts 1-2 Artifacts 3-4 Artifacts At least 1 Artif act per indicator
3.1 Develops and implements curriculum based on clearly defined expectations for student learning		
3.2 Promotes active involvement of students in the learning process, including opportunities for them to explore application of higher-order thinking skills and investigate new approaches to applying their		

learning		
3.3 Gathers, analyzes, and uses data and research in making curricular and instructional choices		
3.4 Designs and uses instructional strategies, innovations, and activities that are research-based and reflective of best practice		
3.8 Implements interventions to help students meet expectations for student learning		
		Total number of artifacts:
Date completed:		

Artifacts/Documentation

1. Master schedule

2. Instructional guides, including curriculum mapping and/or scope and sequence charts

3. Agenda/minutes of grade-level and/or department PLC meetings

4. Pilots or practices based on research and evaluation criteria

5. Program and/or project descriptions

6. School Improvement Plan

7. Student Improvement Teams

8. School discipline plan

9. Other

Table 4: Standard IV – Documenting & Using Results

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

INDICATORS In fulfillment of this standard, the school:	Ratings m. Not Evident n. Emerging o. Operational p. Highly functional	Number of Artifacts 0 Artifacts 1-2 Artifacts 3-4 Artifacts At least 1 Artifact per indicator
4.1 Establishes performance measures for student learning that yield information that is reliable, valid and bias free		
4.2 Develops and implements a comprehensive assessment system for assessing progress toward meeting the expectations for student learning		
4.3 Uses student assessment data for making decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning processes		
4.4 Conducts a systematic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness and uses the results to improve student		

performance		
4.5 Communicates the results of student performance and school effectiveness to all stakeholders		
4.6 Uses comparison and trend data of student performance from comparable schools in evaluating its effectiveness		
4.7 Demonstrates verifiable growth in student performance		
		Total number of artifacts:
Date completed:		

Principal Documentation

For Professional Evaluation

Curricular Standards and Assessments

State Assessment Results

Ø   Copies of assessment results for each grade level and each subject area with percentages of students in each category (Exemplary, Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Unsatisfactory) highlighted.

Ø   Highlight students who are Basic and Unsatisfactory.

MAT8 Results

Ø   Copies of group assessment results for each grade level with areas highlighted that are below the 50th percentile.

Ø   Highlight students that are below average in reading and math.

Local Assessment Results

Ø   Copies of the local assessment results for each grade level with areas highlighted that are below grade level.

Ø   Highlight students that are below grade level in reading and math.

Compare the three assessments above to determine students who are at-risk and list the ways these students are getting extra instruction to ensure their learning success. These strategies can include, but are not limited to:

Ø   Student Improvement Plans on individual students

Ø   Extra instruction times through:

§   HELP/Basic Para-educator

§   Before/After School Tutoring

§   Extra instruction during the day

§   Special Education services

§   PLC interventions/strategies

§   Classroom instruction interventions/modifications

§   Seminar/Homeroom Interventions

§   Special Classes (i.e. STAP, TARGET, Assessment Prep Math, etc.)

Compare the three assessments above to determine students who need to move up academically (i.e. proficient to advanced, advanced to exemplary) to ensure maximum challenge is provided. These strategies can include, but are not limited, to:

Ø   Seminar/Homeroom Periods

Ø   Practice of Released Items/Practice Tests for Kansas Assessments

Ø   Weekly review of Testing Strategies

Ø   Special Tutoring Times to Review/Practice Testing Taking Strategies

Ø   Special Reading (i.e. Read for Success, Reading 180) and Math

Classes to Enhance/Enrich Performance

Teacher Evaluation/Observation

Teacher Evaluation/Observations

Provide an evaluation schedule of teachers being evaluated, including probationary employees and non-probationary employees. Show the documentation you use (for one selected teacher) to support a teacher evaluation, including, but not limited to:

Ø   Semore Observations

Ø   Goal Setting Information

Ø   Informal/Formal Observations

"Two or more classroom visitations, one of which shall be 15 minutes or longer, (or 30 minutes if requested in writing by the teacher at the pre-evaluation meeting) for each employee prior to completion of the Employee Evaluation Form. The total cumulative time for all classroom visitations shall not be less than 40 minutes." (Negotiated Agreement, Item 29.A.3.)

Ø   Observation Conference Notes

Ø   Final Evaluation

New Teacher Mentoring

Observe and review mentoring program with a new, probationary teacher. Visit with mentor and mentee and include your observations in the spring evaluation under the Professional Characteristics and Relations category.

Curriculum Development

Teaching the Intended Curriculum

Review teacher documentation to determine integration of standards with lesson planning/implementation of research-based strategies. Staff documentation of this area can include, but is not limited to:

Ø   Curriculum Map

Ø   Course Outcomes

Ø   Lesson Plans with Standards Highlighted

Ø   Informal/Formal Observations with Lesson Plan

Ø   Indicators on Board for the Day's Lesson (secondary)

Annual Training in State Curricula/Assessments

Document teachers required to attend the summer curriculum academies and the date sharing of information with staff occurs. Document any other activity which will indicate inservicing staff on the

state curriculum standards and assessments..

School Improvement/Effective Schools

School Improvement Plan/Staff Development

Provide a copy of your School Improvement Plan with goals, strategies, and results-based staff development listed. Highlight progress of this plan, giving research supporting strategies selected for improvement.

Professional Learning Communities

List the things you have done this year to incorporate PLC ideas into your school. (Use the attached continuum to track cultural shifts. Page 124-130 in Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become PLCs.))

Community Involvement in School Improvement

Show how you've involved the community in the school improvement process. This can include, but not limited to:

Ø   Site Council agendas/minutes

Ø   PTO agendas/minutes

Ø   Programs from community events

Ø   Newspaper, school newsletter, and Communicator articles featuring your school's involvement in the community

Ø   Presentations to civic clubs and other community agencies

Safe Learning Community

List things you have done to create and ensure a safe learning environment which can include:

Ø   No Bullying Allowed presentations/assemblies

Ø   Class meeting opportunities to talk about self-esteem issues

Ø   Crisis Plans

Ø   Character Education activities

Ø   Harassment policies in place

Promotion of Multiculturalism

Provide examples of how multiculturalism has been promoted in the building, i.e. library programs, specific teacher lessons, building-wide themes during special events, i.e. MLK Week

Professional/Personal Growth

Staff Development Opportunities

Provide a copy of your MyLearningPlan licensure documentation showing your participation in staff development activities in the district and your personal goal setting sheet for the current year. Highlight the progress made in this area.

Professional/Personal Goals

Describe your personal/professional goals for the upcoming school year based on the data collected above

Table 5: Standard V – Resource & Support Systems

STANDARD: The school has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all student.

INDICATORS In fulfillment of this standard, the school:	Ratings a. Not Evident b. Emerging c. Operational d. Highly functional	Number of Artifacts 0 Artifacts 1-2 Artifacts 3-4 Artifacts At least 1 Artifact per indicator
5.2 Assigns professional staff responsibilities based on their qualifications (i.e., professional preparation, ability, knowledge, and experience)		
5.3 Ensure that all staff participate in continuous program of professional development		

5.5 Budgets sufficient resources to support its educational programs and to implement its plans for improvement		
5.6 Monitors all financial transactions through a recognized, regularly audited accounting system		
5.7 Maintains the site, facilities, services, and equipment to provide an environment that is safe and orderly for all occupants		
5.9 Ensures that each student has access to guidance services that include, but are not limited to, counseling, appraisal, mentoring, staff consulting, referral, and educational and career planning		
5.10 Provides appropriate support for student with special needs		
		Total number of artifacts:
Date completed:		

INDICATORS

Artifacts/Documentation

1. Professional development plan and/or opportunities

2. Data or reports of student disciplinary violations

3. Annual budget

4. Facility maintenance

5. Budget allocation

6. Agendas/minutes of staff meetings

7. Long-range facility plans

8. At Risk money

9. SIT documentation

10. Other

Table 6: Standard VI – Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

STANDARD: The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among it's stakeholders.

INDICATORS In fulfillment of this standard, the school:	Ratings e. Not Evident f. Emerging g. Operational h. Highly functional	Number of Artifacts 0 Artifacts 1-2 Artifacts 3-4 Artifacts At least 1 Artifact per indicator
6.1 Fosters collaboration with community stakeholders to support student learning		
6.2 Has formal channels to listen to and communicate with stakeholders		

6.5 Provides information about students, their performance, and school effectiveness that is meaningful and useful to stakeholders		
		Total number of artifacts:
Date completed:		

Artifacts/Documentation

1. Stakeholder group surveys

2. Percentage of parent participation at parent/teacher conferences

3. Student orientation programs

4. Site Council agendas/minutes

5. PTO agendas/minutes

6. Programs from community events

7. Newspaper, school newsletter, and Communicator articles featuring your school's involvement in the community

8. Presentations to civic clubs and other community agencies

9. Volunteer opportunities within the school

10. Other

Table VII: Standard VII – Commitment to continuous Improvement

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

	Ratings	Number of Artifacts
INDICATORS	a. Not Evident	0 Artifacts
In fulfillment of this standard, the school:	b. Emerging	1-2 Artifacts
	c. Operational	3-4 Artifacts

	d. Highly functional	At least 1 Artifact per indicator
7.1 Engages in a continuous process of improvement that articulates the vision and purpose the school is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results)		
7.6 Evaluates and documents the effectiveness and impact of its continuous process of improvement		
		Total number of artifacts:
Date completed:		

Artifacts/Documentation

1   See Standards 1-6 Documentation

2   End of year highlights

3   Other

References

AdvancED. (2006). *Accreditation standards for quality schools*. Decatur, GA: Author.

Waters, J. T. and Marzano, R. J. (2006). *School district leadership that works. The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: McREL.

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