

Baldwin County Schools Oral Exit Report

Quality Assurance Review Team
District Accreditation

A Picture of AdvancED



World's Largest Educational Community

- 27,000 public and private schools
- 30 states and Navajo Nation
- Department of Defense Education Activity
- 66 countries
- 15 million students
- 18,000 volunteers
- 3 million plus teachers

A Picture of AdvancED

Dedicated to Advancing Excellence in Education through:

Accreditation

- Standards, continuous improvement, quality assurance
- **NCA CASI and SACS CASI** are the accreditation divisions of AdvancED

Professional Services

- Professional development, technical assistance, conferences, consulting

Research and Innovation

- Publications, resources, tools, evaluation
- NSSE serves as our research and innovation division of AdvancED



District Accreditation

A national protocol for school systems committed to systemic, systematic, and sustainable improvement

- Builds the capacity of the system and its schools to increase and sustain student learning
- Stimulates and supports improvement and effectiveness throughout the system

District Accreditation

- Ensures all people, processes, departments and operations of the system work in concert
- Strengthens efforts to meet accountability requirements
- Encourages growth beyond compliance to achieve excellence
- Promotes continuous not episodic improvement

Systems Approach

District Accreditation applies a systems approach to improvement. It examines how all elements of the school system work in concert for the benefit of student learning. It looks for examples of systemic, systematic, and sustainable improvement.

- **Systemic improvement** – using and aligning the interdependent functions within and across the district to produce improvement
- **Systematic improvement** – fostering improvement efforts that are regular and predictable at all levels of the district
- **Sustainable improvement** – maintaining improvements over time

Pillars of Accreditation

To earn and maintain District Accreditation, districts must:

1. Meet the **AdvancED Quality Standards**
2. Engage in **Continuous Improvement**
3. Demonstrate **Quality Assurance** through Internal and External Review



Expectations

District

- Meets the *AdvancED* Standards for Quality Systems
- Identifies and guides the implementation of a systemic continuous improvement process
- Monitors its schools through a quality assurance process
- Prepares and hosts a QAR visit every five years

Schools

- Meet the *AdvancED* Standards for Quality Schools
- Implement the district's continuous improvement process
- Participate in the district's quality assurance process

Purpose & Role of the Quality Assurance Review Team

1. Determine the extent to which the district meets the *AdvancED* standards.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement efforts.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance.
4. Provide high-quality feedback with clear recommendations and actionable next steps.
5. Make an accreditation recommendation.

Activities of the Quality Assurance Review Team

- Artifacts/documents review
- Interviews
- School visits
- Observations
- Professional deliberations

Interviews with Stakeholders

- During the on-site Quality Assurance Review, team members interviewed:
 - 120 Administrators
 - 246 Teachers
 - 73 Support Staff
 - 132 Parents, community, and business partners
 - 159 Students
 - 5 Board members

TOTAL of 735 stakeholders

Criteria Used to Arrive at the Team's Findings

- When reviewing evidence to arrive at its findings, the team:
 - Sought a district perspective;
 - Pursued evidence that could be corroborated through multiple sources;
 - Examined the context and capacity of the district in relation to its vision, mission, and beliefs; and
 - Applied the criteria for accreditation.

Structure of Team's Findings

Strengths

- Strong and effective practices, processes, or systems which benefit the school district

Commendations

- Significant accomplishments in meeting and/or exceeding accreditation standards and requirements

Challenges

- Limitations and/or barriers that may be impacting (or have the potential to impact) the district's performance and effectiveness

Recommendations

- Actions that will enhance district effectiveness and improve student learning

Strengths

- Quality teachers and low student-teacher ratio
- Active engagement of stakeholders at the school and system levels
- Strong sense of community among feeder pattern communities and entire Baldwin County community
- Strong sense of ownership among broad group of stakeholders
- Commitment to importance and urgency of student learning that crosses all levels of the system
- Verifiable improvement in student performance based on multiple measures over the last five years
- Empowering district employees to excel

Commendations

- The system is truly committed to continuous improvement planning and to providing research-based professional development for system and school personnel to help them improve student performance and system effectiveness.

Commendations

The school system has successfully cultivated a culture that has improvement embedded in its daily practices through the creation of professional learning communities at nearly all schools during the last two years. School and system leaders have provided direction, structures, and support for professional learning communities that aligned to best practice and research

Commendations

- A preponderance of evidence has been presented to demonstrate that departments, services, and schools function systematically and systemically to improve student learning by using and aligning the interdependent functions within and across the district to produce improvement. These improvement efforts are regular and predictable at all levels of the system and the vast majority of the schools, and they appear to be sustainable.

Commendations

- The system has recognized the need for more effective communications and has responded by dedicating resources and establishing procedures to ensure effective stakeholder communications through multiple approaches including technology.

Commendations

- The system and schools are effectively using resources and their knowledge of educational research to respond to student performance gaps as well as the over-identification of special needs students. Of particular significance is the commitment to provide quality early childhood programs at Title I schools throughout the system.

- The system provides effective leadership characterized by systematic and collaborative decision-making focused on improving student achievement as well as school and system effectiveness. Leaders understand that shared leadership and collaboration are essential if change is to be effectively implemented and sustained. They understand how to balance pushing for change while, at the same time, protecting aspects of culture, values, and norms worth preserving. They understand how to gauge the magnitude of change they are calling for and how to tailor their leadership strategies accordingly. Finally, school and system leaders understand and value the people in the organization.

Commendations

- **Baldwin County has successfully created a system-wide culture that encourages and appropriately nurtures innovation.**

Examples include:

- **PLC's at the school and system level**
- **Technology – e MINTS project**
- **single gender instruction initiative**
- **utilization of “corporate” expertness in communications, finance, technology, and others**

Challenges

- Growth and anticipated growth
- Proration of state funding and other complexities stemming from an economic down turn
- Increasingly diverse student population
- Responding appropriately and effectively to diverse learning needs of all students

Recommendations

- **The Quality Assurance Review Team recommends that Baldwin County Schools :**
 - Further clarify the newly revised vision statement to ensure that it provides direction for decision making about teaching, learning, assessment, and etc., and that it provides strategic direction for schools, departments, and services. Ensure that system-wide goals and measures to advance the vision are established and communicated to stakeholders.

Recommendations

- Refine and further develop system capacity to fully implement, utilize, support and sustain highly functional professional learning communities. Consider, for example, identifying ways that professional learning communities can address the needs of students who have achieved mastery as well as those who have not. Consider ways that professional learning communities can embrace RTI. Consider also linking school PLC's both vertically and horizontally to enhance system cohesiveness and capacity.

Recommendations

- Develop internal quality assurance procedures to ensure that schools are consistently meeting or exceeding the SACS/AdvancED standards

Next Steps

- Written report of findings submitted within 30 days
- After receipt of the report, the district is expected to:
 - Review and communicate the findings.
 - Address the recommendations.
 - Monitor accreditation standards on ongoing basis.
 - Monitor strategies for improvement.
 - Submit the Accreditation Progress Report.

Accreditation Recommendation

- The Quality Assurance Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission that the **Baldwin County School System** be awarded District Accreditation as a quality school system.
- Once reviewed and approved by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, the district and all its schools are granted a 5-year term accreditation.

Final Thoughts

- On behalf of the Quality Assurance Team, I extend:
 - Our **appreciation** for your hospitality, support, and professionalism;
 - Our **deepest gratitude** to Dr. Phyllis French for her patience, graciousness, thoroughness, and thoughtfulness throughout this process;
 - Our **respect** and acknowledgement of the quality of the school district; and
 - Our **congratulations** for your progress toward achieving District Accreditation as a quality system.

*AdvancED District Accreditation
for Quality Systems
www.advanc-ed.org*

*...helping schools
and school systems
improve student
learning*

