Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Bremen City School System
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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 Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvanceD.

Quality Assurance Review Report

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About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

Background. Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and Schools (SACS CASI) accredit public and private schools and districts in 30 states, the Navajo Nation, Latin America, and the Department of Defense Schools worldwide.

In 2006, NCA CASI, SACS CASI, and the research and development arm of the accrediting associations, the National Study of School Evaluation, unified to form AdvancED. Dedicated to advancing excellence in education, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 23,000 schools in 65 countries, serving 15 million students.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help schools, school districts, and educational service agencies continuously improve.

The Accreditation Process. To earn and maintain accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, school districts and their schools must:

- 1) Meet the AdvancED Standards and Policies for Quality School Systems. School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards and policies which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement. School districts and their schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose that the school district is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school and district 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).
- 3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review. School districts and schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, school districts host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the school district improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school district and a written report detailing the team's required actions. The school district acts on the team's required actions and submits a progress report two years following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school district community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help school districts and their schools maximize student success and improve organizational effectiveness

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

Purpose. The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

- 1. Evaluate the school district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and policies.
- 2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
- 3. Identify commendations and required actions to improve the district and its schools.
- 4. Make an accreditation recommendation for review by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

A key aim of the Quality Assurance Review is to verify that the school district is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

School District Preparation. To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school district and the community complete the AdvancED Standards Assessment Report. The report engages the district in an in-depth self assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school district identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that is it meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school district examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school district effectiveness.

Summary of Team Activities. The Quality Assurance Review Team is led by an AdvancED certified District Lead Evaluator and comprised of professionals from outside the school district. The team reviews the findings of the school district's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school district, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school district's adherence to the standards for accreditation. The team provides an oral exit report and prepares a written Quality Assurance Review Team Report designed to help the school district and its schools improve.

The Quality Assurance Review Team Report. Following the visit, the review team completes the Quality Assurance Review report. After review by a nationally-trained reader, the report is submitted to the district. The report contains commendations and required actions for improvement.

Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions. The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the required actions. Following the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, the school district must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress it has made on the team's required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district is addressing the required actions.

Accreditation Recommendation. The Quality Assurance Review team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school district following action from the commission.

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI Georgia State Office (SACS-CASI-GA), a division of AdvancED, visited Bremen City School System on 03/11/2012 - 03/14/2012.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 16 administrators, 70 teachers, 14 support staff, 60 parents and business partners, 50 students, and 5 Board of Education members for a total of 215 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 4 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

- 1. Vision and Purpose
- 2. Governance and Leadership
- 3. Teaching and Learning
- 4. Documenting and Using Results
- 5. Resource and Support Systems
- 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
- 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems with a school district and systematic methods of attaining high student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of the standards lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards. The Quality Assurance Review Team used the AdvancED standards to guide its review of the school district, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school district and its schools function as a whole and embody the practices and characteristics of a quality school district.

Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

The Quality Assurance Review Team also examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team's findings in this area can be found following the standard reports.

The team used the standard reports and quality assurance findings to identify common themes, significant accomplishments, and pressing needs facing the district. These became the basis for the overall commendations and required actions that are provided below. The commendations and required actions should serve as the focus for the district as it acts on the team's findings. They represent the areas that the team believes will have the greatest impact in helping the district further its improvement efforts. The standard reports and quality assurance findings can be used to help reinforce and enrich the district's understanding of the commendations and required actions.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Bremen City School System for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted.

Commendation 1

Commendation Statement:

The district has a fully developed culture of excellence and success.

Evidence:

As evidenced in interviews with the Board, district leadership, building administration, teachers, support staff, parents and students excellence is perceived as always working to be better tomorrow than we are today. All believe in and support the focus on academic success for all students. Data is reviewed on a regular basis and is used to drive instruction and identify support for student needs.

Rationale:

A shared focus and commitment to student success provides the instruction and support necessary for continued growth.

Commendation 2

Commendation Statement:

A strong sense of family exists within the district.

Evidence:

All stakeholder groups emphasized the district as caring, compassionate, cooperative and family oriented. Parents are highly supportive and students indicate feeling safe within the schools. Both parents and students indicate that students are challenged to succeed and are supported in their learning.

Rationale:

Learning is facilitated through strong relationships, and when students feel safe and supported.

Commendation 3

Commendation Statement:

District faculty and staff are highly qualified and to student success.

Evidence:

Teachers are fully certified in the areas they teach. In addition 35% of teachers are certified in gifted and talented education. The majority of special education staff has reading endorsements.

Rationale:

A highly qualified staff is critical to providing appropriate instruction.

Commendation 4

Commendation Statement:

An effective communication system is in place between and among all stakeholders.

Evidence:

Stakeholders reported several avenues of communication with the district and schools and feel well informed of district and school activities as well as student achievement. Stakeholder input is gathered annually through surveys as well as an open door policy that is in effect at the district and school levels.

Rationale:

Student learning is strengthened when there is open communication between and among internal and external stakeholders.

Required Actions

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall effectiveness of the school district. The Bremen City School System will be held accountable for making progress on each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the required actions.

Required Action 1

Required Action:

Disaggregate and analyze data of specific student sub-groups (i.e. economically disadvantaged students) so that interventions and strategies can be incorporated into district and school improvement plans.

Evidence:

The district leadership indicated a change in the demographics of the students. Teachers indicated that students are monitored and provided remediation and support as needed. Specific interventions and strategies for student sub-groups were not delineated in the school improvement plans. It is important to identify specific interventions and strategies especially as those populations grow in number.

Rationale:

Identifying subgroup population issues and needs allows the district to plan for and address specific needs all students.

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools: The team reviewed the district's adherence to each of the AdvancED standards. The findings from this review are provided in the next section of this report.

Next Steps

The school district should:

- 1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
- 2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.
- 3. Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.
- 4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.
- 5. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
- 6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for review and action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school district. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school district should celebrate its achievement with the community. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and other related items can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school district, its schools, and community in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the commendations and address the required actions noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school district to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

The Quality Assurance Review Team divided into standard teams to review each standard and prepare a standards report summarizing the team's findings. These standard reports, along with the quality assurance findings that follow these reports, provided the basis for the team's identification of over-arching commendations and required actions presented earlier in this report. The reports submitted by each team are provided on the following pages for the district's review and use. Each report reflects its respective team's unique voice, perspective, and deliberations. The reports can be used to help enrich and deepen the district's understanding of the overall commendations and required actions.

Standard 1: Vision & Purpose

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

Description:

The district established a process to develop a shared purpose statement that is a combination of vision and purpose. The process as outlined in the district Standards Assessment Report is substantiated through interviews with stakeholder groups and survey results. The District Leadership Team drafted three purpose statements, which were submitted to stakeholders. Four hundred fifty-one stakeholders participated in the survey. The majority of stakeholders chose "Excellence in all we do" as the district purpose. It was evident through interviews with internal and external stakeholders that the concept of excellence is widely accepted as constantly striving to be better tomorrow than we are today. The focus on continuous improvement and striving for excellence prevents complacency with current high performance levels.

The district established goals through the strategic planning process. A review of the district strategic plan found goals established in three areas: academic achievement, financial/facilities/technology, and public relations/communications. Measurement data was established for each area. The Board has a formal review of data during the annual board retreat that involves the district leadership team. Updates are made during board meetings. While the district has specific processes in place to monitor the identified areas within the strategic plan, some support staff indicated that processes for goal setting, data collection and progress monitoring were not formalized in all support areas (e.g. transportation).

The district maintains profile data that is posted at the central office and available on the district website. In addition, the district report card is available online.

Each school has developed a school improvement plan that is aligned with the district goals. During the interviews with district personnel, it was evident that the focus on achieving excellence is a driving force for decisions made within the district and individual schools. Various committees work at the district and building levels to articulate the curriculum vertically and horizontally as well as to review and analyze

data. Interviews with district and building staff as well as meeting calendars demonstrated an on-going review of data to make sure improvement strategies were effective while making adjustments where needed.

Annually the Board and administrative leadership review the district and building data at the Board retreat. Future directions and needs are discussed and then passed on to the district strategic planning committee to use in reviewing and revising the district strategic plan. School improvement teams review the district strategic plan and review and revise the school improvement plans accordingly.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district has a clearly defined strategic planning process that provides for periodic review and revision involving a variety of stakeholders.
- The district places a strong emphasis on the use of data at district and building levels to drive decisions regarding academic improvement efforts

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

• Develop and implement strategic planning processes for each support area (e.g. food service and transportation) of the district.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Bremen City School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2: Governance & Leadership

Standard: The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

Description:

A five member elected Board of Education governs the district, and each Board member holds a four-year term. The Board appoints a superintendent of schools who serves as the chief executive officer. Interviews with district personnel, building administrators, and Board members reveal clear evidence that the Board of Education functions as the policy governing body. They are maintaining clearly defined boundaries for the administration of the day-to-day operation, which is the responsibility of the superintendent, and his administration. The district maintains an organizational chart that outlines a clear chain of command.

During the interview phase of the Quality Assurance Review (QAR), internal and external community stakeholders expressed appreciation for the clear communication they receive from the school superintendent and district administrative staff. Evidence of clear communication of policies and board operations include but are not limited to: weekly informational emails to parents, updated school board policies posted on the eBoard site, and detailed handbooks for school faculty, staff and students.

The district recently reviewed and revised most of the Board policies. Based on a review of the policies on the eBoard site, it is evident the district complies with local, state and federal laws and regulations. Board interviews also reveal that most Board members attend leadership trainings sponsored by outside agencies to stay abreast of changes in state law and/or policies in addition to active participation in local

superintendent-led Board retreats.

Through Board, district leadership, and stakeholder interviews it is evident that the Board of Education is well respected within the district and throughout the community. Additionally, the Board is focused on providing resources to support student learning while mindful of the cost to the community. The district builds public support by soliciting input from the community via surveys, as well as holding open Board meetings. The district is very proud of its reputation and works diligently to maintain it.

Annual state audit reports reveal the district maintains sound fiscal practices and adequate levels of insurance to protect its financial standing.

Student performance data is reviewed annually and periodically throughout the school year as documented through interviews with the Board, administrators and teacher leaders.

It is highly evident that the community at large supports the long-term success of the district. Interviews with both internal and external stakeholders reveal a strong sense of pride and tradition within the district. The community has established the Bremen Education Foundation to support and promote innovative programs within the district. The superintendent assists the principals to develop school level budgets that are centered on the instructional needs of the school. The district involves various stakeholder groups on the strategic planning committee as well as school level improvement committees as substantiated through interviews, survey data and the Standards Assessment Report (SAR) report.

Evaluation is a key component of the district's support of its personnel. The district utilizes CLASS Keys to create a personal evaluation plan for every teacher. Professional learning needs are derived from teacher input and information obtained from formal teacher evaluations. Annually, administrators evaluate classified staff (e.g. secretaries, custodians, etc.).

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- There is clear and effective communication from the superintendent and district office staff to all stakeholders.
- The Board of Education and superintendent responsibilities and duties are clearly defined and honored.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

• Monitor the general budget expenditures to maintain strong program/fiscal effectiveness during austere times.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Bremen City School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3: Teaching & Learning

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

Description:

The district has developed curriculum maps based upon the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). These maps serve as the basis for collaborative planning and pacing of instruction. The curriculum map is a working document that allows for flexibility and customization. Interviews at the district level indicate that reviewing student achievement data and determining instructional needs in regard to defined learning expectations drive curricular decisions. The system is diligent in its vertical alignment efforts and is currently revising the curriculum to follow the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) in Reading, English Language Arts and Mathematics. Teachers meet monthly in both horizontal and vertical collaborative teams to revise curriculum maps based on formative and summative data collection.

All students in the district are exposed to high expectations based on the GPS and are expected to meet them. Extended learning opportunities are provided before, during, and after school to support students who display a need for homework help or remediation. In addition to before and after school assistance, all schools within the district have established an environment where each student is supported through nurturing relationships with school and district personnel. The Teachers As Advisors (TAA) program in grades 6-12 provides a structure for mentoring. The team observed use of essential questions and standards to provide purpose for learning in some classrooms. Increasing this practice will enhance higher order thinking skills. The district utilizes diagnostic tools, paraprofessionals, and professional learning for staff members in order to prescribe and administer academic interventions through the Response to Intervention (RtI) program.

All schools are fully implementing the CLASS Keys teacher evaluation system that incorporates student data goals. All teachers create Professional Growth Plans based on self-evaluations.

Instructional time is maximized and well protected. No interruptions are allowed during the instructional school day unless there is an extreme emergency. Procedural tasks are conducted without causing disruption, and instruction continues smoothly.

Communication throughout the system is highly efficient and pervasive among all stakeholders by allotting common planning periods, utilizing e-mail groups, and daily contacts by principals and the superintendent. Horizontal and vertical curriculum planning teams establish meeting dates which occur regularly throughout the school year.

The district ensures future schooling or employment readiness through PSAT, ACT, and ACT preparation, Work Ready student assessments, Business Partnership in Education, student tours of businesses and industries, and Career Technical and Agriculture Education (CTAE).

Parent and student comments through surveys and interviews indicate a positive climate for student learning, while maintaining a tradition of excellence. These comments are substantiated through data collected from fifty-three classroom visits, all of which indicate evidence of a positive learning environment. Classroom visit reports indicate that the majority of instruction is delivered in a whole-group instructional setting. While students frequently worked together in small groups, tasks were not

differentiated among the groups.

Bremen City Schools has designed and implemented a three-year technology plan to enhance instruction to include student response systems, computer labs at each campus, and training for staff. The district has made a substantial investment to improve technology access in the schools. The district has provided interactive whiteboards in all classrooms. A comprehensive media plan has been developed and implemented.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- There is pervasive and consistent evidence that the district-wide expectation for student achievement is one of continually striving for excellence.
- Teachers have high expectations for student learning, and teachers are committed to providing services to individual students outside of regular school hours.
- Interactions between and among faculty, students, and community stakeholders are positive and caring and exhibit a strong commitment to the school system.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Align current Science and Social Studies curriculum maps to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards for Literacy.
- Expand professional learning for teachers in the effective use of differentiated instruction and monitor its implementation and impact on student achievement.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Bremen City School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

Standard 4: Documenting & Using Results

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

Description:

The district has a learning environment that incorporates comprehensive assessments, that includes nationally normed, criterion-based; teacher designed, and benchmark assessments. The district criterion-based assessments include: Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (K), Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (3rd-8th grade), End of Course Tests (9th-12th grade), Advance Placement Test (9th-12th grade), and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (11th grade). Assessment drives the district's curriculum and instruction as apparent in the district's curriculum maps, school improvement plans, teacher and leadership interviews as well as posted on the district website. Although data is analyzed holistically, it is not apparent how the district uses the data to clearly identify and clarify all subgroups including the growing social economically disadvantage student (ED) population and the causes for underachievement.

The district's improvement goals list three primary areas: academic achievement, finance/facility/technology, and public relations/communications. Goals are based upon data from surveys of teachers, staff, parents, and community stakeholders, and nationally normed and criterion based student

assessment. Each school establishes school improvement plans based on gathered assessment data. The district operates CLASS Keys for their teacher evaluations, which requires student data goals. Campus grade level teams analyze benchmark data, AIMSweb, and program reports in order to identify student needs and potential intervention strategies. The leadership teams at all campuses use Georgia state assessments, CLASS Keys and student need to determine Professional-learning topics.

The schools within the district communicate assessment results to parents/guardians, students, and stakeholders through numerous means as substantiated through interviews with community stakeholders, district leadership, Board members, and administrators. The multiple methods include newsletters, an online longitudinal data system, PowerSchool (email), Board minutes, website, parent/teacher conferences, hard copies, as well as displaying assessment results at the Central Office and school campuses.

The district uses trend and comparison data to track academic progress with like districts. This data is displayed at the Central office and posted on the district's website.

It is the policy of the district that all employees shall comply with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Pupil Protection Rights Amendment (PPRA), as stated in the district policy manual section JR. The district also adheres to Georgia Department of Education Policy in regards to approved student record systems by using PowerSchool, which backups nightly. The district does not have a formal administrative policy pertaining to securing student records, although the schools within the district have a standard operating procedure for securing student records. The district follows the State Record Retention and Disposition Schedule as posted on the Georgia Secretary of State website. The district scans and places all special education records on their server.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

• The district uses a variety of methods to communicate academic progress to stakeholders as substantiated through interviews with community stakeholders, district leadership, Board members, and administrators, website, as well as displaying assessments at school campuses.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

• Identify and clarify all subgroups such as the growing social economically disadvantage student (ED) population and the underlying causes for the underachievement.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Bremen City School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

Standard 5: Resource & Support Systems

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

Description:

The district effectively utilizes human, material, and financial resources to implement the curriculum. The district has uses the following documents to guide the district: Professional Learning Plan, Student-Teacher Ratio Guidelines, Annual Budget, Latest Financial Audit, Facilities Maintenance Plan and Emergency/Disaster Plan.

The common thread among district employees is their desire to work for Bremen City Schools. The district has a large pool of qualified candidates to choose from when openings exist. Principals in the district have complete autonomy regarding hiring. In addition, every classroom teacher is highly qualified, and adequate student to teacher ratios are in place. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the district's teachers are gifted and talented endorsed, 80% of K-12 special education teachers have their reading endorsement, with all of the K-6 special education teachers have their reading endorsement. There is very little teacher turnover within the district. K-8 schools within the district rely on AIMSweb, Benchmarks, and Star Reader to identify struggling students.

Interviews with district staff and administrators indicate that professional learning is identified from a review of data. Professional Learning is district wide but implemented at the building level. Each employee within the district is evaluated annually. Certified staff is evaluated using CLASS (Classroom Analysis of State Standards) Keys, which are aligned to the Georgia Performance Standards.

The district develops the budget beginning at the building level. Central Office personnel as well as building administrators support this process as a means for ensuring budget priorities are classroom based. There is a culture within the district that places the needs of the students above everything else, as evident by the purchase of interactive whiteboards, SanRon writing program and Fraction Nation to enhance instruction.

Facilities within the district are clean and well maintained. Great care and effort is taken to keep the buildings functional and in optimal condition. Maintenance personnel perform daily walkthroughs and there is a system in place to prioritize repair needs. Teachers and staff communicate maintenance/facility needs through email for quick response. The district is continuing to improve facilities through the construction of Bremen Academy, Bremen Middle School, and the Hamilton-McPherson Performing Arts Center. The district has improved the technology infrastructure and support. It was noted in various interviews that technology is highly valued. There is at least one computer in every classroom, the new wireless network is functioning, there are multiple computer carts throughout the school buildings, numerous sets of Student Response Systems have been purchased and the middle school has acquired five E-Readers available for student use.

Building personnel, students, and parents indicated a feeling of security and preparedness. During the school visits the team observed that exterior doors were not locked giving open access to buildings. Fire drills are performed monthly and there are district prescribed emergency and disaster recovery plans. A full-time resource officer is employed through the Bremen Police Department and is housed at the high school but available to all schools as needed. There is a full time nurse and counselor at each building.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district employs quality personnel with a strong commitment to the schools and the community.
- District budget development begins at the building level and is based upon classroom needs.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Analyze and monitor social service needs of the growing ED population.
- Analyze staff demographics in relation to the student population.
- Develop a process to annually review and revise security plans of each school.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Bremen City School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

Standard 6: Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

Standard: The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Description:

Based on information obtained from the Standards Assessment Report (SAR), stakeholder survey data, and interviews with internal and external stakeholders, it is clearly evident the district uses multiple strategies to foster collaboration with community stakeholders to support student learning. Community stakeholders express their appreciation for the on-going communication, especially from the school superintendent via weekly informational emails. One administrator described the collaboration between community stakeholders and district leaders and staff as "much comfort" among all parties.

The district uses various strategies to communicate with and listen to its stakeholders. Each building has a school council that is parent-led and affords parents the opportunity to express and address needs from the community perspective. The district uses annual stakeholder surveys to analyze and determine community needs and to provide an avenue for community feedback. Parents and teachers expressed appreciation for the "open lines" of communication between administration at both the school and district level.

Central office administrators acknowledge they have analyzed and addressed numerous concerns expressed in the stakeholder surveys. One noted concern involves the school level traffic problems, which are being analyzed by various district staff members.

Parents, students and community members clearly expressed their support for the district's purpose statement, "Excellence in all we do!" Many parents during the interview, especially those who pay out of district tuition, clearly articulated their desire to have their children attend the district based on the reputation of high student achievement. Student interviews also reveal high levels of pride and satisfaction with the school district. One high school student explained, "Bremen shapes us." Other students describe the tradition of excellence and high levels of expectations for Bremen City School students.

The district provides information that is meaningful and useful to its stakeholders. Parents were able to identify writing achievement as a target area as outlined in the district's continuous improvement plan. Parents also expressed (in the interviews and surveys) that student progress updates are provided via report

cards, progress checks and through parent/teacher conferencing. The district uses PowerSchool, weekly emails, social media, and other forms of communication to provide additional information to parents and stakeholders.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Community support and involvement are pervasive throughout the district.
- Stakeholder input is sought out and valued.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

• Build upon the strong community support to develop a more formalized school/business partnership program.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional," indicating that the Bremen City School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

Standard 7: Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description:

The district has a purpose statement, which serves as the focus for decisions made in the continuous improvement process. The purpose statement was developed with stakeholder involvement and is communicated throughout the school community. Stakeholder interviews substantiated the level of commitment by all to live and work the purpose statement "Excellence in all we do."

The district maintains profile data on student achievement and demographic data as referenced in interviews with various stakeholder groups and posted in the district office and schools. Data walls, marking progress toward meeting learning targets, are visible in school buildings and classrooms. Data is current and used as a driving force in the continuous improvement efforts. Internal and external stakeholders were conversant regarding the data and performance levels of students on the state summative assessments.

The district has a Strategic Plan, which outlines the goals. Data is shared with school building improvement teams to review and develop school improvement plans aligned to the district. School improvement teams review the district data and determine target areas of need for their respective buildings. The administrators present the information to the Board during the annual board retreat at which the district data is reviewed and discussed. The district strategic planning committee then reviews the data and determines the strategic plan for the district. Data is reviewed periodically to monitor progress toward goals and develop next steps in improvement efforts. A review of school improvement plans demonstrates general alignment to the district strategic plan, though not all district goals are reflected in every school building.

Stakeholders are involved on the district level strategic planning committee as evidenced by the membership list. Stakeholders reported that achievement data is communicated through newsletters and

the district website.

A review of state assessment data indicates that student achievement and attendance gaps exist between economically disadvantaged (ED) and non-economically disadvantaged students. Through interviews with teachers and building leadership it is evident that needs of the ED population are targeted for intensive support. Data indicates that while the gap has been closing between the two sub-groups, there are no specific strategies addressing the ED population within school improvement plans. District leadership expressed concerns regarding the continual growth of this special population. However, the district plan does not specifically address the issue.

During interviews with various internal stakeholders it is evident that the district has invested in various programs to support school improvement efforts. Benchmark assessments, AIMSweb and teacher-developed assessments are provided to monitor student progress toward goals. Teachers report that professional learning has been provided in areas of data analysis and differentiation strategies to help student progress in learning the identified standards. Teachers and administrators meet regularly to discuss student progress toward the identified targets. Teachers and building administrators emphasize that board and district leadership make sure resources (e.g. Fraction Nation and SanRon writing program) are available. School leadership teams meet to discuss progress as well as analyze data related to improvement efforts. These results are shared with stakeholders through weekly newsletters and emails.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The district places a strong emphasis on the use of data at all levels.
- Administrators and staff at both the district and building levels work collaboratively to make sure students are learning and applying the required standards.
- Professional learning opportunities, aligned to improvement goals, are provided by the district and are delivered at the building level.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Analyze data to identify and track sub-groups progress toward meeting district goals.
- Articulate improvement strategies to address the needs of sub-groups i.e. economic disadvantaged students to ensure that the special needs of this group are met.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Bremen City School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

Quality Assurance Findings

The Quality Assurance Review Team examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team provides the following findings in this area.

Description

The district regularly monitors assessment data at board meetings as well as at the annual board retreat. Building administrators work hand in hand with the Board to analyze data, determine progress made, and initiate upcoming stages of district needs. In addition, teachers and administrators analyze state assessment data along with benchmark assessments to adjust instruction within classrooms to maximize student learning. Progress monitoring of at risk students is made on a monthly basis.

Parents report that teachers and administrators are readily accessible to discuss student achievement. Parents and students have access to academic progress through PowerSchool as well as frequent communication via district and school newsletters and email.

Data analysis, at both district and school levels, ensures curriculum alignment to state standards. Teachers adjust pacing guides as needed. District curriculum alignment, in some content areas, is monitored and revised by district vertical alignment committees composed of teachers and district administrators.

Teachers meet in grade level and department meetings to discuss the data and to share information from district and school improvement discussions.

The district budget process is well defined and starts with the buildings. Emphasis is on directing the majority of the budget allocation (72%) on instruction. The district used cash reserves in 2011 to pay for one-time expenses. During uncertain financial support from funding sources, the district needs to monitor expenditures carefully to ensure cash reserves do not become a regular source for expenditures. The budget is closely monitored and is audited by the state annually.

The district received district accreditation in 2006. The required actions of the Quality Assurance Review Report were addressed and expanded. The district monitors adherence to the standards through the data analysis process of student learning.

Interviews with internal and external stakeholders indicated strong support to the schools and classrooms by the board and district administration. The district administrators attend curriculum and data analysis meetings and participate actively at school events.

Strengths

- Highly developed continuous improvement process at district and building levels.
- Open two-way communication between and among stakeholders.
- Regular in-depth data analysis processes in place at district and building levels.

Opportunities

- Develop and implement improvement processes for subsystems within district (i.e. transportation, food services, facilities management, etc.).
- Develop and implement disaggregation of data processes to identify and track subgroup (i.e. economically disadvantaged students) academic and attendance gaps.
- Study and identify long-range financial plans to deal with austere financial times.

Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Bremen City School System on 03/11/2012 - 03/14/2012.

| Bremen Middle School | 515 Laurel Street | Bremen | Georgia | 30110 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------|---------|----------------|
| Bremen High School | 504 Georgia Avenue | Bremen | Georgia | 30110 |
| Bremen Fourth and Fifth Grade Academy | 2440 Crosstown Pkwy | Bremen | Georgia | 30110- 5433 |
| H. A. Jones Elementary School | 206 Lakeview Drive | Bremen | Georgia | 30110 |

Conclusion

The commendations and required actions in this report are designed to focus the school district on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and system effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and required actions only have meaning when acted upon by the school district and its schools. The strength of this report lies in the school district's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school district is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified required actions for improvement that the school district will need to address. Following this review, the school district will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's required actions.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the district leadership, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the district and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS-CASI-GA accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Joyce A. Fulford, Chair/Lead Evaluator (Retired)
- Dr. Mike Newton, Vice Chair (Jasper County Schools)
- Mr. Rodney Thomas, Team Member (Fifth Avenue 4/5 Academy)
- Mrs. Charlotte Foskey, Team Member (Jones County Schools)
- Mrs. Brenda Russell, Team Member (Hyde Park Baptist School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

The AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for school districts to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As school districts reach higher levels of implementation of the standards, they will have a greater capacity to support ever-increasing student performance and organizational effectiveness. Each of the seven standards listed below has corresponding indicators and impact statements which can be accessed at www.advanc-ed.org.

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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