

Greenville County Schools Awarded National Accreditation

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

All Facets of School System Are Working in Concert to Support Student Learning

Greenville County Schools has been awarded National Accreditation from the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, recognizing the school system as a high quality school district and granting full accreditation to the school district and all of its schools.

“Accreditation as conferred by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission provides national and international recognition of the high quality of our schools, school board, and school district,” said Superintendent Dr. Phinnize J. Fisher. “To receive district-wide accreditation means that all facets of a school district are working in concert to support student learning and to meet the needs of students. Our efforts to attain district-wide accreditation also demonstrate to our community our ongoing commitment to excellence, our openness to external review and feedback, and our desire to continuously improve to support the achievements of our 69,000-plus students.”

How Accreditation is Earned

To earn and maintain National Accreditation, a school district and its schools must:

- 1) Meet high quality standards that research and best practice indicate are necessary to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement.
- 3) Engage in quality assurance through ongoing internal and external review.

What is AdvancED?

AdvancED (Advancing Excellence in Education) is a national accrediting organization formed about three years ago when the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) merged with other regional accrediting agencies.

“I am honored to report that the school system has satisfactorily met the expectations and responsibilities of the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study in pursuit of district accreditation. Additionally, the Quality Assurance Review Team certified in the report that Greenville County Schools met all the standards for accreditation. Consequently, the Quality Assurance Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, unanimously and without reservation, that Greenville County Schools be awarded district accreditation.”

*Mark A. Elgart, Ed.D.
President/Chief Executive Officer
AdvancED Worldwide*



The Accreditation Process

- Step 1:** Greenville County Schools applies to AdvancED to be considered for an accreditation review.
- Step 2:** AdvancED decides that the school district has provided adequate proof that the school district should be considered for an accreditation review.
- Step 3:** Once approved for review, the school district uses AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems as a framework to conduct a thorough self-assessment, including input from a cross-section of representatives from across the district, schools, and broader community. Results of the review are used to compile the District's Standards Assessment Report, which is provided to the AdvancED Quality Assurance Review Team.
- Step 4:** The AdvancED Quality Assurance Review Team reviews the 105-page District Accreditation Standards Assessment Report that outlines the school district's efforts to achieve Highly Functional status for all seven standards set by AdvancED.
- Step 5:** The 22-member Quality Assurance Review Team, comprised of professionals from across the nation and state, visits the school district. They review hundreds of district documents and performance data, interview 800-plus district, school, and community stakeholders, visit schools, and observe district and school practices.
- Step 6:** The Quality Assurance Review Team presents its preliminary report and informs the School Board, administration and community of its intention to recommend accreditation for the school district and its schools.
- Step 7:** Greenville County Schools is approved for district-wide accreditation by the Accreditation Division of AdvancED.
- Step 8:** Greenville County Schools begins implementing recommendations as appropriate for improvement.
 - First Review: 2 years
 - Final Review: 5 years for reaccreditation

Overall Findings

Commendations

1. Exemplary leadership

- The Board, administration, and community work in concert for the benefit of students.
- The superintendent is accessible and open in gathering input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

2. Quality strategic plan

- Focuses on student achievement as the primary goal.
- Focuses on a standards-based curriculum driven by the use of data.
- Links all activity throughout the district to the strategic plan and its five goals.
- Provides a clear, compelling vision and mission for the district.
- Allows schools and departments within the district to design mission statements that align with the district's mission.

3. Positive, productive culture

- Stakeholders express devotion to the district and its cause.
- Personnel exhibit passion for their work.
- A sense of “family” is infused throughout the entire district.
- A district-wide volunteer base has provided hundreds of thousands of hours of assistance.

4. Exemplary service to schools and community

- Profound level of professional development is provided.
- Personnel are fairly evaluated.
- Wide variety of data are used to assist personnel in decision-making.
- Resources and technology are utilized to meet instructional learning needs.
- Excellent school facilities serve the community.

5. Practices worthy of inclusion in the AdvancED Resource Network

- Staff evaluation model
- BEST school construction program
- Program of volunteerism
- Computer “Refresh” program



Recommendations

1. Create a plan for life-long learning in the district.

- Increase access to underserved 4K students.
- Focus more broadly on helping students achieve successful transitions into school, between levels, and into post-graduate life.
- Provide ongoing support for all citizens, especially parents.

2. Design and implement a plan, through the district's legislative advocacy committee, proposing legislation to address:

- Appropriate definitions of terms, (e.g. graduation rate) that accurately reflect all options for program completion.
- Equitable funding for all learners, especially early childhood.
- State-wide alternative assessment that allows students with special needs to demonstrate “success.”

3. Ensure consistent and ongoing quality throughout the district.

- Immediately target improvement areas where student performance is still below expectations.
- Continue to select and support strong leadership in buildings and departments.
- Standardize and formalize successful processes and practices that already exist in the district.
- Increase student input at all levels of the strategic planning process.

Standards Assessment Levels

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

Quality Assurance Review Team Report Summary



Standard 1: 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.

Assessment Level: Highly Functional

Strengths

- The team, in over 800 interviews, found that everyone could articulate the vision and mission of the district.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Incorporate additional strategies to communicate the district's vision and purpose to specific subgroups.
- Annually review and evaluate the strategies for effectiveness.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

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

Assessment Level: Highly Functional

Strengths

- The board of trustees supports the superintendent as the day-to-day leader of the school system.
- The district maintains a comprehensive evaluation system focused on student achievement.
- The district provides a variety of human, facility, and instructional resources to enhance student achievement.
- The district has a system in place for ensuring data-driven decisions.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Provide more publicity regarding school quality and student successes.
- Continue to emphasize policies, procedures, and programs focused on student achievement and closing the achievement gaps between and among subgroups.

Standard 3: Teaching and Learning

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

Assessment Level: Operational

Strengths

- The use and application of multiple data are pervasive in the schools and extend to the classroom level.
- The school culture and climate mutually support teachers, students, parents, community, and administrators.
- Resources that enrich the educational program—technology, instructional coaches, and support staff—are implemented equitably.
- Wide and broad professional development opportunities are designed to improve skills and enhance teaching and learning.
- Administrative leadership at the schools and district office is exemplary, with a clear focus on student achievement.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Expand the early childhood program to serve all at-risk 4K children.
- Provide additional dual enrollment options (high school and college credit) for students, particularly first-generation college students.
- Quickly augment efforts and plans to increase the graduation rate.
- Address problems encountered by transient students because of different high school schedules.

Standard 4: 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.

Assessment Level: Operational

Strengths

- Decisions are driven by data and decision-making criteria.
- Instructional coaches are critical to the data analysis and reporting process.
- The district's leadership effectively and appropriately disseminates pertinent data and information to the schools, stakeholders, and the community.
- The decision-making process relies on knowledge and research regarding learning, teaching, and student development.



Standard 4: (continued)

Opportunities for Improvement

- Use district trend data to assess and compare student test results against other student results within and outside the district. Identify districts across the nation to benchmark.
- Continue to develop the process of disaggregating student data beyond “typical” categories to guide the analysis of student learning needs.
- Develop data-reporting systems to diagnose programmatic and student weaknesses, to evaluate the results of changes in the school’s instructional program, and to make appropriate modifications for teaching and learning.
- Define and report “verifiable growth” in student performance and program effectiveness.

Standard 5: 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.

Assessment Level: Highly Functional

Strengths

- Effective programs and strategies are in place for personnel recruitment, mentoring, and ongoing professional development.
- The district’s budgeting process is tied to the district strategic plan.
- Budget cuts are designed to protect the instructional program.
- The BEST construction program has provided attractive and functional schools to support learning.
- The district focuses on student safety.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Continue to focus on the retention of a qualified and diverse teaching force.
- Disaggregate teacher turnover information so that reasons for leaving the district are clearly identified and, when possible, addressed with intervention.
- Formalize the process for identifying and hiring candidates for administrator positions.
- Consider increasing the number of professional development offerings provided online.

Standard 6: Stakeholder Communication and Relationships

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

Assessment Level: Operational

Standard 6: (continued)

Strengths

- Communication, collaboration, and opportunities for stakeholder involvement are exceptional.
- Hundreds of thousands of hours of volunteerism were recorded for all stakeholder groups.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Create methods for greater involvement and representation of students in planning and policy development.
- Identify innovative approaches to increase the participation of minority parents and less-involved community groups.
- Continue to evaluate the effectiveness of data presentations to stakeholder groups.

Standard 7: Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Assessment Level: Highly Functional

Strengths

- The strategic plan focuses on raising student achievement.
- Comprehensive and extensive professional development opportunities exist.
- The analysis of data is thorough and extensive and is the basis for decision-making.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Create more opportunities for student input into the decision-making process.
- Standardize the school portfolio process to provide greater consistency and ease of monitoring.

Quality Assurance Process

Strengths

- Ensuring consistent implementation of school improvement strategies and alignment to the distinct strategic plan, using walk-through observations by multiple levels of district staff.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Identify key indicators of success and align existing measures or develop new ones that will accurately assess these indicators.
- Develop and implement a method for ensuring, at least annually, that each building is meeting AdvancED standards.