



District Accreditation

A Handbook For Districts

Fall 2009

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Welcome

Thank you for your interest in pursuing AdvancED District Accreditation. By beginning the AdvancED District Accreditation process, you have made a commitment to a systems approach to continuous improvement. You are not alone in this commitment. You join a network of hundreds of districts across the country that have made this same powerful commitment. In addition, AdvancED stands ready to support you with all aspects of the District Accreditation Process through state office assistance, workshops, on-site support, and a wide range of materials.

This brief handbook is designed to help you with the steps and logistics of the District Accreditation Process – from beginning the process to preparing for and hosting the Quality Assurance Review to continuing the journey after the review. Districts will find that this handbook complements the more thorough and substantive *AdvancED Accreditation for Quality School Systems: A Practitioners' Guide* which is designed to support districts in their efforts to earn and maintain District Accreditation. The Guide provides a detailed overview of each of the components of accreditation and includes helpful tools and discussion questions at the end of each chapter. The Guide can be purchased online at www.advanc-ed.org in the “Products and Services” tab.

If you have questions or need assistance during the process, please contact your AdvancED State Office. A directory of State Offices can be found at www.advanc-ed.org in the “About Us” tab.

Resources

AdvancED provides a range of support and resources to assist districts in their pursuit and maintenance of District Accreditation. It is helpful for districts to become familiar with these resources as they begin the District Accreditation process.

Standards

AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality School Systems

AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality Schools

The standards are the foundation of the accreditation process and can be downloaded at www.advanc-ed.org in the “Accreditation” tab.

Practitioners’ Guide

AdvancED Accreditation for Quality School Systems: A Practitioners’ Guide

The Guide provides a detailed overview of the three components of accreditation – meeting standards, implementing a continuous process of improvement, and engaging in quality assurance. The Guide includes helpful tools and discussion questions at the end of each chapter. The Guide costs \$40 and can be purchased online at www.advanc-ed.org in the “Products and Services” tab.

Processes, Steps, and Procedures

Visit www.advanc-ed.org, click on “Accreditation,” then “District Accreditation.” You will find:

- An overview of the District Accreditation Process
- A brief outline of the Steps to District Accreditation
- Accreditation Policies and Procedures
- A Resources and Tools section that compiles in one location the key reports, documents, and guides that districts need throughout the process

Reports, Resources, and Tools

The following reports and resources can be accessed online at www.advanc-ed.org, “Accreditation” tab, then “District Accreditation,” then “Resources and Tools.”

Standards Assessment Report

The Standards Assessment Report is designed to serve as a valuable self-assessment and as a tool to help districts prepare for their Quality Assurance Review. The report must be completed between six months and six weeks prior to the Quality Assurance Review.

AdvancED Standards Assessment Report Overall Assessment Rubrics for Districts

This document is a companion to the AdvancED Standards Assessment Report (SAR). After completing the indicators rubrics and answering the focus questions in the SAR, districts use this overall assessment rubric to indicate the level of implementation that most accurately reflects the district’s adherence to each standard.

Examples of Evidence for Districts

This resource is designed to provide a starting point for district personnel as they consider the evidence available in their district that demonstrates the district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards. Intended to be used in conjunction with and as a resource to

the SAR, this document provides examples of practices and artifacts that the district might consider using to support its responses to the indicators and focus questions in the SAR.

Readiness for AdvancED Accreditation: A Self-Assessment of Readiness for District Accreditation

This tool is designed to help district personnel assess their readiness for district accreditation by examining the district's practices in relation to the research-based conditions, core tasks, and effective practices of continuously improving schools and districts (NSSE, 2007).

Technical Guide to School and District Factors that Impact Student Learning

The *Technical Guide to School and District Factors that Impact Student Learning* identifies a number of organizational conditions and effective practices within a school system that can contribute to improved student learning. This research review identifies necessary conditions for improving school systems and core tasks and effective practices of improving schools or districts. AdvancED's seven accreditation standards and accompanying indicators are tied directly to this research review.

Products and Services

AdvancED offers a range of products and services to schools and districts. Visit www.advanc-ed.org and click on the “Products and Services” tab for a current listing of publications, resources, and tools.

State Office Support

State Offices provide hands-on support and technical assistance to districts as they engage in the District Accreditation Process. Many states tap the expertise of trained Field Consultants to support districts. Districts can contact their state offices to learn more about the range of services and support available to them. A complete directory of State Offices is available at www.advanc-ed.org in the “About Us” tab under “State Offices.”

Introduction to District Accreditation

Overview

AdvancED District Accreditation is a systems approach to improving student performance results over time. District Accreditation recognizes that increasing student achievement is more than improving instruction. It is a result of how effectively all the parts of the education system - the district, school, and classroom - work together to meet the needs of students.

District Accreditation applies the three pillars of accreditation - high standards, continuous improvement, and quality assurance – to the entire district to ensure alignment and support between and among all the departments and operating units of the district and its schools. The District Accreditation process provides the district with a comprehensive framework for continually improving student learning and district effectiveness.

To earn and maintain District Accreditation, districts:

1. **Meet quality standards.** The district meets the *AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality School Systems* and has a process in place for ensuring that its schools meet the *AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality Schools*.
2. **Engage in a continuous process of improvement.** A district-led continuous improvement process is in place at both the district and school levels, whereby the district (including all departments and support systems) and all of its schools identify a shared vision, maintain a district-wide profile of the current reality, establish plans and assess the implementation of interventions, and document the results of their efforts to improve student learning and school/district effectiveness.
3. **Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.** The district has in place quality assurance systems and processes to maximize effectiveness across all departments and schools and to improve student performance. The district engages in regular internal self-review and hosts an external review once every five years.

Prerequisites

There are several prerequisites to District Accreditation. The district:

- Ensures that all schools in the district are accredited or candidates for accreditation.
- Embraces a systems approach to improvement.
- Commits to meeting the District Accreditation standards, policies, and procedures.
- Leads and supports a continuous improvement process at both the district and school levels.
- Has the capacity to engage in an internal self-review and an external quality assurance review process.

The District Accreditation Process: Responsibilities of the District

The District Accreditation Process is based on a five-year term accreditation. It is an ongoing process of meeting standards, engaging in continuous improvement, and demonstrating quality assurance. The following chart outlines the how the process unfolds and the responsibilities of the district over the five-year term.

Timing	District Responsibilities
Every year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhere to the <i>AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality School Systems</i>. • Monitor and ensure that every school in the district adheres to the <i>AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality Schools</i>. • Implement a continuous process of improvement. • Engage in ongoing internal review and quality assurance. • Document results of improvement efforts. • Update school and district demographic information. • Notify AdvancED of any substantive changes in the district's ability to meet the standards. • Submit annual accreditation dues.
Between Six Months and Six Weeks before Quality Assurance Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and submit the Standards Assessment Report. The report helps the school system prepare for the review and provides the review team with the basis for its evaluation.
Year of Quality Assurance Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for the Quality Assurance Review team, working with the team chair to establish the review schedule and make arrangements for the team. • Gather evidence to document the district's adherence to the standards. • Host the Quality Assurance Review team. • Share the findings from the Quality Assurance Review team report with the district community. • Begin acting on the team's recommendations.
Year following the Quality Assurance Review Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act on the team's recommendations and document progress.
Two Years following the Quality Assurance Review Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act on the team's recommendations and document progress. • Submit the Accreditation Progress Report on the district's response to the team's recommendations.

Role of the District Facilitator

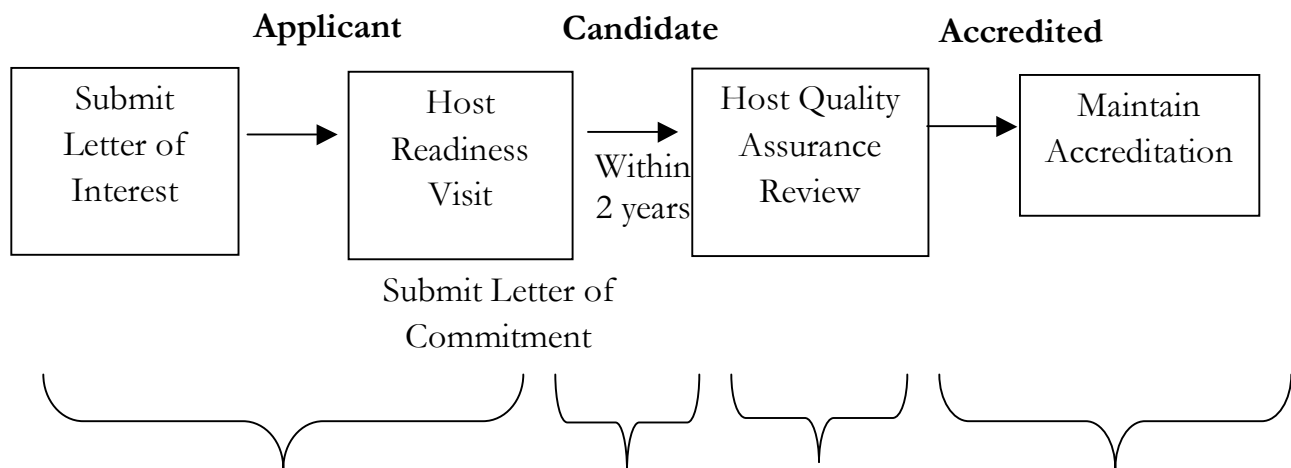
The district superintendent assigns a senior district staff member to facilitate the District Accreditation Process for the district. The District Facilitator:

- Serves as the key point of contact between AdvancED and the district;
- Works with the Quality Assurance Review Team Chair to prepare for and host the Quality Assurance Review;
- Oversees the accreditation process for the district and its schools;
- Supports district and school stakeholders throughout the accreditation process, answering questions and providing guidance;
- Ensures that all requirements of the accreditation process are met; and
- Manages the logistics and oversees the schedule for the Quality Assurance Review.

Steps to AdvancED District Accreditation

The following flow chart depicts the steps to AdvancED Accreditation. As the district successfully completes these steps, it moves from Applicant to Candidate to Accredited status. This handbook is designed to assist the district with each of these steps. The sections of the workbook that address the various steps are highlighted in blue.

Steps to District Accreditation



Corresponding Chapters from this Handbook that address each step of the process

Chapter 1: Beginning the District Accreditation Process	Chapter 2: Preparing for the Quality Assurance Review	Chapter 3: Hosting the Quality Assurance Review	Chapter 4: Continuing the Journey
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Chapter 1: Beginning the District Accreditation Process

Submitting the Letter of Interest

The District Accreditation Process begins with the district superintendent sending a Letter of Interest to the Office of the CEO for AdvancED. The letter conveys that the district is interested in the process and in exploring readiness for District Accreditation. The letter should include the following components:

- Name of district and the city and state in which it resides
- Statement of intent to pursue District Accreditation
- Indication of the number of schools in the district, and of those the number that are accredited and in candidacy
- Contact information

A sample letter follows.

Sample Letter of Interest

Dr. Mark Elgart, President & CEO
AdvancED
2520 Northwinds Parkway, Suite 600
Alpharetta, GA 30009

Dear Dr. Elgart,

This letter is to notify you that Harmony School District in Harmony, Wisconsin, is interested in pursuing AdvancED District Accreditation. We have 20 schools in the district, 15 of which are accredited and the remaining 5 are candidates for accreditation.

We understand that the first step in this process is the Readiness Visit, and are eager to begin preparing for this visit. We appreciate your consideration of our request and look forward to hearing from you regarding next steps in this process.

Should you have any questions or require any additional materials, please contact me at (888)-622-2222 or superintendent@harmonypublicschools.edu.

Sincerely,

Terry Anderson,
Superintendent

Upon receiving the Letter of Interest, AdvancED sends the district a Readiness Letter which explains that the next step in the District Accreditation Process which is to host a successful Readiness Visit.

Preparing for and Hosting the Readiness Visit

Purpose. The purpose of the Readiness Visit is to make a determination regarding:

- 1) The district's capacity to meet the standards;
- 2) The degree to which continuous improvement and quality assurance processes are in place in the district; and
- 3) The commitment of the district to meet the standards and adhere to all policies within the two-year candidacy timeline.

Participants and Length of Visit. The AdvancED State Office assigns one to three State Office representatives to conduct the Readiness Visit. The State Office representatives meet with the district leadership team, which, depending on the size and nature of the district, could include the Superintendent, District Accreditation Facilitator, Assistant/Associate Superintendents, and other stakeholders as determined by the district. Many districts have found it helpful to include board members in the Readiness Visit to enhance their level of knowledge and understanding of the process. The visit typically lasts two to four hours.

Preparing for the Readiness Visit. To prepare for the Readiness Visit, the district:

- 1) Studies the *AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality School Systems* to gain an understanding of the standards, indicators, and impact statements.
- 2) Reviews the AdvancED Accreditation Policies and Procedures and the Steps to Accreditation (available at www.advanc-ed.org/accreditation/district_accreditation) to ensure they can fulfill the requirements and steps involved in the District Accreditation Process.
- 3) Completes the *Self-Assessment of Readiness for District Accreditation*. The self-assessment, which is sent to the district after it submits its Letter of Interest, is a tool designed to help districts determine their readiness for accreditation by examining the district's practices in relation to the research-based conditions, core tasks, and effective practices of continuously improving districts. This research forms the basis of the *AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality School Systems*. By self-assessing against the research, the district can determine its capacity to meet the AdvancED Standards. Districts often involve their leadership team and board in the completion of the self-assessment.

Activities Conducted During the Visit. The Readiness Visit typically begins with a brief tour and overview of the district presented by the district leadership team. The AdvancED State Office representatives then provide a brief orientation to the AdvancED District Accreditation Process, answering any questions that the district might have. After providing the brief orientation, the State Office representatives meet with the district leadership to:

1. Review and discuss the district's Self-Assessment of Readiness.

The district leadership should be prepared to answer such questions as:

- Who completed the assessment?
- What did you learn about yourself as a district through the completion of the tool?
- What strengths and areas of improvement did you identify through the tool?

2. Provide an overview of the AdvancED standards.

The AdvancED State Office representatives highlight each of the seven standards and discuss with the district its perception on its ability to meet the standards within the two-year candidacy time frame.

3. Discuss the AdvancED accreditation process.

The AdvancED State Office representatives engage the leadership team in a discussion of the steps to accreditation, answering any questions the team might have. The district should be prepared to answer questions related to its processes for improvement, methods of quality assurance, and processes to ensure that each of its schools meets the AdvancED standards.

4. Outline next steps.

The visit concludes with a discussion of next steps. The AdvancED State Office representatives explain that they will prepare a brief report, the Readiness Visit Report, summarizing the findings from the visit.

Based on the visit, the AdvancED State Office representatives make a determination as to the district's readiness for District Accreditation. If the representatives believe the district would benefit from more time to address specific areas of need, they will recommend that the district remain in Applicant status. If this is the case, the district will receive specific instructions regarding necessary next steps. If the representatives believe the district is ready for District Accreditation, they will recommend that the district move to Candidate status.

Submitting the Letter of Commitment

Upon receiving the recommendation from the Readiness Visit Report to move to Candidate status, the district sends a Letter of Commitment to the CEO of AdvancED that includes governing board and superintendent approval to enter the District Accreditation process. The letter should include the following components:

- Name of district and the city and state in which it resides
- Notice of when the Readiness Visit was held and the name of the individual(s) who conducted the visit
- Statement of Commitment to pursue District Accreditation
- Notice and date of board approval to pursue District Accreditation

A sample letter of commitment is provided on the following page.

Sample Letter of Commitment

Dr. Mark Elgart, President & CEO
AdvancED
2520 Northwinds Parkway, Suite 600
Alpharetta, GA 30009

Dear Dr. Elgart,

This letter is to notify you of Harmony School District's commitment to pursue District Accreditation. We hosted a successful Readiness Visit on April 2, 2008 led by Dr. John Smith. On April 15, 2008, the Board of the Harmony School District voted to approve the district's involvement in the AdvancED District Accreditation Process.

Should you have any questions or require any additional materials, please contact me at (888)-622-2222 or superintendent@harmonypublicschools.edu. We look forward to engaging in this process.

Sincerely,

Terry Anderson,
Superintendent

Upon receiving the district's Letter of Commitment, AdvancED sends a Candidacy Letter to the superintendent. The candidacy letter outlines the next steps in the District Accreditation Process which include:

1) Ensuring that all schools in the district are accredited or candidates for accreditation

The AdvancED State Office works with the district to develop and implement a plan to bring all schools into the accreditation process.

2) Preparing to host the Quality Assurance Review

The AdvancED State Office and the district's assigned Quality Assurance Review Team Chair are available to support the district as it prepares for its Quality Assurance Review.

In addition, the Candidacy Letter asks the district to identify a District Facilitator who will serve as the primary contact between the district and AdvancED and who will lead the District Accreditation process. The district should inform the State Office of the name and contact information of the District Facilitator.

The Candidacy Letter includes a Visit Date and Team Member Expertise Request Form. The form asks the district to:

- **Identify and submit to the Office of the CEO of AdvancED three preferred dates to host the Quality Assurance Review visit.** The visit dates normally reflect a Monday through Wednesday schedule with the team arriving on the Sunday evening prior to these dates. The visit needs to be scheduled within two years of receipt of the Candidacy Letter. Visit date requests must be made at least 6 months prior to the preferred dates.
- **Indicate any specific expertise** the district would like members of the Quality Assurance Review Team to have based on the needs facing the district.

Most districts identify and submit their preferred visit dates and desired expertise shortly after receiving their Candidacy letter. This provides them with a targeted time frame for their visit and helps them beginning preparing for the Quality Assurance Review.

Upon receiving the district's preferred dates and desired team member expertise, AdvancED selects and sends a letter confirming the dates for the visit to the district. The letter provides instructions for preparing for the review and includes the amount of the District Accreditation Quality Assurance Review fee that is assessed following the visit to help defray the costs of managing and coordinating the visit. The fee is based on the size of the district and varies from \$750 to \$2,500.

The district has moved from interest to commitment and is ready to begin preparing for the Quality Assurance Review.

Chapter 2: Preparing for the Quality Assurance Review

Understanding the Quality Assurance Review

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

- Evaluate the district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards.
- Assess the efficacy and impact of the district's continuous improvement process.
- Assess the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance.
- Identify strengths deserving of commendations and provide recommendations to improve the district.
- Make an accreditation recommendation for national review.

Composition. The Quality Assurance Review team is comprised of a nationally-certified Team Chair and team members selected for their expertise and fit with the district needs. The number of team members varies depending on the size of the district. An effort is made to ensure that at least half of the team members are from outside the state. This provides the district with both national and local perspectives and insights. The Office of the CEO of AdvancED works with the AdvancED State Office to appoint the Team Chair and team members at least three months prior to the district's review. The district is provided the name and contact information for the Team Chair and all team members.

Structure. The Quality Assurance Review occurs over a three-and-a-half day time period. The review includes the following three components, each of which helps the review team members gather evidence about how the district is meeting the requirements for district accreditation.

1. District Presentations and Interviews (Day One)

The team meets at the district offices for a Superintendent presentation, standards presentation, and interviews with district stakeholders. The district presentations and interviews provide team members with a chance to gain a big picture perspective of the district, its vision, how it is meeting the standards, and what it views as its strengths and weaknesses.

2. School Visits (Day Two)

The team splits into smaller sub-teams to visit a sample of schools in the district. The school visits provide an opportunity for the team to gather additional evidence pertaining to the alignment and consistency of the internal systems within the school district. During the school visit, the team receives an instructional walkthrough led by the principal, visits classrooms, and conducts interviews with school stakeholders.

3. Standards Verification and Team Deliberations (Day Three)

The team meets at the district offices to complete its standards verification work, review evidence, and craft the team's findings. The standards verification and team deliberations allow the team an opportunity to gather additional evidence on the standards, verify findings, engage in professional deliberations around the findings, reach consensus, draft standard narratives, and write commendations and recommendations.

Activities of the team. Over the course of the review, the Quality Assurance Review Team engages in **artifact review, interviews, school visits, and professional deliberations.** These activities help the team gather and analyze evidence to determine how the district is meeting the standards. In addition, to ensure that all the standards receive proper attention and focus, team

members are assigned to focus on a specific standard. Team members are trained to approach every activity during the visit with an eye for how the district is meeting the standards, strengths, and suggestions for improvement.

The Standards Assessment Report. The guiding document for the Quality Assurance Review is the district's Standards Assessment Report (SAR). The district completes and submits the SAR between six months and six weeks prior to its Quality Assurance Review. The SAR engages the district in a comprehensive review of each of the seven AdvancED standards. It guides the district's internal review and becomes the basis for the Quality Assurance Review Team's external review.

Working with the State Office and Quality Assurance Review Team Chair

Having a general understanding of the purpose and functions of the Quality Assurance Review helps the district prepare for a successful review. In addition, the district has the ongoing support of the AdvancED State Office and nationally-assigned Quality Assurance Review Team Chair available for clarity and support.

The State Office is available to support the district with all aspects of the District Accreditation Process – from informing and engaging stakeholders to completing the Standards Assessment Report to providing technical assistance in responding to the team's recommendations. Districts are encouraged to use their state offices as a resource and partner in their accreditation and continuous improvement efforts.

The Team Chair is also available to support the district. As the visit date approaches, the district works closely with the Team Chair to:

- Establish the visit schedule;
- Identify the schools to be visited during the School Visits;
- Coordinate logistics for the team;
- Address any questions and/or concerns related to visit preparation;
- Host a pre-visit and/or contact with the district approximately eight weeks prior to the review; and
- Ensure the district is ready for the review.

Hosting the Pre-Visit Review with the Chair and/or Vice chair

Approximately eight weeks prior to the Quality Assurance Review, the Team Chair or Vice Chair conducts a Pre-Visit Review with the district to ensure that the district is ready to host a successful Quality Assurance Review. This review can occur through conference call, webinar, or an on-site visit.

During the review, the Chair/Vice Chair meetings and/or contacts the Superintendent and District Facilitator to:

1. Review the Standards Assessment Report for quality and completeness.
2. Review artifacts assembled for the team.
3. Discuss the interview schedule and confirm interviewees. Ensure interviewees include a broad and representative cross section of the community.
4. Discuss the purpose and structure of the school visits.

5. Confirm that the district has called a Board Meeting to hear the Oral Exit Report and that stakeholders have been notified of the meeting.
6. Ensure the schedule and necessary logistics to accommodate the team have been finalized.
7. Answer any questions the district has with regard to the Quality Assurance Review.

The following sections of this chapter will help ensure that districts are ready for this Pre-Visit Review and well-prepared for the Quality Assurance Review.

Understanding the Standards Assessment Report

As stated earlier, the guiding document for the Quality Assurance Review is the district's Standards Assessment Report (SAR). The district completes and submits the SAR between six months and six weeks prior to its Quality Assurance Review. The SAR is a web-based report that the district completes and submits online. Many districts like to work on the SAR in a Microsoft Word format so that it can be shared and worked on by multiple groups, finalized, and then transferred to the online form. The SAR can be downloaded from the Home Page of the AdvancED website (www.advanc-ed.org) as a Microsoft Word document. The SAR includes five sections: 1) executive summary of the school system profile; 2) a review of each standard; 3) a description of the school system's methods for quality assurance; 4) online peer-to-peer submission; and 5) conclusion. A brief overview of each section is provided below.

Executive summary. The executive summary of the district profile provides an opportunity for the district to give an overview of the district's vision, goals, demographics, and community characteristics. The district profile is developed by collecting and examining data to determine the district's current reality as it relates to its vision. The profile includes data on students and their performance; school and district effectiveness; and the district and community contexts for learning. (Districts can refer to *AdvancED Accreditation for Quality School Systems: A Practitioners' Guide* for more detail on the components of a good profile.) The executive summary of the district profile highlights the information in the profile and helps provide the context for the SAR.

Standards review. The review of each standard is divided into three components: 1) the indicators rubric; 2) focus questions; and 3) overall assessment rubric. The indicators rubric enables the district to assess the degree to which practices and/or processes are in place that indicate adherence to the standard and indicators. For each indicator, the district may check if the practices and/or processes are highly functional, operational, emerging, or not evident. The district should use the rubric as an opportunity to ask itself challenging questions and to respond with accurate answers geared toward self-improvement. After completing the rubric, the district can quickly see areas of strength and opportunity. The section asks, "To what degree are the noted practices/processes in place?"

The focus questions allow the district to expand on and think more deeply about the responses to the indicators rubric. The focus questions provide an opportunity for the district to describe the systematic and systemic processes that are in place to support its ability to meet the indicators. The section asks, "How are the practices/processes implemented?"

The overall assessment describes how well the districts and its schools are implementing practices and/or processes and the impact these practices and/or processes have on student results and overall school effectiveness. The overall assessment helps the school system judge where it is in

relation to each standard. The “operational” level is required in order to demonstrate meeting the standard. The section asks, “How well are we meeting the standard overall?”

Description of quality assurance methods. The description of the district’s methods for quality assurance allows the district to provide an overview of the practices and methods it uses to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that the AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results.

Peer-to-peer submission. The peer-to-peer submission section is an optional section of the report that asks the district to share an effective practice for inclusion in the online AdvancED Resource Network. The submission allows the district to highlight a practice that it feels is indicative of the quality work occurring across the system and its schools. The review team may refer to the practice and use it as the basis for identifying other successful practices occurring in the school system. In addition, by contributing to the network, the district becomes part of an international professional learning community, making available its practice to schools and districts around the world.

Conclusion. The conclusion provides an opportunity for the district to share final insights and information.

Completing the Standards Assessment Report

Using the online tutorials. AdvancED has developed a brief online video tutorial to assist you in preparing to complete the Standard Assessment Report. This can be accessed at www.advanced.org. Click on Accreditation, District, then Resources and Tools. The tutorial can be found in the list of resources. Districts will want to view this tutorial before beginning the process of completing the Standard Assessment Report.

Establishing a plan. The Standards Assessment Report serves as the vehicle to engage the district in meaningful internal review. Districts that engage in a thorough and purposeful internal review benefit the most from the District Accreditation Process. In fact, many districts rate the internal review, which is guided by the Standards Assessment Report, as the most powerful aspect of the accreditation process. The District Facilitator should work with district leadership to develop a plan with clear timelines, strategies, and responsibilities to ensure that the SAR is completed on time, has the involvement of a broad cross-section of stakeholders, and provides an accurate depiction of the district.

Allowing the right amount of time. The amount of time that districts devote to the internal review and completion of the SAR varies from district to district. Some districts are able to complete the SAR in a six-month time frame; others use a year to 18 months. The key determinants in the amount of time it takes are the district’s overall readiness to pursue District Accreditation, its sophistication and experience in implementing a systems approach to improvement, and its overall commitment and buy-in from stakeholders.

Gaining experience and training. During this process, districts find it helpful to have representatives from the district serve on Quality Assurance Review (QAR) teams to other districts. This helps them gain a greater understanding of the QAR process and how to prepare for a

successful QAR. Districts also send teams to training sessions on District Accreditation and systems thinking or bring in presenters to provide focused training on leading a systems approach to improvement. Districts consult with other districts that have hosted their QAR, obtain technical assistance from their AdvancED State Office, and consult with their Team Chair. Many districts have found that the *AdvancED Accreditation for Quality School Systems: A Practitioners' Guide* available for purchase at www.advanc-ed.org/products_and_services provides valuable resources and tools to support their internal review and completion of the Standards Assessment Report.

Organizing to complete the SAR. Districts use a wide range of strategies for organizing themselves to conduct their internal review and complete the Standards Assessment Report. All of the strategies rely on the broad involvement of district, school, and community stakeholders. Some sample strategies that districts have used are provided below; however, districts should design strategies that best fit their unique needs and circumstances.

- **Standard teams.** Some districts assign district leadership to specific standards. These individuals then form teams for their assigned area, involving staff and community members from different district-level departments, different schools, and a range of staff positions. They work in their cross-functional and cross-organizational teams to review the standard, self-assess against the indicators rubric, respond to the focus questions, and make an overall assessment regarding the district's level of adherence to the standard. They then share their work with the other standard teams, district leadership, and board for review, validation, and final refinement. The District Facilitator takes the work of the teams and finalizes the SAR.
- **Cross-functional internal review team.** Some districts create one team, representing all district stakeholders, to review all standards and prepare a draft SAR that is then distributed widely for input and feedback. The document is then refined and finalized.
- **Focus groups.** Some districts conduct a range of focus groups of district and school stakeholders, using the indicators rubric and focus questions of the SAR to guide the discussions. District leaders gather input from these focus groups and use the input to help inform the completion of the SAR. District leaders with primary responsibility for particular standard areas draft and complete their respective sections of the SAR.

Considering the evidence. Regardless of the strategies used to complete the report, the district considers the evidence that addresses the question, "How do we know we are doing what we say we are doing?" The district should be able to provide the evidence to support the ratings it gives itself in the indicators rubric and the overall assessment for each standard. For example, if the district rates a particular practice as "highly functional," the district should be able to produce evidence to support that rating.

AdvancED has developed the "Examples of Evidence for School Systems" resource to help districts as they consider the evidence supporting each standard. This resource can be downloaded from the Home Page of the AdvancED website at www.advanc-ed.org.

Seeking feedback and support. As the district engages in its internal review, it is encouraged to seek feedback and support from the AdvancED State Office. State Office staff are available to provide ongoing guidance and direction to ensure a meaningful internal review and a quality SAR.

Developing the Visit Schedule

The District Facilitator works with the Quality Assurance Review Team Chair to develop the visit schedule. The typical district Quality Assurance Review visit lasts three and a half days. Following is an overview of key components of a district Quality Assurance Review visit.

Key Components of a Typical District Quality Assurance Review Schedule

Evening before review

Team meeting for orientation at the Hotel (2-3 hours)

Day 1 – District Presentations and Interview

- Superintendent provides general orientation to Team (approx. 45-60 minutes)
- System personnel provide brief presentation on the district’s adherence to each of the seven standards and highlight key artifacts related to the standard.
- Team interviews Superintendent, central leadership staff, board members, and major stakeholders; team members conduct artifact review
- Team work sessions & artifact review in preparation for school visits

Day 2 – School Visits

- Mini-teams visit selected schools, receive an instructional walkthrough, observe classrooms, and interview: 1) the school leadership team and school improvement team; 2) teachers; 3) parents and community stakeholders; and 4) students (teams typically visit two schools – one in the morning and one in the afternoon). During interviews, team members rotate in and out to observe classrooms. A brief concluding meeting is held with the principal at the end of each school visit.
- Team debrief of school visits and team work sessions

Day 3 – Standards Verification and Team Deliberations

- Team conducts follow-up interviews with Superintendent and central leadership staff to finalize verification of the district standards
- Team reviews findings and develops final consensus recommendations
- Team chair meets with Superintendent to review key findings and recommendations of the Team
- Team chair provides oral exit report to district stakeholders and the school board at the conclusion of the review

A schedule template is provided in the Appendix that the district can adapt and use.

Preparing Artifacts for Review

In preparation for the Quality Assurance Review team’s arrival, the district makes artifacts (documents, assessment data, plans, policies, etc.) available to the team that it references in its Standards Assessment Report and any additional artifacts it feels demonstrate the district’s adherence to one or more of the standards. These can be made available in written or electronic formats. Many districts post files on webpages or place them on disks or thumb drives.

Included with the artifacts that the district provides in support of its Standards Assessment Report, the district provides the following essential artifacts for team review. The list is organized by standard area; however, many artifacts will address more than one standard area. Districts may call the artifacts by different names than those provided below and should provide whatever comparable artifacts they maintain.

Essential Artifacts

Vision and Purpose

- District vision and mission statement
- District annual report to the community
- District demographic and community profile information
- Other _____

Governance and Leadership

- District organization chart
- District policy manual
- District personnel manual
- Personnel evaluation plan
- Other _____

Teaching and Learning

- District curriculum guide (and relevant accompanying artifacts such as pacing guides)
- District calendar with number of instructional days and teacher work days
- Media services and technology plan
- Other _____

Documenting and Using Results

- District student performance data
 - Trend data – past three years, multiple assessments
 - Comparative data with other like districts
- District student assessment plan (including short-cycle/formative assessments and summative assessments)
- Other _____

Resources and Support Systems

- Professional development plan (including induction program for new staff)
- Number of staff members and student-teacher ratios
- Annual budget
- Latest financial audit
- Facilities maintenance plan and long range facilities plan
- Crisis management and other emergency plans
- Other _____

Stakeholder Communication and Relationships

- Stakeholder perception data
- Other _____

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

- District improvement plan including results of improvement efforts (and for departments)
- School improvement plans for all the schools in the district
- Other _____

Quality Assurance

- Artifacts supporting quality assurance processes described in the Standards Assessment Report

Preparing the Superintendent's Overview

On the morning of the first day of the Quality Assurance Review, the superintendent welcomes the Quality Assurance Review team and provides an overview of the district. The purpose of the superintendent's remarks is to set the tone and context for the visit. The following questions are designed to assist the superintendent in thinking about the type of content to include in his/her remarks:

- What will help the team quickly gain an understanding of the district community, challenges, strengths, and opportunities?
- What information will best convey what the district is trying to accomplish for students?
- How is the district meeting the needs of its students – currently and over time?
- What does the district want the team to look for? What advice/support would the district like the team to provide over the course of the visit?

Team members find it helpful when the superintendent's comments include an overview of the district vision, basic demographic information about the district, a description of challenges, an overview of key programs and improvement initiatives, and a snapshot of student performance results using multiple measures over time.

The superintendent's overview typically lasts between 30 and 45 minutes. It is helpful to provide team members with a copy of the superintendent's comments for use and reference during the visit.

Preparing Brief Presentations on the Standards

Also on the morning of the first day, district personnel provide brief presentations on each of the seven AdvancED Standards. The presentations provide the QAR team with a general overview and description of how the district is meeting each standard. The overview lasts approximately one hour. The following questions are designed to help district personnel as they develop the presentations for the overview:

- What does the district most want the team to know about each standard as the team begins its work?
- What information about each standard does the district wish to highlight and/or clarify from the Standards Assessment Report?
- What artifacts does the district wish to bring to the team's attention that help demonstrate the district's adherence to one or more standards?
- What processes and practices does the district wish to explain that demonstrate how the district is meeting the standard?
- What does the district want the team to look for and/or verify with regard to each standard as it conducts its review?

Setting Up Interviews

Purpose and coordination. A critical component of the Quality Assurance Review is interviews of district and school stakeholders. The purpose of the interviews is to provide an opportunity for the QAR team to gather information from a variety of stakeholders about the district's adherence to the AdvancED accreditation requirements. The District Facilitator, in conjunction with district and school leadership and with guidance and support from the Team Chair, identifies, invites, and schedules stakeholders to be interviewed by the Quality Assurance Review Team.

Structure of the interviews and questions asked. The interviews last between 45 minutes and one hour. They begin with a brief overview of the purpose of the interviews and the role of the Quality Assurance Review team. The team members and the interviewees then introduce themselves. Following these introductory activities, the team asks approximately 9-10 broad questions which address each of the AdvancED standards, the district's profile, and the district's methods for quality assurance. The questions are tailored as appropriate for each stakeholder group. The district may request a copy of the sample interview questions from the Team Chair. Some districts share the sample questions with interviewees so that they can prepare in advance for the questions that will be asked.

Stakeholder groups to be interviewed. The team interviews the following stakeholder groups:

Day One – District-level Interviews

- Superintendent
- Central office staff
- School board members
- Parents, business members, and community members
- Principals of the schools that will not be visited on Day Two
- Support staff

Day Two – School-level Interviews

- School leadership and school improvement team
- Teachers
- Parents, business members, and community members
- Students

Day Three – Follow-up Interviews

- Determined on-site, often follow-up interviews are with district personnel whose responsibilities relate to the AdvancED Standards

The district and Team Chair may add to and/or adapt the groups interviewed as appropriate for the district setting.

Selecting interviewees. The following guidelines are designed to help the District Facilitator in identifying stakeholders to be interviewed.

Guidelines for Identifying Stakeholders to Be Interviewed

Stakeholders should collectively:

- Reflect the district’s broader community
(socio-economic levels, race and ethnicity, regions served by the district, etc.)
- Provide a range of view points and perspectives
(strong and active supporters of the district, critics of the district, those who are less involved, etc.)
- Represent all schooling levels in the district
(e.g., preK to career/technical, if applicable)
- Represent all major categories of positions in the district
(e.g., leadership, administrative, teaching, guidance, and support functions)
- Include individuals who are knowledgeable of the district’s efforts in the AdvancED Standards
- Include individuals who can discuss district strengths and challenges that the district wishes the team to understand

The overarching questions to ask when identifying stakeholders to be interviewed are:

- Will the stakeholders collectively provide an accurate assessment of the district for the QAR team?
- Do the stakeholders collectively have enough knowledge of the district's practices with regard to the AdvancED standards to yield meaningful information?
- Will the stakeholders collectively yield information that will prove valuable to the district in its continuous improvement efforts?

While it may be tempting to identify only those stakeholders who are active and strong supporters of the district, it does not maximize the insights and richness of the findings that can emerge from these interviews that ultimately benefit the district's improvement efforts.

Inviting interviewees. The District Facilitator should begin inviting stakeholders to be interviewed as soon as it has finalized the visit schedule (approximately eight to twelve weeks prior to the visit). Following is sample language that the District Facilitator can adapt and use as appropriate when inviting stakeholders to participate in the interviews.

Sample Invitation to Potential Interviewees

Dear <insert name>,

You are cordially invited to participate in <insert name of district>'s upcoming District Accreditation review by serving on a stakeholder interview team.

As you may know, <insert name of district> is actively pursuing AdvancED District Accreditation. In order to earn this prestigious designation, the district must meet the AdvancED quality standards, implement a process of continuous improvement, and host a Quality Assurance Review once every five years.

<insert name of district>'s Quality Assurance Review will take place <insert dates>. The review is led by a team of professionals from inside and outside the state. During the review, the Quality Assurance Review team interviews a wide range of district and school level stakeholders, examines artifacts, conducts school visits, and engages in professional deliberations to determine the degree to which the district meets the AdvancED standards. The team shares its findings in oral and written formats and makes an accreditation recommendation for national review. The district uses the findings from the team to further its continuous improvement efforts. If the district is awarded accreditation status, the district and all of its schools are accredited.

On <insert day>, the Quality Assurance Review team will be interviewing several stakeholder groups. We would like the team to interview you as part of the <insert interview group> at <insert time> in <insert location>. The interview will last approximately <insert allotted time for interview> minutes. We believe that you have experience, knowledge, and insights that would enhance the team's understanding of our district.

Please reply to this invitation by <insert date>. I hope you can participate in this exciting and valuable process.

Sincerely,

<District Facilitator and/or Superintendent>

Preparing interviewees. After stakeholders accept the invitation to serve on an interview team, the district sends a brief note to confirm the interview date, time, and location. The note should emphasize the importance of being on time. The note should repeat some of the information from the invitation letter that highlights the purpose and activities of the team. Depending on the stakeholder being interviewed, the district may wish to include supporting materials such as a copy of the district’s Standards Assessment Report and a list of the sample questions that may be asked in the interview (as noted earlier, these can be obtained from the Team Chair).

Understanding and Preparing for the School Visits

Purpose of school visits under District Accreditation. On Day Two of the Quality Assurance Review, the team visits a representative sample of schools in the district. The purpose of the school visit is to: 1) validate the school’s participation in the district’s continuous improvement planning framework; 2) seek evidence that the school is implementing its improvement plan as intended; 3) verify the school’s participation in the district’s quality assurance practices; and 4) gather evidence pertaining to the alignment and consistency of the internal systems within the school district.

Selecting schools to be visited. On a typical district review, a minimum of 20% of the district’s schools are visited (in districts with 10 or fewer schools, an effort is made to visit all the schools in the district). The Team Chair and district use this minimum percentage as a starting point to identify the number of schools that will be visited. Once the number is determined, the Team Chair is responsible for selecting the schools to be visited. The District Facilitator provides the Team Chair with a list of schools in the district that includes basic demographic information about each school. The team chair then selects schools to ensure a representative mix of:

- School levels (elementary, middle, high, etc.)
- Student achievement/performance levels
- Student demographics
- Geographic region within the district

At least 20 working days prior to the review, the Team Chair notifies the District Facilitator of the schools selected for the on-site review.

Materials for the team. The District Facilitator should provide for the team (either electronically or in paper format) the vision and mission statements, demographic data, performance data, school improvement plans, and website addresses for the schools to be visited. These materials will assist the team in their preparations for the school visits.

Components of the school visit. The school visit includes an instructional tour, scheduled interviews, and classroom observations. The Sample Schedule in the Appendix outlines the timing and flow of these components. The District Facilitator should review these components with the schools to be visited so that they have a clear understanding of what to expect during their visit.

Instructional tour. The Principal or School Head should lead the instructional tour of the school. The tour should occur when classes are in session and should be scheduled to avoid the start of school, passing periods, and lunch. If the team arrives at the school during this time, the instructional tour should be scheduled after the initial interview to allow time for classes to begin.

The purpose of the tour is to see instruction in action and to view the implementation of key improvement initiatives in the school; it is not a facilities tour. For example, if the school is focused on literacy, the Principal or School Head may wish to show the team a literacy lab where specialists are working one-on-one with students, classrooms where literacy coaches are aiding teachers in instruction, the media center where literacy is reinforced, a music class where literacy concepts are integrated into the curriculum, the teacher workroom where samples of student work/portfolios are on display and an intervention wall tracks student's literacy progress, etc.

During the instructional tour, the Quality Assurance Review team looks and listens for data pertaining to:

- The nature of the overall learning environment – how welcoming is it, does it support student learning, are teachers and students actively engaged in the learning process
- The use of a variety of instructional and assessment methods
- The implementation and monitoring of improvement priorities in the classroom and throughout the school
- The role all staff play in the teaching and learning process

School interviews. In most cases, the review team will interview four groups during the school visit: 1) the school leadership team and school improvement team; 2) teachers; 3) parents and community stakeholders; and 4) students. The interviews last between 30 and 45 minutes. The purpose of the school interviews is to hear how the district vision and improvement efforts are implemented at the school level and to check for alignment, coherence, and strategies in action across a range of stakeholders. The interviews provide an opportunity to hear how the school interprets and adheres to the AdvancED standards and how the district supports them in meeting those standards. To ensure that all voices and opinions are heard during the interviews, it is requested that the school principal only participate in the interview of the school leadership and improvement team. He/she should not participate in or observe the other interviews.

The team asks questions that are similar to those asked during the district interviews on Day One. The questions are tied to each of the AdvancED standards with additional questions pertaining to the school profile and quality assurance methods. The District Facilitator can request the sample questions from the Team Chair should he/she wish to share them with the school to assist in preparing for the review.

Identifying interviewees for the school interviews. The District Facilitator supports the schools in identifying stakeholders to be interviewed. The following guidelines, which mirror those provided for the district interviews, are designed to help the school identify interviewees.

Guidelines for Identifying School Stakeholders to Be Interviewed	
Stakeholders should collectively:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflect the population served by the school <i>(socio-economic levels, race and ethnicity, etc.)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide a range of view points and perspectives <i>(strong and active supporters, critics, those who are less involved, etc.)</i>

- Represent a variety of grade levels and/or departments
- Represent a range of positions in the school
(*e.g., leadership, administrative, teaching, guidance, support functions*)
- Include individuals who can discuss the school's strengths and challenges

The overarching questions to ask when identifying stakeholders to be interviewed are:

- Will the stakeholders collectively provide an accurate assessment of the school for the QAR team?
- Will the stakeholders collectively provide information that will prove valuable to the school and district in its continuous improvement efforts?

Inviting interviewees. With help from the District Facilitator, the school invites stakeholders to be interviewed. The sample invitation provided on page 21 can be adapted for use at the school level.

Preparing interviewees. After stakeholders accept the invitation to serve on an interview team, the school sends a brief note to confirm the interview date, time, and location. The note should emphasize the importance of being on time. The note should repeat some of the information from the invitation letter that highlights the purpose and activities of the team. Depending on the stakeholder being interviewed, the school may wish to include a list of the sample questions that may be asked in the interview (as noted earlier, these can be obtained from the Team Chair).

Classroom observations. During the school visit, team members will observe a variety of classrooms. The purpose of classroom observations is to view teaching and learning in action and to corroborate information obtained from interviews and artifacts. Typically lasting five to ten minutes, the visits provide an opportunity to see how improvement initiatives are translated into the classroom and to view the impact on teachers and students. The visits allow the team to check for alignment from the district to the classroom level.

The Principal should notify teachers that the team may visit their classrooms during the review. The Principal should explain the purpose of the visit, emphasizing that the team members are observing processes and activities in the school; they are not evaluating teachers. Team members are instructed to be as unobtrusive as possible and to not disrupt the learning process. Teachers should conduct class as usual.

Debrief with the team. Prior to end of the school visit, the team briefly shares with the principal the observations and findings made through the artifact review prior to the visit, the instructional tour, interviews, and classroom observations.

Preparing for the Final Day of the Visit

Standards verification. The final day of the Quality Assurance Review occurs at the district office. The District Facilitator schedules time for each standard team to meet with the district personnel whose work most directly pertains to the standard. The standard teams use this time to verify data that has been gathered over the course of the visit and ask any remaining questions that the team

has. The team may wish to meet with additional district personnel or review artifacts during this time. The District Facilitator helps connect team members to personnel and/or artifacts as needed.

Team deliberations. After gathering additional data and clarifying questions, the team meets to deliberate and prepare its report. The District Facilitator provides a work room for the team to use during this time. The team needs access to the Internet, power cords for computers, and a printer.

Meeting with the superintendent. When the team has finished its deliberations and solidified its findings, the Team Chair and Vice Chair meets with the Superintendent and any staff members he/she designates to participate in the meeting to share the team's findings. The District Facilitator schedules the meeting time and location and ensures all participants are informed of the meeting. The meeting provides an opportunity for the Team Chair and Vice Chair to discuss the team's findings with the Superintendent and his/her staff, answer questions, and address any concerns. The Team Chair and Vice Chair review the Oral Exit Report with the Superintendent and his/her staff to ensure that they are familiar with and prepared for the content that will be shared at the public sharing of the Oral Exit Report.

Setting up the Board Meeting to Receive the Oral Exit Report

Overview. After reviewing the team's findings with the Superintendent and his/her staff, the Team Chair will present the Oral Exit Report at a publicly called meeting of the school board. The board meeting typically occurs between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm on the final day of the visit. It is a special meeting of the board that is open to the public and held for the purpose of receiving the findings from the Quality Assurance Review Team. The meeting contains only one agenda item – to hear the team's findings – and no other actions or items are discussed. Because it is a special meeting of the board, it is critical that ample notice is provided to the board, public, and media of the meeting.

Logistics. The District Facilitator coordinates all of the logistics pertaining to the board meeting, including:

- Notifying all board members of the meeting date, time, and purpose
- Notifying the district community through internal and external communication vehicles
- Notifying the media as appropriate
- Preparing a room for the meeting to occur with appropriate seating and audio/visual
- Providing a computer, LCD projector, and screen for the Oral Exit Report presentation which will be delivered via PowerPoint slides
- Providing a podium and/or table from which the Team Chair can deliver the findings
- Providing a microphone, if needed
- Preparing the Board Chair and Superintendent to call the meeting to order and to provide preliminary background information about the district's involvement in District Accreditation and the purpose of the meeting

Agenda. The Board Chair typically begins the meeting, calling it to order. Often, the Board Chair makes some general remarks about the district's participation in the District Accreditation Process and the board's support of the district's pursuit of District Accreditation. The Board Chair then

introduces the Superintendent who explains the work the district has undertaken and provides an overview of the Quality Assurance Review Team's role and activities. The Superintendent then introduces the Team Chair who introduces the rest of the team and begins the Oral Exit Report. The Board Chair and Superintendent introductory comments typically last five to seven minutes. The Team Chair's report lasts 20-25 minutes. Following the report, the Board Chair and/or Superintendent thanks the team and concludes the meeting.

Preparing for media interest. At most Oral Exit Reports, representatives from the media attend. Often, they will ask to interview the Team Chair, Superintendent, and School Board Chair. They may also ask for copies of the Oral Exit Report. The District Facilitator, most likely working with district personnel from the public relations or communications departments, helps coordinate these interviews and makes copies of the Oral Exit Report to ensure that accurate information is shared with the media.

Coordinating Team Logistics

The District Facilitator is responsible for coordinating all the logistics associated with the Quality Assurance Review. The following checklist is intended to assist the District Facilitator with this task.

- Coordinate transportation for the team members for each day of the visit (from the airport to the hotel, from hotel to the district, from district back to hotel, from hotel to the school visits, etc.).
- Secure hotel room reservations for team members.
- Make all meal arrangements for the team for each day of their stay (and coordinate any necessary transportation to meals, such as dinner each evening).
- Reserve meeting space at the hotel for each night of the visit. The meeting room should be organized as a hollow square, with enough chairs to accommodate all members of the team. A screen, LCD projector, power cords (2-3), flip chart paper (at least one full pad), markers (at least one for every member of the team), masking tape, and sticky notes (standard square size, at least one pad for each member of the team). Water and light refreshments are appreciated.
- Reserve a team meeting room at the district office where the team can work, discuss their findings, and review artifacts. The room should include power cords for multiple computers.
- Schedule rooms for the Day One interviews and Day Three standards verification meetings.
- Work with the schools that will be visited on Day Two to coordinate all logistics associated with the school visits (including, transportation, food, rooms for the interviews, etc.).
- Ensure the logistics pertaining to the public meeting of the Oral Exit Report (outlined earlier) are addressed.
- Make name badges for the team members and ensure that district personnel wear their name badges.

- Prepare information packets for the team's arrival (often including a hard copy of the district's Standards Assessment Report, the final schedule, and other district-specific materials).

Making Final Preparations

Following is a checklist to help the District Facilitator address final preparations for the Quality Assurance Review Team.

- At least a week prior to the Quality Assurance Review team visit, confirm all details related to the schedule.
- Ensure that all staff, schools, and stakeholders involved in the review have a copy of the QAR team schedule.
- E-mail and/or send a reminder to all interviewees.
- Confirm with the schools the details for the school visits. Remind the school about the purpose of the instructional tour and the focus of the interviews. Ask the school to remind all of its interviewees.
- Remind school board members of all the details pertaining to their role in the visit.
- E-mail and/or send a reminder to the media regarding the review and the public meeting on the final day.
- Make sure that artifacts are accessible and ready for review.
- Confirm lodging reservations for the team.
- Confirm transportation arrangements for each day of the visit.
- Confirm meals and dinner reservations for the team.

Chapter 3: Hosting the Quality Assurance Review

By following the guidelines outlined in Chapter 2, the district should find that it is well-prepared for the Quality Assurance Review. Chapter 2 provides a detailed overview of each component of the visit and how to prepare for it. This chapter provides brief tips to help the district host a successful Quality Assurance Review.

The visit schedule serves as the primary guide for the three and a-half-day review. The District Facilitator manages the schedule and ensures that all activities of the review occur as planned. The District Facilitator should maintain the schedule and extra copies at all times during the visit. He/she should be available for questions and to help the team access needed information throughout the visit. It is a good idea for the District Facilitator to provide the Team Chair and members with his/her contact information (including cell phone) and the names and contact information of other district staff should questions or emergencies arise.

Welcoming the Team

The district may wish to have a district representative, often the District Facilitator, at the hotel as team members arrive to welcome them and provide them with any information needed for the review. Often, the district supplies name badges, a hard copy of its Standards Assessment Report, a final schedule, and additional district-specific materials.

Attending to the Details

Once the review team has arrived, the District Facilitator ensures that all details unfold as planned.

Arrival and Orientation Night

- Confirm dinner reservations for the team.
- Check to see that the meeting room for the team's evening orientation is properly set-up (hollow square with enough seats to accommodate the team, flip chart paper, sticky notes, markers, masking tape, LCD projector, power cords, screen, any district artifacts that the district wants in the team's work room, water and refreshments).

Day One

- Ensure all team members have transportation to the district.
- Make sure the team's meeting room at the district is properly set up and meets the team's needs.
- Ensure easy access to artifacts the team will need.
- Manage the presentations and interviews for Day One, ensuring all activities stay on schedule.
- Provide lunch for the team.

- Make available coffee, water, and light refreshments throughout the day for the team.
- Provide transportation to the hotel
- Ensure dinner reservations are confirmed and transportation to dinner is provided, if needed.
- Check to see that the team meeting room at the hotel is set up as needed and ready for the team.

Day Two

- Check that all team members have transportation to their assigned schools.
- Support the schools as they host the school visits.
- Ensure lunch is provided for the teams.
- Check to see that transportation to the afternoon schools is provided to the teams.
- Ensure transportation to the hotel is provided to the teams.
- Confirm dinner reservations and transportation to dinner, if needed
- Check to see that the team meeting room at the hotel is set up as needed and ready for the team.

Day Three

- Ensure all team members have transportation to the district.
- Make sure the team's meeting room at the district is properly set up and meets the team's needs.
- Ensure easy access to artifacts the team will need.
- Manage the schedule for interviews and additional follow-up as directed by the team.
- Provide lunch for the team.
- Make available coffee, water, and light refreshments throughout the day for the team.
- Host the meeting between the Chair, Vice Chair, Superintendent, and designated district staff.
- Set up the room for the presentation of the Oral Exit Report (see details in Chapter 2).
- Have materials available and be prepared for questions from the media.
- Provide transportation for team members to the airport, as needed.

Keys to success

Districts that have hosted Quality Assurance Reviews offer the following advice to their colleagues.

- **Be open and honest with the team.** The more authentic and accurate your responses are to the team, the better able the team is to assess the strengths and needs of the district.
- **Stay on schedule.** Use the schedule to guide the visit.
- **Communicate with all stakeholders about the visit;** the more people who know about the visit and the activities of the team, the better. Be as open and transparent about the process as possible.
- **Use and refer to the Standards Assessment Report.** The self-assessment is perhaps the most valuable component of the review process. The Standards Assessment Report represents the work and thinking of a broad range of stakeholders. Reference it regularly with the team so that it is used to maximize the team's time and their ability to provide meaningful feedback to the district.
- **Share and encourage the team to review specific artifacts** that you feel are critical to the team's understanding of your work.
- **Highlight the areas where you need the team's assistance.** The earlier in the process that the team discovers the challenges the district is facing, the more time the team has to consider and craft powerful recommendations to support the district in addressing those challenges.
- **Remember, you get out of a process what you put into it.** The district has the ability through its own commitment to the process to make the most out of the Quality Assurance Review. The more committed the district is to gaining valuable support and feedback from peers, the more likely the district is to receive a meaningful Quality Assurance Review.

Chapter 4: Continuing the Journey

While the majority of this handbook is devoted to preparing for the Quality Assurance Review, the majority of the district's time is spent following the review, acting on the team's findings and continuing the journey of the accreditation process. This chapter reviews the key activities that occur on an ongoing basis as districts seek to maintain their accreditation and continuously improve.

Receiving the Written Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team

At the conclusion of the Quality Assurance Review visit, the Team Chair works with the team to finalize the written report of the team's findings and recommended accreditation status. The report is submitted for review to an AdvancED Reader who reads and finalizes the report to ensure quality. After the Reader finalizes the report, it is sent to the school district, State Office, and Team Chair. The district receives the report within 30 days of the visit.

Upon receipt of the written report, the district communicates the QAR team's findings to the board and district stakeholders. Sharing the results of the visit with a wide range of stakeholders helps educate the district community about the district's accreditation and garners buy-in with regard to next steps that the district will take to address the findings in the report.

Included with the report, the district receives the invoice for the reimbursement of team members and the District Accreditation Quality Assurance Review Fee. This fee is based on the number of schools in the district and is assessed once every five years to defray some of the costs associated with preparing and coordinating the visit.

Receiving Notice of Accreditation Status and Celebrating with the Community

The Quality Assurance Review team's recommended accreditation status is submitted to AdvancED for state and national review and action. The national AdvancED Accreditation Commission, the body that grants accreditation, reviews and acts on all accreditation status recommendations. After the Commission has taken action on the district's accreditation status, a letter is sent to the district confirming its accreditation status.

Upon receiving the accreditation letter, the district communicates its final accreditation status to the board and district stakeholders. The district receives and displays a certificate of accreditation. Press releases (see samples in the Appendix), flags, Q&A guide, and more are available from the AdvancED website at www.advanc-ed.org to help districts share and celebrate their accreditation with their community. Practices that many districts find useful include: sharing information about their accreditation with parents at every "Back to School Night" through brochures and/or handouts; including the NCA CASI or SACS CASI accreditation seal on their website, district stationery, and student transcripts; posting information about accreditation in a regular column of their district newsletters; and including a section on accreditation in their annual reports to the community.

Acting on the QAR Team’s Findings

The Quality Assurance Team report serves as a resource to the district as it furthers its continuous improvement efforts. The district celebrates and strengthens the successes and accomplishments noted in the team’s commendations. The district builds on these accomplishments, enhancing their impact across the system and using what it has learned from its accomplishments to inform other work of the district and to help address recommendations noted by the team.

The team’s recommendations identify areas of needed action designed to enhance district effectiveness and improve student learning. The district is held accountable for making progress on each of the team’s recommendations. Two years following the review, the district submits a report (discussed in the next section) which details the progress made on the recommendations.

To begin acting on the team’s findings, the district reviews the full team report with district stakeholders. In addition to spending time discussing the team’s commendations and recommendations, the district studies the detailed description of strengths and opportunities for improvement provided in each of the standard reports. These reports provide greater clarity, guidance, and direction on the commendations and recommendations. Should questions arise during this process, the district seeks clarity from the QAR Team Chair and/or AdvancED State Office.

After thorough review of the QAR team’s findings, the district establishes a plan of action, engaging a representative group of stakeholders in the process. The district determines what this plan looks like and how it puts the plan into action to ensure ongoing progress. The plan typically outlines next steps related to the team’s findings, including actions to strengthen commendations and clear strategies for addressing recommendations. In addition, the plan includes implementation strategies and methods for monitoring, documenting, and analyzing results.

The district implements its strategies for responding to the team’s finding, tracks the progress it is making, and is prepared to answer the questions, “What steps have been taken? What progress has been made? How do you know you’ve made an impact?”

Completing the Accreditation Progress Report

Following the QAR visit, AdvancED sends a letter to the district superintendent requesting an Accreditation Progress Report (APR) detailing the district’s progress in addressing the recommendations from the QAR team report. The APR is a critical component of the accreditation process. It engages the district in a detailed review and analysis of the steps it has taken to address the recommendations made by the QAR team. Completing the report helps the district focus and reflect on its continuous improvement efforts.

The deadline for completing the APR varies depending on the district’s accreditation status, but it is usually due either one year or two years following the QAR visit. The APR is organized around the recommendations in the QAR team report. For each recommendation, the district is asked to summarize the progress it has made in addressing the recommendation.

It is the responsibility of the district to address each of the recommendations within the 5-year term accreditation.

The district completes the report and submits it to AdvancED for review and action. The district receives feedback from AdvancED on the report and notice of any action taken by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

Maintaining Momentum

Accredited districts understand and honor the concept of continuous improvement. They are dynamic, in motion, and continuously evolving with an unrelenting focus on becoming better on behalf of the students they serve. Quality districts operate as learning communities by possessing healthy cultures where individuals collectively analyze practices and results, engage in professional learning and dialogue, take meaningful action, and assume responsibility for results.

When the visit concludes and progress reports are filed, the commitment and action continues. Districts remain focused on improving organizational effectiveness and student learning.

Strengthening the three pillars of accreditation. On an ongoing basis, accredited districts and their schools adhere to the AdvancED standards, engage in continuous improvement, and demonstrate quality assurance. As districts continuously improve, they monitor, build capacity, and grow more effective in each of these activities.

The district and its schools aim to exceed the AdvancED Standards and aspire to reach ever higher levels of quality. Practices within each standard are strengthened to increase effectiveness. The district uses the standards to engage in regular self-assessment and to guide ongoing improvement.

Systemic processes for continuous improvement provide a framework for purposeful and strategic growth. Districts and schools continue to address each element of quality improvement processes (vision, profile, plan, results). These elements should be regularly reviewed and thoughtfully revised at all levels to maximize relevance and impact. Successful practices are embedded into the culture to ensure sustainability while new interventions are identified and tested. Results are documented, analyzed, and used to inform decisions and actions.

The district and its schools maintain quality assurance through practices and methods that: 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.

AdvancED is available to support the district as it furthers its improvement efforts. Districts are encouraged to take advantage of AdvancED's web-based resources, publications, workshops, conferences, and on-site technical assistance as they continue on their journey of improvement.

Sustaining Interest and Commitment. As districts seek to sustain interest, momentum, and commitment to the district accreditation process, they find that competent and committed educators are the key to sustained improvement. Districts recognize the importance of enhancing the capacity of staff through continued professional learning that is aligned with organizational purpose,

improvement goals, and QAR recommendations. Staff confidence comes from having the knowledge, understanding, and skills to thrive while engaging in professional practice. District leaders who create conditions and provide resources to optimize performance and professional growth find the most success in sustaining improvement.

Successful districts shape a culture of learning, collaboration, and high expectations for staff and students and weave it into the fabric of the system. All staff are encouraged to grow through action, experimentation, and reflection. Successes are identified, celebrated, and embedded into practice.

Educators are motivated by their collective mission to impact students and make a difference in their lives. Districts that find the most success with the District Accreditation Process ensure that the connection between accreditation initiatives and student learning is established and understood by all stakeholders.

Conclusion

Congratulations on your commitment to AdvancED District Accreditation. As you engage in the District Accreditation process, you will find that all elements of your school system become stronger. Your district will become more sophisticated as a system, as its understanding of systems improvement increases. The entire district community, and most importantly students, benefit, as the district works to improve its systems and process to increase district-wide effectiveness and enhance student learning.

AdvancED looks forward to supporting you throughout the district accreditation process. We hope this Handbook has been helpful, and we welcome any feedback you have on improving its usefulness. Please feel free to share your comments with us at accreditation-info@advanc-ed.org.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Sample Schedule

Sample Press Releases

Quality Assurance Review Team Sample Schedule <Insert Dates>

Note: Adjust Times as Appropriate

SUNDAY, <Insert Date>

Time	Event	Where	Who
Check in 3:00 p.m.	QAR Team arrives		QAR Team members
5:30 p.m. 7:00 p.m.	Dinner		QAR Team members
7:00 p.m.- 9:00 p.m.	Team Orientation & Meeting		QAR Team members

MONDAY, <Insert Date> District Office

Time	Event	Where	Who
7:30a.m.	Pick-Up QAR Team		District Office Staff
8:00 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.	Superintendent's Overview		Superintendent, Cabinet Members, Key Central Office QAR Team Members
8:45 a.m.- 9:30 a.m.	Superintendent's Interview		QAR Team Members
9:30 a.m.- 9:45 a.m.	Break		
9:45 a.m.- 10:45 a.m.	Standards Overview		Central Office Staff
10:45 a.m.- 11:00 a.m.	Break		QAR Team Members
11:00 a.m.- 11:45 a.m.	School Board Interviews		QAR Team Members and School Board Members (divided into interview teams)
11:45 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.	Lunch		QAR Team Members
12:30 p.m.- 1:15 p.m.	Central Office Interviews		QAR Team Members and Central Office Staff (divided into interview teams)
1:15 p.m.- 2:00 p.m.	Stakeholder Interviews		QAR Team Members and identified parent, community, and business stakeholders (divided into interview teams)
2:00 p.m.- 2:15 p.m.	Break		QAR Team Members
2:15 p.m.- 3:00 p.m.	Principal Interviews - Principals of HS,MS & ES not visited		QAR Team Members and selected principals (divided into interview teams)
3:00 p.m.- 3:45 p.m.	Support Staff Interviews		QAR Team Members and support staff (divided into interview teams)
3:45 p.m.- 4:30 p.m.	Work time – review of artifacts		QAR Team Members
4:30 p.m.	Return to Hotel		QAR Team Members
5:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.	Team Dinner/ Work Session		QAR Team members

Tuesday, <Insert Date> School Visits

Time	Event	Where	Who
7:00 a.m. - 7:35 a.m.	Breakfast		QAR Team members
7:40 a.m.	Pick-Up QAR Team Members		
MORNING VISIT			
8:00 a.m.- 8:30 a.m.	Instructional Walk- through		Principal, QAR Team members
8:30 a.m.- 9:10 a.m.	Interview: School Leadership and School Improvement Team		QAR Team members
9:10 a.m.- 9:50 a.m.	Interview: Teachers		QAR Team members
9:50 a.m.- 10:20 a.m.	Classroom Observations		QAR Team Members
10:20 a.m.- 10:50 a.m.	Interview: Stakeholders		QAR Team Members
10:50 a.m.- 11:15 a.m.	Interview: Students		QAR Team Members
11:15 a.m.- 11:25 a.m.	Team debrief		QAR Team Members
11:25 a.m.- 11:30 a.m.	Concluding meeting with Principal		QAR Team Members and Principal
11:30 a.m.	Lunch		
12:15 p.m.	Transportation to next school		School/district personnel and QAR Team Members
AFTERNOON VISIT			
12:30 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Instructional Walk- through		Principal, QAR Team members
1:00 p.m.- 1:40 p.m.	Interview: School Leadership and School Improvement Team		QAR Team members
1:40 p.m.- 2:20 p.m.	Interview: Teachers		QAR Team members
2:20 p.m.- 2:50 p.m.	Classroom Observations		QAR Team Members
2:50 p.m.- 3:20 p.m.	Interview: Stakeholders		QAR Team Members
3:20 p.m.- 3:50 p.m.	Interview: Students		QAR Team Members
3:50 p.m.- 3:55 p.m.	Team debrief		QAR Team Members
3:55 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.	Concluding meeting with Principal		QAR Team Members and Principal
4:00 p.m.-	Transportation to next school		School/district personnel and QAR Team Members
5:30 p.m.- 9:00 p.m.	Dinner and Evening Work Session		

Wednesday, <Insert Date> District Office

Time	Event	Where	Who
7:15 a.m.	Check out of hotel and be ready to leave hotel		QAR Team Members
7:30 a.m.- 8:00 a.m.	Breakfast		QAR Team Members
8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Standards Verification/ Follow-up Interviews as Necessary		Superintendent, Cabinet Members, and Central Office Staff responsible for Seven Standards, QAR Team Members
10:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.	Work time and deliberations		QAR Team members
12:00 p.m.- 1:30 p.m.	Working lunch; Continued deliberations		QAR Team members
1:30 p.m.- 2:15 p.m.	Final Meeting with Superintendent		Superintendent, district personnel as designated by the superintendent, Chair and Vice- Chair
3:00 p.m.- 3:30 p.m.	Oral Exit Report during called Board meeting		Chair, QAR Team members All District Administrators School Board Members Public
3:30 p.m.	Departure of Team		QAR Team Members

Date

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACTS:

Name

Phone number

e-mail

Sample Press Release Announcing Candidacy
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<Insert Name of District> Announces Pursuit of AdvancED District Accreditation

<insert name of superintendent>, Superintendent of <insert name of district>, announced that the district has become a candidate for AdvancED District Accreditation.

AdvancED District Accreditation provides nationally recognized accreditation for the district and all of its schools. To earn AdvancED District Accreditation, the district must: 1) meet the AdvancED accreditation standards; 2) implement a continuous process of improvement; and 3) host an external review team once every five years.

“District accreditation is a rigorous process that demonstrates to our students, parents, and community that we are focused on raising student achievement, providing safe and enriching learning environments, and maintaining efficient and effective operations staffed by highly qualified educators,” stated <insert name of superintendent>.

Using the *AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems* as a framework, the district will begin the process by conducting a thorough self-assessment of its strengths and opportunities for improvement. The district will engage a broad cross section of representatives from across the districts, its schools, and the broader community in its self-assessment.

Following its internal review, the district will host an AdvancED Quality Assurance Review team comprised of trained professionals from across the nation and state. The review team will visit the district on <insert dates> to evaluate the district’s self-assessment, determine the degree to which the district meets the AdvancED accreditation standards, and make an accreditation recommendation.

“<Insert name of district> is a good district,” stated <insert name of superintendent>. “We believe strongly that the AdvancED District Accreditation Process will make us even better. Students win when the entire district commits to examining all of its processes and systems to determine what more we can be doing to benefit the students we serve. This is the essence of the accreditation process.”

Parents and interested community members can learn more about the District Accreditation Process at www.advanc-ed.org.

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AdvancED is the parent organization for 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). NCA CASI and SACS CASI are accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 23,000 public and private schools and 4,500 school districts worldwide.

For more information, please contact <insert contact information>.

Date

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACTS:

Name

Phone number

e-mail

Sample Press Release following the QAR Visit

<Insert Name of District> Receives Praise and Recommendations from National Accreditation Team

On <insert dates of visit>, <insert name of district> hosted an AdvancED Quality Assurance Review Team that visited the district and a cross section of its schools to evaluate the district's adherence to the AdvancED accreditation standards and to make a recommendation for national accreditation.

Comprised of <insert number> trained professionals from across the state and nation, the team: reviewed district documents and performance data; interviewed over <insert number> district, school, and community stakeholders; conducted site visits to <insert number>; and observed district and school practices.

The team commended the district for <insert highlights of commendations>.

In addition, the team recommended that the district <insert highlights of recommendations.> The district will be developing plans to respond to and address these recommendations. In two years, the district must report to AdvancED its progress in addressing the team's recommendations.

<Adapt the following section as necessary based on the team's findings.>

Overall, the team found that <insert name of district> met the requirements for AdvancED accreditation. The team announced that it will be recommending the district for District Accreditation. Their recommendation will be reviewed and acted upon by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission in <insert month action will be taken>.

<Insert quote from the Superintendent or District Facilitator commenting on the value of hosting the review team. Emphasize what the district learned, how external review provides the opportunity to take an objective look at oneself, and how the process is geared toward continuous improvement.>

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For more information, please contact <insert contact information>.

Date

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACTS:

Name

Phone number

e-mail

Sample Press Release When District is Awarded District Accreditation
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<Insert Name of District> Awarded District Accreditation

<Insert district superintendent's name> announced today that <insert name of district> was granted District Accreditation from the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, the national commission that confers the <insert appropriate seal for region in which the district resides - North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) or Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement> accreditation seal. This means that the district and all of its schools are accredited, and that <insert district name> is recognized across the nation as a quality school system.

The accreditation process involves three ongoing components: 1) meeting high quality standards; 2) implementing a continuous process of improvement; and 3) engaging in quality assurance through internal and external review. The district's accreditation is for a five year term with regular monitoring of progress and reporting occurring during the term.

"District Accreditation as conferred by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission provides <insert name of district> a nationally-recognized mark of quality for our district and all the schools within our district," shared <insert name of superintendent>. "It demonstrates to our community our commitment to excellence, our openness to external review and feedback, and our desire to be the best we can be on behalf of the students we serve."

Dr. Mark Elgart, President/CEO of AdvancED, stated, "District Accreditation is a rigorous process that focuses the entire school system on the primary goal of creating lifelong learners. <insert name of district> is to be commended for engaging in this process and demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement."

Parents and interested community members can learn more about the District Accreditation Process at www.advanc-ed.org.

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