AdvancED™

Educational Practices

REFERENCE GUIDE

Aligned to the AdvancED® Standards for Quality Schools

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Introduction

This *Educational Practices Reference Guide* describes the educational practices that AdvancED has found, through our experience base, to assist in providing a quality learning environment. The *Educational Practices Reference Guide* is designed to serve as a resource to schools that want a reference point or example of practices that are aligned with the *AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality Schools.* This guide also provides information related to Early Learning and Digital Learning environments. Schools seeking further guidance in these areas are strongly encouraged to review the AdvancED Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools and the AdvancED Standards for Quality Digital Learning Institutions (available for implementation July 2013) for specific expectations for accreditation for those schools.

AdvancED is focused on quality. Quality is about the dynamic combination of inputs, processes, and results working in harmony to achieve the school's vision for student learning. The *AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools* provide this comprehensive view of quality. Schools should use the standards to focus on the end goal of quality. The educational practices referenced in this guide can be used to support the standards when schools are looking for a guidepost for inputs; however, they should do so always recognizing that there are many paths to quality.

The practices highlighted address those areas where AdvancED is most often asked for examples or benchmarks of good practice and pertain to specific indicators within Standard 1 - Purpose and Direction, Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership, Standard 3 - Teaching and Assessing for Learning, and Standard 4 - Resources and Support Systems.

This reference guide should not be interpreted as requirements, nor should it limit thinking about common practice. The practices serve as reference points of what is generally accepted as good practice. The practices provide schools with a starting point for comparison. They do not represent the end point, nor should they limit creative and innovative practices that best meet the needs of students.

The ultimate goal of the accreditation process is to help schools maximize student success and school effectiveness. Schools are encouraged to use the educational practices referenced in this guide only so far as they find them useful in achieving this goal.

Purpose and Direction

The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

INDICATOR 1.1

The school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.

In support of this indicator, the school:

- Has a systematic and documented process in place for regularly reviewing the vision and purpose of the school and for involving representatives of all stakeholder groups in that review.
- Has procedures for clearly communicating the vision and purpose to all stakeholders.
- Provides evidence that the vision and purpose of the school clearly focus on student success and promote an equitable and inclusive community that inspires students to respect and value diversity.

INDICATOR 1.3

The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.

In support of this indicator, the school implements a documented continuous improvement process including the following:

- Documented process including goals based on improving student learning and conditions that support student learning.
- A profile of current and comprehensive data on student and school performance.
- Identified goals based on the analysis of data from the profile.
- Action plans that identify measurable student learning objectives, strategies, activities, resources, and timelines for achieving improvement goals.
- Evaluation of the results of the improvement processes.

Governance and Leadership

The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.

DUTIES OF THE GOVERNING BODY

INDICATOR 2.1

The governing body establishes polices and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the school

GENERAL DUTIES

In support of this indicator, the governing body can produce evidence that substantiates it establishes policies and ensures implementation of practices which:

- Support the school's purpose and direction.
- Support the effective operation of the school including the following functions:
  - Monitoring strategic and continuous improvement plans.
  - Establishing and monitoring policies regarding nondiscrimination in all actions regarding student and stakeholders.
  - Maintaining access to legal counsel who can advise or obtain necessary information about the legal requirements and obligations that exist in the state, federal, or other jurisdictions in which it operates.
  - Maintaining adequate risk management policies for the protection of the school, including governance policies in the event of an emergency.
- Hire and oversee the administrative head of the school.
- Provide evidence of the monitoring of effective instruction and assessments that produce equitable and challenging learning experiences for all students.
- Provide for the professional growth and development of all staff.
- Provide clear direction and oversight of fiscal management including the following functions:
  - Assuring that the accounts of the school are kept in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and are audited annually by an independent, licensed accountant.
  - Assuring that debt service or lines of credit are managed in such ways as to ensure that fiscal responsibility remains under the control of the governing authority.
  - Maintaining adequate insurance or equivalent resources to protect its financial stability and administrative operations from protracted proceedings and claims for damage.

- Maintaining a policy for funds in reserve.
- Ensuring the financial stability of the school, and assuring that the school is not in, nor in prospect of moving into, financial reorganization under the protection of bankruptcy.
- Maintaining policies for fund raising and adhering to accepted standards for reporting and recognizing gift revenues and fund raising expenditures.

INDICATOR 2.2

The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.

In support of this indicator, the governing body ensures the implementation of the following policies and practices:

- Ensures that its decisions and actions are in accordance with defined roles and responsibilities, a code of ethics, and free of conflict of interest.
- Participate in formal professional development regarding the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and its individual members.
- Complies with all policies, procedures, laws and regulations.
- Functions as a cohesive unit.

ROLES OF THE GOVERNING BODY AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

INDICATOR 2.3

The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.

In support of this indicator, the governing body and school leadership engage in and document the following practices

- Maintain and adhere to clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Maintain a strategic and policy-level focus.
- Enable the school leadership to focus on the day-to-day operations of the school.
- Preserve the school leadership's ability to hire and evaluate personnel in accordance with established policies and procedures.
- Assure that the school leadership allocates and aligns the human instructional, financial, and physical resources in support of the vision and purpose of the school.

Schools seeking additional practices and resources with regard to effective governing body practices and school management may wish to visit the National School Board Association's website at www.nsba.org, which has published The Key Work of School Boards which outlines eight key action areas to guide school boards in their efforts to improve student achievement. The National Association of Independent Schools at www.nais.org offers Principles of Good Practice which defines standards and ethical behavior in key areas of school operations for independent schools.

Teaching and Assessing for Learning

The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.

CURRICULUM

INDICATOR 3.1

The school's curriculum provides equitable and challenging experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking and life skills that lead to success at the next level.

INDICATOR 3.2

Curriculum, instruction and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.

AdvancED offers the following information and practices to support schools as they review and evaluate their curricula. In highlighting these practices, AdvancED recognizes that the school's chosen curriculum and its implementation of that curriculum define the school (e.g., comprehensive high school, college preparatory school, career technical school, early learning school). The school's curriculum should be aligned with its purpose and expectations for student learning and structured to meet the unique needs of the students served by the school. As a result, schools should review/use the practices identified below in conjunction with their stated vision, mission, and student population to best evaluate the quality of their curricula.

EARLY LEARNING

Curriculum content and learning experiences provide young children with challenging and equitable opportunities that address the cognitive, emotional, social, creative, and physical growth and development of the student. The curriculum also:

- Incorporates developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate instructional practices
- Promotes children's success at the next level.
- Provides for different levels of ability, development, and learning styles.
- Provides opportunities for students to actively explore and interact with the environment, other students, and adults in a positive manner.
- Incorporates learning about literacy, math, science, social studies, health, and other content areas
- Reflects differences in cultures, growth, and interests.

PRIMARY AND ELEMENTARY LEVEL

The curriculum is broad in scope and provides for a wide range in student readiness and potential for learning. The curriculum:

- Places an emphasis upon the development of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective skills.
- Develops the knowledge and skills necessary for student success at the next level of education.
- Includes learning experiences in language arts (including technical writing, technical reading, and speech communications at the appropriate levels), mathematics, science (including experimental activities), social studies, foreign language exploration, health and safety, physical education, the arts, and the application of technology as a tool for learning.

MIDDLE AND JUNIOR HIGH LEVELS

The curriculum has sufficient breadth to serve both general and special needs of early adolescents through a variety of exploratory experiences and courses that ensure that the student is prepared to be successful at the next educational level. The curriculum includes:

- Language Arts (including English, reading, writing, technical reading, technical writing, and speech communications)
- Social Studies
- Mathematics (including preparation for Algebra at the appropriate levels)
- Science (including experimental activities)
- Fine Arts
- Practical and technical arts
- Foreign language
- The application of technology as a learning tool
- Physical education, social and emotional health, and safety

SECONDARY LEVEL

The curriculum includes a core set of offerings to enhance academic skills, college and career readiness, application of knowledge, application of technology, and to ensure successful transitions to employment or postsecondary education. For diploma granting high schools, including digital learning institutions, the curriculum includes a minimum of the following course offerings:

- Four Language Arts courses including content focusing on literature, grammar, writing, reading, technical reading, technical writing, and speech communications
- Four Mathematics courses (three at or above the Algebra I level)
- Four Science courses (at least two which are laboratory based)
- Four Social Studies
- Four courses in the Practical and Technical Arts
- Two courses in the same Foreign Language
- Three courses in Fine and Performing Arts
- One course in Physical Education, Social and Emotional Health; and Safety
- Additional elective courses

SUPPLEMENTARY

Supplementary schools provide educational services to PreK-12 level and adult students. They offer programs of instruction that are a portion of a comprehensive educational program leading to a diploma or degree. The programs of instruction are based on clearly defined learning objectives related to the school's identified purpose.

DIGITAL LEARNING

Digital Learning instructional programs are where comprehensive or supplementary learning takes place when the teacher and the student may be at separate locations or the teaching and learning processes may take place at different times. Digital learning integrates the effective use of technology to strengthen the student learning experience and gives students some element of control over time, place, path and/or pace. Delivery of instruction can be synchronous with simultaneous interaction between the teacher and student or asynchronous where the teacher and student interaction is delayed over time. Instructional methodologies, materials, and resources may be facilitated by internet, video, audio, print, online, computer, travel-study, and/or mail. The curricular program is based on clearly defined course objectives and the school has a written policy for granting credit for each digital learning course.

INTERNATIONAL

International schools are guided by board-approved purpose statements that demonstrate a commitment to providing either an American or an International curriculum. The curriculum provides instruction in and promotes the benefits of tolerance and respect for all cultures and nations. Instruction is offered in either English and/or an English language focused, bilingual program delivered by a faculty qualified to represent and deliver an American and/or International modeled curriculum.

In addition to assessing a school's adherence to AdvancED's accreditation standards and indicators, quality assurance review teams will validate the school's use of the terms "American" and/or "International" in regard to mission, school name, and school publications.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS

INDICATOR 3.4

School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.

INDICATOR 3.6

Teacher's implement the school's instructional process in support of student learning.

AdvancED recognizes the importance of providing teachers and students with uninterrupted instructional time. To make the most of this instructional time, teachers need adequate planning time. AdvancED shares the following practices for instructional time and planning time.

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

The school meets the state requirements for the number of instructional days in the year or provides a school year that consists of at least 180 instructional days and the following minimum total hours:

- Early childhood and pre-kindergarten: A planned program
- Kindergarten: 900 hours
- Elementary: 900 hours
- Middle level: 990 hours
- High school: 1100 hours
- Digital learning (See digital learning requirements below)

DIGITAL LEARNING REQUIREMENTS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

The school has a written policy for instructional time for digital learning programs/courses that includes the requirements for the following:

- Student engagement within each course.
- Student progress within each course.
- Completion of each course.
- Eligibility for accessing the next or additional courses upon previous course completions.
- Documentation of the student's instructional work for each course.

PLANNING TIME

The school meets state requirements for planning time, or provides a master schedule that includes a minimum of 200 minutes per week of planning time for all full-time instructors that is unencumbered by teaching or supervisory responsibilities. Part-time professional instructional staff has appropriate planning time within their designated workday.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

INDICATOR 3.11

All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.

AdvancED shares the following practices regarding professional development activities.

SCHOOL'S PROGRAM OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Quality schools implement a program of professional development that is aligned with the school's purpose, expectations for student learning and continuous improvement goals. The program addresses those areas where staff development is most needed in order to support identified interventions. Professional development activities are research-based, include follow-up activities as appropriate, encourage innovation and risk taking, and include evaluation for their effect on instructional practice and student performance.

TIME SPENT IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

All professional personnel meet state requirements for participation in professional development activities necessary to maintain certification, or earn at least six semester hours of credit or the equivalent during each five years of employment. Six semester hours of credit is equivalent to 120 clock hours of participation in professional development activities (e.g., workshops, seminars, conferences and professional learning communities).

Resources and Support Systems

The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.

Note: For all Early Learning Programs (serving PreK) please refer to the AdvancED Quality Standards for Early Learning Schools (Standard 4) for all requirements for staff qualifications, class sizes and health and safety standards.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS (K-12)

INDICATOR 4.1

Qualified professional and support staff are sufficient in number to fulfill their roles and responsibilities necessary to support the school's purpose, direction, and the educational program.

AdvancED recognizes that the definition of "qualified" in relation to hiring qualified professional staff encompasses more than a person's education. The definition also includes the person's experience base, unique talents, professional attitude, and general aptitudes. Hiring qualified professional staff requires a thorough examination of all the attributes of the individual; and in the end, the hiring decision is based on good professional judgment.

At the same time, AdvancED recognizes that school and district leaders find it useful to know what is generally accepted by the profession as necessary in regard to a person's professional credentials and education background. As a result, we have provided the following practices.

INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL QUALIFICATIONS

The instructional personnel meet the certification requirements of the state, hold an endorsement for the grade level(s) at which they are teaching, and hold an endorsement for the subject area being taught. For personnel who are not required to meet state certification requirements, instructional personnel have an earned bachelor's degree that includes:

- Eighteen semester hours of professional education (as part of, or in addition to the degree, and including at least six semester hours of student teaching) from a regionally accredited institution; and

- A major or at least 24 semester hours in their assigned field.

SUPERINTENDENT QUALIFICATIONS

The superintendent meets state certification requirements or has an earned graduate degree from a regionally accredited institution with 30 semester hours in educational administration or supervision.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR QUALIFICATIONS

The school principal or administrative head, school assistant administrators, and district-level administrators meet state certification requirements or have an earned graduate degree from a regionally accredited institution with 18 semester hours in administration, curriculum, supervision, or related subjects.

COUNSELORS AND MEDIA SPECIALISTS QUALIFICATIONS

Counselors and media specialists meet state certification requirements or have an earned graduate degree in their assigned field from a regionally accredited institution.

NON-TEACHING PROFESSIONAL STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Other non-teaching professional staff (nurses, nutritionists, physical therapists, athletic trainers, etc.) meets the certification/licensure requirements established by the state or their relevant professional association.

PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFF

Paraprofessional staff meets the requirements of the state, have appropriate training to complete their assignment, and serve under the direct supervision of professional personnel.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS DIGITAL LEARNING PROGRAMS/COURSES

For digital learning programs/courses, the number of personnel necessary to fill all the roles and responsibilities is determined by the institution's purpose, educational programs, delivery of online instruction and continuous improvement. While schools may use a variety of technology systems to provide digital learning instructional content and media resources to students taking digital learning courses, the AdvancED requirements for teacher qualifications apply to those digital learning programs and/or courses. Qualified teachers must provide instructional guidance and oversee the progress of students within each course. Their role should include adapting instruction by accessing data on student mastery and to work with students to personalize learning that reflects the skills and knowledge students have mastered.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR EARLY LEARNING STAFF IN PREK PROGRAMS THAT ARE A PART OF A K-12 SCHOOL)

NOTE: For Early Learning Schools (Serving PreK-K), please refer to the AdvancED Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools for additional staffing qualifications.

LEAD TEACHERS

All lead teachers have an advanced level degree or higher or an Associate's Degree/ credential in early childhood education or 60 credits with a minimum of 24 in early childhood education, child development, or elementary education. All lead teachers meet the state/governmental requirements for staff credentials for the position.

ASSISTANT TEACHERS

All assistant teachers have a High School Diploma/GED or higher or the country's equivalent credential and meet the state/governmental requirements for staff credentials for the position.

STAFFING LEVELS - ADMINISTRATIVE, COUNSELING, AND LIBRARY/MEDIA STAFF

Quality schools provide sufficient staff to meet the needs of the whole child and ensure effective operations. At the same time, they recognize that providing staff does not automatically translate to quality programs. As a result, they examine staffing decisions in light of the school's purpose, learning goals, student needs, and staff qualifications; and they make staffing decisions based on what will best advance their work with students. As schools make decisions about appropriate staffing levels, they should meet applicable state laws.

In the absence of such laws, AdvancED shares the following practices for staffing levels for administrative, counseling, and library/media staff.

- Every school must have an administrative head who serves as the instructional leader of the school.
- For elementary schools with enrollments of 500 or more students, the school should add .5 assistant administrators for every additional 250 students
- For middle and high schools with of 250 or more students, the school should add .5 assistant administrators for every additional 250 students
- Counselor student ratios should be 250 to 1 with additional staff added for each additional 250 students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA] recommendation). For more information on school counseling programs please visit their website at http://www.schoolcounselor.org/
- Library Media Specialist ratios should be 250 to 1 with additional staff added for each additional 250 students.

CLASS SIZE

Instructional quality and student achievement can be enhanced when the learning conditions are supported by smaller class sizes. Small class sizes alone, however, may not impact student learning if instructional methods are not aligned with the needs and learning styles of students. Differentiated instruction and effective classroom practices are critical to taking advantage of the more individualized learning environment that smaller classroom sizes afford. Context also plays a role in class size – a science lab and a swimming class, for example, require different class sizes to maximize the success of students and accomplish class objectives. While it may be tempting to focus discussion and resources on class size, the primary focus for schools should be on improving classroom instruction and providing an environment that best meets the objectives of the class. Quality is about what happens in the classroom and less about actual class size.

Emphasizing the importance of what happens in the classroom and the overall context for the class; AdvancED also recognizes that many schools find it helpful to have a reference point for what is generally accepted as good practice with regard to class size. At a minimum, schools should meet state class size requirements. In the absence of such requirements, AdvancED shares the following practices with regard to maintaining class sizes conducive to student learning:

- K-2   Range of 18-22 students per class
- 3-6   Range of 22-25 students per class
- 7-12   Range of 25-28 students per class

These practices assume a minimum of one full-time equivalent teacher in each of the class sizes noted above. For additional information on class size recommendations, please review the SREB Policy Brief on Class Size (Publication #: 12E02R) available at http://www.sreb.org/page/1252/publications.html

TEACHER STUDENT RATIOS FOR DIGITAL LEARNING PROGRAMS/ COURSES

All assistant teachers have a High School Diploma/GED or higher or the country's equivalent credential and meet the state/governmental requirements for staff credentials for the position.

- Every school must have an administrative head who serves as the instructional leader of the school.
- For elementary schools with enrollments of 500 or more students, the school should add .5 assistant administrators for every additional 250 students

EARLY LEARNING CLASS SIZE (PRE-K PROGRAMS)

EARLY LEARNING INDICATOR 4.5

The school maintains a class-size and ratio of young children to teachers that support the care and developmentally appropriate learning, growth, and development of young children.

		Infant	Toddler	Early Preschool 1	Early Preschool 2	Preschool	Pr-K	K
Level 4	Age Range	Up to 12 months	12 to 18 months	18 to 24 months	24 to 36 months	36 to 48 months	48 to 60 months	60 to 72 months
	Group Size	6	10	12	12	20	24	24
	Ratio	1:03	1:05	1:06	1:06	1:10	1:12	1:12
		For all age ranges of young children, the school meets state licensure requirements for group size and student-to-adult ratios.						
Level 3	Age Range	Up to 12 months	12 to 18 months	18 to 24 months	24 to 36 months	36 to 48 months	48 to 60 months	60 to 72 months
	Group Size	8	10	12	16	24	24	30
	Ratio	1:04	1:05	1:06	1:08	1:12	1:12	1:15
		For all age ranges of young children, the school meets state licensure requirements for group size and student-to-adult ratios.						
Level 2	Age Range	Up to 12 months	12 to 18 months	18 to 24 months	24 to 36 months	36 to 48 months	48 to 60 months	60 to 72 months
	Group Size	8	10	12	16	24	24	30
	Ratio	Meets State Licensure Requirements for Student-to-Adult Ratios						
		For all age ranges of young children, the school meets state licensure requirements for group size and student-to-adult ratios.						
Level 1	Age Range	Up to 12 months	12 to 18 months	18 to 24 months	24 to 36 months	36 to 48 months	48 to 60 months	60 to 72 months
	Group Size	For all age ranges of young children, the school meets state licensure requirements for group size and student-to-adult ratios.						
	Ratio							

Notes:

- Group sizes are ceilings, regardless of the number of staff
- Ratios include teachers, assistant teachers, support staff
- Ratios are to be lowered when one or more young children in the group have specialized needs relating to their developmentally appropriate learning, growth, and development.
- If infants and age 1 children are in mixed groups, the ratio for the youngest child applies.

LIBRARY MEDIA SERVICES

INDICATOR 4.4

Students and school personnel use a range of media and information resources to support the school's educational programs

The following guidelines for quality school library media programs are recommended by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). For more information on school library/media centers, please visit their website at http://www.ala.org/aasl/

PLANNING AND EVALUATING

The school library program is built on a long-term strategic plan that reflects the mission, goals, and objectives of the school.

STAFFING

The school library program has a minimum of one full-time certified/licensed school librarian supported by qualified support staff sufficient for the school's instructional programs, services, facilities, size, and numbers of teachers and students.

THE LEARNING SPACE

The school library program includes flexible and equitable access to physical and virtual collections of resources that support the school curriculum and meet the diverse needs of all learners.

BUDGET

The school library program has sufficient funding to support priorities and make steady progress to support the program's mission, and to attain its goals and objectives.

POLICIES

The school library program includes policies, procedures, and guidelines that support equitable access to ideas and information throughout the school community.

COLLECTION AND INFORMATION ACCESS

The school library program includes a well-developed collection of books, periodicals, and non-print material in a variety of formats that support curricular topics, and that are suited to inquiry learning and users' needs and interests.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF DIGITAL EDUCATION

DIGITAL LEARNING DESIGNATION:

The majority of on-site schools have online learning opportunities or programs available to their students. Blended and hybrid education models are rapidly becoming an expanding segment. The digital learning program becomes a separate digital learning institution when it enrolls students who are not enrolled in the on-site school or who would not normally enroll in the on-site school., or when more than 50% of the enrolled students receive their education in the digital learning environment.

Note: Digital Learning Institutions should refer to the AdvancED Standards for Quality Digital Learning Institutions for specific requirements for Digital Learning Institutions.

AUTHENTICITY OF STUDENT WORK:

Schools having digital learning programs must have a written policy or procedure that describes how the school reasonably ensures the authenticity of student work on key assessments for the digital courses. Examples may include the use of proctors, assessment centers or other on-site attendance, Skype or other visual communications, synchronous communications, conference calls, and other ways. Schools may implement a combination of practices for ensuring the authenticity of student work.

CONTRACTING WITH ACCREDITED DIGITAL LEARNING INSTITUTIONS:

Onsite or other digital learning institutions may purchase or contract with accredited digital learning institutions for courses, instruction, or other services. The accreditation of the digital learning institutions does not transfer to the school contracting for services from the accredited digital learning institutions.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND CREDITS:

The digital environment provides a new learning experience for many students. Upon enrollment, the school should provide students with resources that support student achievement in the digital environment. The resources should include a clearly defined admissions process for student placement, an induction program and clear expectations and strategies for successful learning in the virtual environment.