



# **Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for The Danville Schools**

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AdvancED is the parent organization of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), 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 serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

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# About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

## Background

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

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

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

## The Accreditation Process

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

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

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

# Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

## Purpose

The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

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

A key aim of the quality assurance review is to verify that the school district is operating with institutional integrity – that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students and other stakeholders.

## School District Preparation

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

## Summary of Team Activities

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

## Using the Report – Acting on the Recommendations

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

## Accreditation Recommendation

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

## Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited the Danville Schools on February 8-11, 2009.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed: 19 administrators, 58 teachers, 37 support staff, 45 parents and business partners, 48 students and 5 Board of Education members for a total of 212 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited five schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts.

Throughout the visit, the team reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

- Vision and Purpose
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Documenting and Using Results
- Resource and Support Systems
- Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The Quality Assurance Review Team used the standards to guide its review of the school district, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school district and its schools function as a whole and embody the practices and characteristics of a quality school district. Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

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

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

## Commendations

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

- **The district has enjoyed a tradition of achievement.** Stakeholder interviews indicated that both the community and staff hold high expectations for student achievement. Extra-curricular and co-curricular activities have garnered many awards and this has instilled pride in all stakeholder groups.
- **Despite the age of facilities, all are well-maintained.** The QAR team visited all five schools and was impressed with both the inward and outward appearances. The Kentucky Department of Education also has commended the district for the maintenance and upkeep of the facilities.
- **As evident through a review of documents and stakeholder interviews, the team noted that the district offers 11 Advanced Placement courses.** The small size of Danville High School makes this a noteworthy commendation, as many larger schools offer fewer AP courses. The AP courses are open to all students.
- **The Danville Kids University has provided a vehicle to ensure the success of students in grades 3-5.** Parents praised DKU for being one of the more successful initiatives for elementary students. Parents of DKU students are required to pay tuition; however, the fees are waived for those who lack the resources to pay. The program enjoys a 75% successful completion rate.
- **The Danville Education Foundation has provided additional support for students.** The foundation has conducted fundraisers and has used funds to sponsor field trips and cultural activities for students. Interviews indicated that beginning the foundation has fostered greater community support.
- **As documented in the district SAR and affirmed by stakeholder interviews, prior to the beginning of the school year, all teachers district-wide are required to conduct home visits.** These visits are popular for teachers and students and serve as a vehicle to facilitate home-school communication.
- **Because of the projected shortage of state, federal, and local funding, the district has aggressively and successfully pursued grant writing as a means to support programs.** The QAR team noted that the district exceeded the state minimum staffing numbers and offered many programs that enable students to experience success.

## Recommendations

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

- **Strengthen ongoing efforts to improve internal and external communication in order to build relationships.** To gauge stakeholder perceptions, the Lighthouse Survey was conducted by the district. Improving communication was a high priority recommendation identified in the survey. The QAR team noted that there were varied opinions regarding how well the district communicates. The QAR team also noted that the district was proactive in addressing and improving communication. Therefore, it is recommended that the district sustain its current efforts and focus more on changing the perception that it does not communicate well with all stakeholder groups
- **Establish more effective transition programs for students and parents between schools.** Stakeholder interviews revealed that parents feel that the currently scheduled programs are more “Meet and Greet” and do not provide an opportunity for parent/teacher/student interactions.
- **Integrate the available technology more fully into instructional process.** The district has abundant state-of-the art technology; however, through observation and interviews, usage is inconsistent throughout the district. More professional development that supports full integration of technology should be scheduled.
- **Facilitate ongoing leadership effectiveness through team building to enhance the decision making process.** The preceding is Goal #3 for the district and was affirmed as an area of improvement through interviews. Because of a significant change in the composition of the school board, sustain and renew the focus on improving the school board/superintendent team effectiveness through team building and leadership skill development.
- **Focus on identifying the data that most impacts student learning and subsequently use that data consistently to evaluate and to make program decisions.** The district has a wealth of data that can be used to make informed instructional decisions; however, the QAR team noted that the usage is uneven.

## **Next Steps**

The school district should:

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

## **Resources**

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides online resources, research, handbooks, and tools to assist school districts and their schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for assistance in accessing these resources.

## **Celebrating Accreditation**

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

## **Summary**

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

## Standard Reports

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

## Vision and Purpose

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it commits to a purpose and direction that is shared system-wide. The leadership establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the system's vision that is supported by system and school personnel and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and district effectiveness. The system's vision guides allocations of time and human, material, and fiscal resources.*

### Description

Five years ago, an administrative retreat was convened and the Vision and Purpose of the district were developed. The Vision and Purpose statements were presented to stakeholders for input and have been communicated to school staff. These statements are displayed in schools and in the district office. SBDM Councils (School-based Decision-Making), district committees, and various other groups discuss the Vision and Purpose and how well the district is performing. The current Vision and Purpose are displayed prominently on the district website and in communications to parents. The QAR team noted that a limited number of non-school stakeholders were involved in the development of the mission and goals.

A communication plan specifies methods for information collection in a variety of areas and the distribution of that information to stakeholders. Each of the five district schools has one central office administrator appointed to serve as a liaison. The liaisons have access to the same data files as each school level administrator.

School board members have posted their e-mail addresses on the district website and each is highly visible in the community. To further articulate the district vision and purpose, the school board encourages public participation and open communication.

The school board meets twice monthly for a work session and a regular meeting. The superintendent has a radio program in which he communicates the events that are occurring in the district and school board meetings are broadcast on a tape-delayed basis to keep the community informed. The

Superintendent's Dashboard Report is disseminated prior to school board meetings. This report gives a preview of what will be discussed during the school board meetings.

Each month, the ASSIST Team, which is composed of district leadership, Highly Skilled Educators, a SACS representative, and various other stakeholders meet to discuss school improvement strategies, initiatives, and how well the district is achieving the vision, purpose, and mission. Additionally, the Principals' Roundtable is a monthly principals' meeting with the superintendent. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the district initiatives and current progress. Principals then return to their schools to discuss and to implement strategies and initiatives that were discussed.

Approximately 22% of the district's 1800 students have been identified as needing special education services – this designates disproportionately as a concern. Interviews with the superintendent and district staff revealed that some homes within the district are accepting severely handicapped students in order to receive Medicaid funding. The Kentucky School for the Deaf is located in Danville and is the only school of its kind in Kentucky.

### **Strengths**

- The local newspaper, a radio station, a cable access channel, and school and district newsletters are used to keep stakeholders aware of current events. In addition, assessment results and public notices are also disseminated. The district has given parents the ability to log onto a website, Global Connect, to view current information about their children's academic progress and homework assignments. The district has active Parent Teacher Organizations.
- A continual cycle of assessment, planning, implementation, and adjustment is used to ensure that the focus on achieving the district's goals remains a high priority. The district has developed goals that guide instructional efforts.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

- Involve more stakeholders in both the review and revision of the district's goals, vision, and purpose. Interviews with stakeholders revealed that a limited number were involved in the development and review of the current mission and vision.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Danville Schools have met the accreditation requirements for the Vision and Purpose standard.

## Governance and Leadership

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has leaders who are advocates for the system's vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders function with clearly defined authority and responsibility and encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for system and school improvement among stakeholders. The system's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.*

### Description

A five member school board governs the district. These members participate in district activities and give support to students and staff. Three board members were elected to four year terms in November 2008 and two of the three have begun their first term. One of the new members was selected to serve an unexpired term and he won an election to a four year term. Board members and the superintendent indicated that an orientation between the new board members and the superintendent occurred in December 2008. The newly-elected school board members also attended the Kentucky School Board Association training in January of 2009. Board members meet the required hours of training required by the Kentucky School Board Association.

District policy mandates that the superintendent is the chief administrative officer and that he executes the policies of the district without interference. The superintendent has the proper credentials for his position and he is evaluated annually by the school board.

The Danville Board of Education is self insured and has had successful audits without exceptions. The district currently has a AAA+ Plus bond rating. A review of the district SAR and interviews indicated that legal counsel services are available when needed. As the school board develops and implements policy, when changes to policies are proposed, those proposed changes are communicated to the board attorney. Any proposed changes to board policy are also communicated to district and school administrators, local teacher organizations, and school staff. Policies and procedures, including changes, are maintained on district website. The Danville School District complies with local, state, and federal regulations. Emergency preparedness activities are planned and practiced routinely.

Interviews with district staff, board members, and the superintendent indicated a concern for the financial ability to maintain the current structure of programs and staffing. Because the district has used contingency funding for the past several years to maintain a balanced budget, the state-mandated fund minimum balance of two percent seriously jeopardizes current programs and initiatives.

The Danville School District utilized the Lighthouse Survey to gain information from the local community. Parent stakeholders indicated that the district has open houses for students planning to enroll in new schools; but that they want more opportunity to familiarize themselves with the new schools, expressing that not enough time was allowed.

School personnel interviewed indicated that district information is sent by e-mail and as well as communicated in faculty meetings by principals. School board members serve as a liaison for each of the five schools in the district. Each member has a specific school for which they serve.

Each school has a School Based Decision Making Council. These councils meet with the school board at least twice annually to discuss ways to improve educational activities for students.

School visits and classroom observations revealed that the district routinely recognizes faculty and student achievement. Many areas of schools have student work, pictures, and other exemplary work displayed.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The Danville Board of Education meets with school councils to engage in meaningful conversations about improving student achievement. Rotating the meeting sites among schools provides opportunities for school-level discussions regarding student achievement.
- Central office administrators serve as liaisons for schools. This provides an opportunity for quality assurance and for monitoring student achievement.
- The Danville School District is effectively seeking grants for educational improvements. Anticipated funding decreases from state, local, and federal governments will seriously affect the current staffing in the district. Grant funding has allowed the district to sustain many unfunded district initiatives.
- The superintendent has established a round table discussion for certified and classified staff. Reciprocal feedback from these groups has strengthened communication.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Establish a system that allows for a smoother transition for both students and parents as student move from fifth grade to sixth grade and from eighth grade to ninth grade. Though open houses are scheduled, parent interviews indicated a need to enhance the current programs.
- Participate in effective team building and leadership skill development. Changes in the make-up of the school board and getting new board members oriented can be an opportunity to conduct team building, strengthening working relationships.
- Provide continuing communication and positive interactions between the school board and School Based Decision Making Councils. As listed in the district SAR, these meetings will improve communication and provide a means for quality assurance.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Danville Schools have met the accreditation requirements for the Governance and Leadership standard.

## Teaching and Learning

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

*Impact Statement:* A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The system ensures that teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process; provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations; and give students feedback to improve their performance.

### Description

During walk-through observations in classrooms, clearly-defined expectations for student learning were displayed for students. During interviews, teachers, school administration, leadership teams, and central office administrators discussed using the Kentucky Core Content 4.1, Program of Studies and the Kentucky Crosswalk to develop curriculum maps with expectations for student learning. Many of these documents can be found on the district website [www.danville.kyschools.us](http://www.danville.kyschools.us)

The QAR team found through interviews of stakeholders and walk-through observations that the district establishes expectations and supports student engagement in the learning process. This allows opportunities for students to explore the application of higher order thinking skills and for investigating new approaches to applying their learning.

During interviews teachers, school administration, leadership teams, and central office administration discussed how the district utilizes data and research to make curriculum and instructional decisions to improve student achievement. Examples include ThinkLink, and Achieve to Read, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Saxon Math, Everyday Math, and STAR Math. Uses of these programs are documented in Comprehensive School Improvement Plans. As a result of stakeholder interviews and a review of documents, the QAR team noted that the data utilization was inconsistent at the school level.

Teachers, parents, school administrators, and central office personnel all communicated that they viewed diversity in the district as strength. These same stakeholders discussed that there is equity of learning in the district. Parents expressed a need for an increase in rigor.

Master school schedules in the district provided evidence that instructional time is utilized to support student learning. Minimal interruptions to classroom instruction, if any, occur.

Teachers and administration use ThinkLink, DIBELS, progress reports, and report cards to monitor student performance. Teachers and school administration indicated that articulation between grade levels within buildings occurs and that early release days are used to align curriculum maps with other elementary schools. During interviews, the teachers indicated that communication should be improved at transitional grades.

The district-wide purchase of ThinkLink supports the implementation of interventions to help students meet expectations for student learning. During interviews students, teachers, school administration, and central office personnel discussed programs and instructional interventions.

School visits and walkthroughs along with stakeholder interviews revealed that the district supported a system-wide climate that supports student learning. Comprehensive School Improvement Plans showed planning for Professional Learning Communities for each of the 5 schools.

As observed on classroom visits, the district ensures the availability of technology as an instructional tool for teachers. Classrooms contain LCD projectors and Smartboards for instructional purposes and all schools have computer labs and wireless Internet connections.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The QAR team noted classroom instruction that encouraged active involvement of students in their own learning. Visits to all five schools validated that the on-task percentages are high throughout the district.
- Though inconsistent, data is utilized to support resources and guide instruction. QAR members saw evidence that the district generates multiple data sources and that schools use data to conduct both formative and summative assessments.
- The superintendent and his staff provide varied programs and multiple resources that impact teaching and learning. The district has employed math and literacy coaches and thus provided additional assistance for students.
- School climates are welcoming. The climate of the schools is important to all stakeholders and presents an opportunity for increased achievement.
- Early release days provide an opportunity for district and school-based professional learning opportunities.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Identify content gaps at transitional grades to ensure district curriculum alignment. Interviews revealed that that though articulation occurs, it is not consistent or formally planned.
- Provide more technology professional development for teachers to enhance the teaching and learning environment. Technology is available and abundant, but school visits and observations indicated that technology is not fully integrated for usage as an instructional tool.
- Use data more consistently to evaluate and to make program decisions. In addition, enhance the inclusion of higher order thinking skills and investigate new approaches for students to apply their learning.
- Review curriculum documents to ensure that rigor is provided. Parents expressed a desire to have more rigor incorporated.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the orientation programs for the transitional grades. Interviews with parents revealed a need to offer more opportunities for parent, student, and teacher interactions.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Danville Schools have met the accreditation requirements for the Teaching and Learning standard.

## Documenting and Using Results

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

*Impact Statement:* A school system is successful in meeting this standard when it uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly-defined performance measures. The assessment system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, identify gaps between expectations for student learning and student performance, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine interventions to improve student performance. The assessment system yields timely and accurate information that is meaningful and useful to system and school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in understanding student performance, system and school effectiveness, and the results of improvement efforts.

### Description

The district recently implemented a comprehensive assessment product for grades three through ten. The program, ThinkLink, provides assessment results that are useful for monitoring student progress on standards across content areas. Elementary and middle schools teachers and administrators find the results useful in making instructional decisions. Additionally, Danville High School recently purchased an assessment system based on the ACT test.

Student grades and attendance have been available to parents by way of the student information system. As the division transitions to Infinite Campus, that feature is currently unavailable. Division staffs are also able to link data to changes in programs and instruction. High school administrators and staff report a significant increase in library circulation as evidence supporting recent schedule changes in English/reading instruction.

### Strengths

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- School instructional staffs also use informal classroom assessments (bell ringers, exit slips, and unit tests). Grant projects, particularly at the elementary schools, have significant reporting requirements. Teachers report that reading data is continually updated and is available in a consistent format to building and central office administrators.
- Student grades and attendance have been available to parents by way of the student information system. As the division transitions to Infinite Campus, that feature is currently unavailable.
- Division staffs are able to link data to changes in programs and instruction. High school administrators and staff report a significant increase in library circulation as evidenced by recent schedule changes in English/reading instruction.
- School improvement teams at schools report a strong emphasis on data in developing plans. Building and grade level teams use early release days to analyze data and plan accordingly. Department chairs in selected content areas at Danville High School have an additional planning period to work with instructional data.

- District and building administrators noted several changes in programming for which local data are available, but Kentucky Core Content Testing data are not yet available.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

Enhance external communication through systematic sharing of instructional and non-instructional data. The QAR team recommends that schools continue to find ways to make effective use of data for instructional improvement. Danville Schools have significant data available and are at various stages of using student data to make instructional decisions.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Danville Schools have met the accreditation requirements for the Documenting and Using Results standard.

### **Resource and Support Systems**

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that: enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, meets special needs, and complies with applicable regulations. The system employs and allocates staff well-qualified for their assignments. The system provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The system ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations.*

### **Description**

The district has the human resources and support systems necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students. The interview of the district administration and finance officers provided evidence that there is an adequate number of certified and classified staff to accommodate the needs of the students. The district pupil: teacher ratio is 14:1 ratio, which is below the state requirement and that adheres to AdvancED recommended numbers. A review of documentation, including the district Standards Assessment Report, revealed that the district employs guidance counselors, technology and curriculum specialists, arts and humanities specialists, family and youth service directors, and other staff to raise student achievement. The district initiates a recruitment program to employ the best qualified and minority staff possible evidenced by the interview of the human resource director and other district administrators. All staff participate in a professional development program that is aligned with the comprehensive school improvement plan. Danville Schools also employ a strong classified support system by employing building and grounds, transportation, and maintenance personnel. The Family and Youth Services and Food Services personnel understand their role in meeting student needs of health, nutrition, and safety. The QAR team

noted pride in the small community concept and consider this a great strength for the betterment of the diverse student population.

Highly-qualified and competent staff have been commonplace in the district. The QAR team noted a strong history of athletic and academic achievement as well as a sense of pride.

The financial resources are adequate at this time; however, the future budgets may be seriously affected by budget shortfalls. The district complies with all budgetary procedures and audited accounting practices as evidenced by the district financial records.

District facilities provide adequate learning environments for the students. School buildings are well-maintained as a result of renovations and strong maintenance measures. The ages of the schools varies, as the oldest is a 1930s elementary school and the newest, the middle school, was constructed in 1987. The district recently underwent a facilities plan for future consideration of the facilities construction and upkeep. This plan is adequate currently, as it complies with building codes for the present use of technology. There are limited financial resources for future acquisition of land and new construction of buildings.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Small school communities and small class sizes build strong personal relationships with students.
- The district has a history of excellence.
- Community support is high, as evidenced by the number of volunteer hours served in schools.
- Facilities offer a safe environment for students and staff.
- The district has caring, passionate, and competent teachers and administrators.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Review the facilities planning process to ensure that the facilities can support technology and that an adequate infrastructure is maintained. As the technology inventory increases, buildings may need to be retrofitted to accommodate new and/or expanded technology.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Danville Schools have met the accreditation requirements for the Resource and Support Systems standard.

## Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has the understanding, commitment, and support of stakeholders. System and school personnel seek opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership among stakeholders to help students learn and advance improvement efforts.*

### Description

The district participated in the Lighthouse Survey to gauge stakeholder perceptions regarding its effectiveness. The district SAR indicated that it is proactive in communicating with all stakeholders. QAR team members validated that the district utilizes e-mail, messages, phone calls, district and school level committees, and print/broadcast media to keep the public informed.

School board meetings are held twice monthly and public participation is encouraged. One of the school board meetings is a work session and the other meeting is a regular business meeting. Sites for school board meetings rotate monthly and each of the district's five schools hosts a meeting no less than twice annually. Further, the school board meets with SBDM (Site-based Decision Making) Councils from each school no less than twice annually and during these meetings, both groups discuss student achievement data, and progress on school and district initiatives. Phone numbers and e-mail addresses for school board members are posted on the district website.

A "Dashboard Report" is given by the superintendent during all school board meetings. This report gives board members and the public another opportunity to receive current information regarding the progress on district initiatives. All school board meetings are broadcast on a tape-delayed basis the following day on a public access channel. The superintendent also conducts a monthly radio program in which he discusses the achievement of the district goals. Members of the clergy also have regular meetings with the superintendent.

District staff actively participate in the Danville/Boyle County Chamber of Commerce, the United Way, and the Leadership Danville/Boyle County program. The Youth Coalition, a group comprised of representatives from schools, law enforcement, court and legal services agencies, meets with the district leadership.

The size of the district and its ten square mile attendance area lends itself to a high degree of familiarity among all stakeholders, a stated goal of the district.

Other communication avenues are billboards, home visits mandated by the district prior to the beginning of school, newsletters, and the Global Connect Parent Notification System. This system is an automated call system used to notify parents about school news such as cancellations.

## Strengths

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the home visits prior to the beginning of school that are required by the district for PK-12 students. This is a highly effective method that facilitates the establishing of communication and trust among students, parents, and teachers.
- The QAR team noted that both the school board and each of the five schools routinely celebrate and recognize achievement and accomplishments of students and staff. School visits revealed numerous postings and space devoted to recognitions. Students and staff are also recognized during school board meetings.
- Young Achievers, a program designed to help bridge the achievement gap by an intensive program of modeling and field trips, has provided support for minority students. The program meets on Saturdays and the program has enabled students to visit colleges and universities.
- The Global Connect Parent Notification System informs parents about school news and events such as weather-related school cancellations. Stakeholder interviews documented a high degree of satisfaction with the system.
- All schools post and distribute regular newsletters and the local newspaper publicizes school news. It is noteworthy that school board meetings are broadcast on a public access channel and the superintendent hosts a monthly radio program.
- The Danville Kids University, a program developed for students in grades three through five, was noted as being both a popular and effective initiative. Though the program charges tuition, fees are waived for those without the resources to pay. The district boasts of a 75% successful completion rate for this program, which is held on Saturday mornings.

## Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Sustain and seek ways to further enhance the efforts to communicate with stakeholders. Though the district documentation and stakeholder interviews revealed multiple efforts to communicate with all stakeholders, there is a perception that the district is not successfully communicating with all groups.
- Involve more stakeholders in the development and/or review of the mission and beliefs for the district. Interviews with stakeholders indicate that only a small percentage of stakeholders had any involvement in the development of or knowledge about the district mission and beliefs.

## Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Danville Schools have met the accreditation requirements for the Stakeholder Communications and Relationships standard.

## Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the system with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained and the system and its schools demonstrate progress in improving student performance. New improvement efforts are informed by the results of earlier efforts through analysis of student performance, system effectiveness, and assessment of the improvement process.*

### Description

All schools have school improvement plans that complement the district plan. The district utilized PLC's (Professional Learning Communities) and a partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education and the Danville ASSIST Team to establish a systematic approach to continuous improvement and to monitor the efficacy of such efforts.

During the 2007-2008 school year, the superintendent began the process of organizing school-level PLC's in order to focus upon closing the achievement gaps and to monitor progress on the district goals. School Based Decision Making Councils from each school also meet with the school board a minimum of twice annually to discuss and to receive feedback about progress on achieving the district goals. The superintendent has assigned central office administrators to serve as liaisons for each of the schools and the superintendent meets with each school's Site Based Decision Making Councils a minimum of two times annually. The overall performance of the district is discussed during these meetings.

A Volunteer Assistance Partnership Team, the ASSIST Team, and school-level PLC's also intensify the focus on meeting AMO (Annual Measureable Objectives) of the No Child Left Behind legislation. All schools are required to complete an RTI (response to Intervention) plan that prescribes interventions for students who need additional assistance in order to meet achievement requirements. The district SAR indicated that nearly four of five students successfully meet requirements.

Comprehensive School Improvement Plans are required at all schools and these plans are based upon the most recent No Child Left Behind results, an analysis of the Kentucky Core Content for Assessment, demographic changes, and school-level improvement plans. School-based councils have the responsibility of approving the CSIP's and for making decisions about how best to ensure success at meeting goals.

Certificated staff develop professional growth plans annually. These plans cite personal needs as determined by evaluations. Professional development for classified employees is determined by needs assessment and determinations made by supervisors.

The provision of professional learning is a high priority in the district. A review of documentation showed that professional learning supports the achievement of the district goals which were developed by a systematic review of student work, test scores, and school improvement plans. A compilation of

this data is used to identify professional learning for the district. Participation in professional learning is monitored by a review of sign-in sheets, focus walks, and a review of student achievement data.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Each school has a central office administrator assigned to serve as a liaison. This provides an opportunity for reciprocal feedback and provides an awareness of how well the schools are progressing and what interventions need to be modified or enhanced on school improvement plans.
- School-level professional learning allows for the focus on specific identified school site needs. Early release days are provided by the district and this time is used for job-embedded professional development.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Promote the integration of technology into the instructional programs. A wealth of technology is available; however, the usage is inconsistent throughout the district as noted by school visits and walkthroughs.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of **Operational**, indicating that the Danville Schools have met the accreditation requirements for the Commitment to Continuous Improvement standard.

## Quality Assurance Findings

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

The district utilizes a continuous process of needs assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring for quality assurance. This process is also used for establishing goals for SACS accreditation, and the district Strategic Plan. A projected budget is developed in the spring and is later submitted to the school board for approval. The approved documents list strategies and interventions that promote achievement of the district goals. School and district plans are updated annually, reviewed by the school board, school councils, and the superintendent before posting on the district website and other media for public review.

District schools have been accredited by the Southern association of Colleges and Schools and the district values this achievement. By hosting school level Quality Assurance teams, schools have used the continuing accreditation process and five-year reviews as a vehicle to gauge improvements over time.

Kentucky schools have a School Report Card that provides an annual summary of activities, programs, state assessment results, plans for improvements, and achievements of schools and districts. This information is posted on the district and Kentucky Department of Education websites and a copy is also mailed to families by the state education agency.

### Strengths

- Members of the central administrative staff have been assigned to serve as liaisons at each of the schools. These liaisons work closely with the school staff to maintain the focus on student achievement. This also enables the leadership to monitor progress on achieving both school level and district goals.
- The district has identified a process for quality assurance with the cycle of needs assessment based upon data and constant review of data and progress on goal achievement. The district has identified a continuous assessment system, ThinkLink, for grades three through ten. This system provides formative and summative assessments that enable staff to monitor student progress.
- The continuous assessment plan uses state, local, and commercial instruments to evaluate students. The curriculum is currently being revised using the Program of Studies and the Core Content for Assessment as guidelines.

### Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

- Seek ways to receive more formative assessment results, especially in grades 11-12. While conducting its SACS self-assessment, an identified need was improvement in continuous assessment. The district leadership agreed with that finding and as a result, the district

purchased the ThinkLink system. This model gives individual assessment during the first two weeks of school and a second assessment in December. A third and final assessment is also given.

- The size of the district and decreased funding from state, local, and federal agencies seriously compromises the district's ability to fund staff and initiatives above and beyond requirements. For this reason, the district should expand its efforts to write and secure funding from grant programs.

## Conclusion

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

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

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to Paige Stevens, Bob Rowland, and David Davis, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS CASI accreditation with AdvancED.

## Appendix

### Quality Assurance Review Team Members

Jay Wansley (Georgia) was Chairperson. He currently serves as Associate Director of the Georgia SACS CASI office in Kennesaw, Georgia.

Larry Woods (Kentucky) served as Vice-Chair. He currently serves as superintendent of the Lincoln County Schools

Ken Bicknell (Kentucky) currently serves as principal of B. Michael Caudill Middle School in Richmond, Kentucky.

Mark Krummen (Kentucky) currently serves as principal of Walton-Verona High School in Walton, Kentucky.

Dr. Mary Holm (Virginia) currently serves as Director of Instruction for the Buena Vista Schools located in Buena Vista, Virginia.

### AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

**Vision and Purpose**

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

**Governance and Leadership**

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

**Teaching and Learning**

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

**Documenting and Using Results**

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

**Resource and Support Systems**

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

**Stakeholder Communications and Relationships**

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

**Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

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