

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Elkhart Central High School
1 Blazer Boulevard
Elkhart, Indiana, United States 46516**

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North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

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About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

Background. Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (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 April 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form one strong unified organization dedicated to education quality. That unified organization, known as AdvancED, creates the world's largest education community, representing 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 65 countries worldwide and educating 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 continuously improve.

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

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

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help schools be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

1. Evaluate the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and policies.
2. Assess the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and required actions to improve the school.
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 is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

School Preparation. To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school community engages in an in-depth self assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that it is meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school 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. The team reviews the findings of the school's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school'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 improve.

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

Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions. The school uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The NCA CASI/SACS CASI State Office is available to assist schools in addressing the required actions. At prescribed intervals, the school must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress the school has made on the team's required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school is addressing the required actions.

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the NCA CASI Indiana State Office (NCA-CASI-IN), a division of AdvancED, visited the Elkhart Central High School in Elkhart, Indiana, United States on 04/12/2012 - 04/13/2012.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 5 members of the administrative team, 113 students, 17 parents, and 52 teachers. In addition, 6 support staff members and 2 school resource officers (SRO) were interviewed. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

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

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

Through its examination of the school's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following commendations and required actions.

Commendations

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

Commendation 1

Commendation Statement:

The school has created a collaborative working environment where students, teachers, administrators, and community members share leadership responsibilities for achieving the vision and mission.

Evidence:

Students and school personnel, as well as parents and community members shared ways in which they work together toward the vision and mission. Staff members reported to the QAR team that leadership roles are available to all members through serving on data teams, AdvancED committees, freshmen academic teams,

mentorships, and class / club / team sponsorships. Department chairs act as leaders of their fields of expertise and are involved in curricular decision-making and will sometimes act as liaisons between parents and teachers. Students may serve on the Superintendent's Advisory Council and may also serve on the student council, which all interviewed students regarded as their voice to administration. Parents and community members have leadership opportunities in groups such as the Principal's Parent Advisory Council, Band Boosters, Blazer Club. Kiwanis, and Rotary Club also afford stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback to the school.

Rationale:

A school that nurtures leadership among various stakeholder groups results in people feeling that their contributions are meaningful and valued.

Commendation 2

Commendation Statement:

The administration team is proactive, innovative, involved, and respected.

Evidence:

Most stakeholders interviewed praised the administration of the school for the smooth operation of the school. For the most part, stakeholders felt that school administrators' effective and efficient management directly correlates to student success. Representatives of all stakeholder groups mentioned in interviews that administrators create and foster positive, productive working relationships with members of the learning community that open up lines of communication, provide feedback, and create a strong sense of connection to the school with members of the school community. Administrative presence throughout the day and throughout the building was cited by students and teachers as being a positive motivator for classroom behavior and learning. According to students, parents, and support staff members who were interviewed, administrators have an open-door policy for needed communication and are willing and available to hear suggestions, complaints, and provide feedback according to interviewed students, parents, and support staff. Parents and community representatives noted that school administrators are easy to work with and foster on-going opportunities for at risk students to achieve successful learning. Community representatives further noted that the administration promotes a positive rapport between community agencies and promotes collaboration with community members.

Rationale:

A school where administrators communicate with and encourage participation of all stakeholders enjoy greater support from these stakeholders.

Commendation 3

Commendation Statement:

The school focuses on continuous growth through systematic and pervasive use of data to support and direct instruction in all subject areas.

Evidence:

The school uses the 8 Step Instructional Process for data-driven decision-making in all content areas, with special focus on remediation for English 10 and algebra students. Additionally, the school keeps a picture data wall in a teacher workroom to track which students are on track to graduate based on their credits and ECA scores. Individual pictures and color-coding track each student in each grade cohort, 9 through 12. Students see a separate data wall in the hallway which shows what percentage of each class is "on track to graduate." The school uses a data team approach to analyze and interpret data in order to provide most effective instruction to

meet identified student needs; data teams meet monthly to review student achievement data and to identify the "bubble kids" – those students who might benefit from additional reinforcement or re-teaching. Data teams review student achievement data to identify possible interventions for non-proficient students. Regular meetings of the 82 data teams allow for teacher collaboration within departments and consistent and frequent data analysis and immediate curricular decision-making. School-wide emphasis on monthly writing prompts in support of writing across the curriculum provides additional data for these teams and administrators to examine. Student writing is evaluated in all subjects at all grade levels on a monthly basis. The school's academic and achievement growth is tracked and analyzed through a locally-developed specialized complement to PowerSchool called OSCAR and monthly data team reports.

Rationale:

A school that focuses on data-driven decision-making is better prepared to provide students with instruction based on identified student learning needs in all subjects.

Commendation 4

Commendation Statement:

The school provides a plethora of resources and support services to help each student achieve at high levels and develop those skills necessary to be successful after graduation.

Evidence:

Guidance counselors meet with students at least annually to help students make course selections that ensure progress toward graduation and preparation for life after graduation. The school employs eight paraprofessionals who provide support for students with special needs in all core subjects, keyboarding, and physical education. The school provides services for students whose first spoken language is not English, noting that the numbers of students qualifying for these services continues to increase each year. The school assigns each 9th grade student to one of five academies to assist with the transition from middle school to high school – to help students adjust and develop skills necessary to be successful in high school. Each student is also assigned to an advisory group that meets three days each week; during advisory, teachers provide relationship-building activities and review grades with individual students. Students participate in clubs and other co-curricular activities two days each week during the advisory time. Blazer Connections is an informal after-school program where any student can "drop in" for tutoring, study time, or extra resource time in the media center. The Students with a Goal (SWAG) program helps black male students develop a positive attitude toward education, while learning and practicing skills required for success in school. The Olweus bullying prevention program has shown verifiable results.

Rationale:

Students thrive when a school provides programs and other support resources that engage them in meaningful activities before, during, and after school hours.

Required Actions

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall school effectiveness. The school will be held accountable for addressing each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions.

Required Action 1

Required Action:

Select and implement a common writing prompt across common courses and data teams to ensure the fidelity of the 8 Step Instructional Process, and teach students how to set individual growth goals and learning targets to engage students authentically in the writing process.

Evidence:

School-wide emphasis on monthly writing prompts supports student development of writing skills across the curriculum and provides additional data for data teams and administrators to examine. Even though teachers and administrators describe the use of "common" writing prompts, the QAR team heard mixed messages from teachers about how these prompts are created from available banks, leading the team to question the degree to which writing prompts are actually "common" across all sections of the same course, regardless of who the teacher is or the grade level of students in the course. Also, the relevance of cross-curricular writing prompts in non-core classes is sometimes questioned by students even though teachers are diligent in developing individual and team strategies to help emphasize the importance of writing prompts in developing student skills and higher-level thinking regardless of subject.

Rationale:

Students will become better writers in a school that uses common writing prompts across all sections of a course and helps students use information from these writing samples to set personal goals.

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

Next Steps

The school should:

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

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for state review and for action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school should celebrate its

achievement with the school community. The NCA-CASI-IN accreditation seals are available at www.advanced.org/communicationskit for accredited schools and districts to post on their website and to use in school communications. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and lapel pins are also available and can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

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

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

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

Standard 1: Vision and Purpose

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Although Elkhart Central High School (ECHS) has a mission statement that was written 12 to 15 years ago, the principal reports that the mission statement is reviewed each year by various stakeholders to ensure that mission statement remains current and applicable despite the demographic changes of the student body. The principal and some teachers stated that the school's current vision statement was developed through discussions with staff and students during the advisory period; however, no students who were interviewed recall having any input in the development of the vision statement. On the other hand, all students interviewed could explain the school's vision statement and clearly support it. Stakeholders from the Blazer Club and Principal Parent Advisory Council were given the opportunity to review drafts of the vision statement and provide feedback which was used to formulate the current vision statement. The vision statement was posted in various places throughout the building, including classrooms and offices. The vision and mission statements are also included in newsletters and appear on the school website. During interviews, students and teachers provided examples highlighting how the school's vision guides instruction and practices.

In order to ensure student needs continue to be met in the future, the School Improvement Planning Team adopted the goal of ensuring all students will demonstrate proficiency of the end of course assessment. Two strategies were selected to improve proficiency of students: 1) Use the data team process to identify and provide interventions for non-proficient students. 2) Improve writing across the curriculum. The goal, as well as both strategies, are directly related to the vision and mission. Data teams review student achievement data to identify possible interventions for non-proficient students. Student writing is evaluated in all subjects at all grade levels on a monthly basis. Administrators and teachers discussed the revised goal and related strategies and shared specific examples of additional activities used either school-wide and or in individual classrooms to help improve student proficiency.

School utilizes various computer systems for the efficient maintenance, storage and access of recording data. In its profile the school discusses the change in the demographics of the student body and its impact on the school's performance data. Graphs and charts examining the impact of the school improvement strategies are also disaggregated. The school consistently updates and reviews the profile.

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

- The vision was created as a response to student needs.
- The vision and mission are clearly communicated to all stakeholders within the school building and

in various publications.

- Instruction is driven by the school's vision and mission.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Involve representatives from all stakeholder groups in the planned review and revision of the vision statement.

Finding: Elkhart Central High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Policies are in place at both the school and district levels to ensure compliance with federal, state, and local laws. Policies and procedures of both the school board and the school are available online. These policies delineate expectations and responsibilities of all stakeholders with direct impact on the school. However, interviewed students and teachers alike were unaware of specific school board policies and procedures.

Systems are in place to evaluate certified staff. All teachers with less than five years' experience at the school participate in a formal system of pre- and post-observation conferences. Tenured staff members are on a five-year rotation of observation and evaluation. Non-certified staff members are evaluated by school administrators on a scheduled rotation. Informal evaluations also provide opportunities to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of staff members in order to provide professional growth opportunities.

Data teams have been developed to examine student performance data and develop possible intervention strategies. Advisory period has fostered collegial relationships among teachers and students, allowing opportunities for teachers to provide intervention for at-risk students. During this period, students are also afforded opportunities to participate in and provide leadership for numerous faculty-sponsored club activities. In addition to advisory, after-school sports and clubs are available to students. Administrators reported that many students volunteer to organize fund-raising activities for charities, which are submitted to the administration team for approval and sponsorship.

Staff members reported to the QAR team that leadership roles are available to all members through serving on data teams, AdvancED committees, freshmen academic teams, mentorships, and class / club / team sponsorships. Department chairs act as leaders of their fields of expertise. They are involved in curricular decision-making and will sometimes act as liaisons between parents and teachers. Students may serve on the Superintendent's Advisory Council; however, many students who were interviewed did not know about this opportunity. Students may also serve on the student council, which all interviewed students regarded as their voice to administration. The principal also leads a Principal's Parent Advisory Council in which parents are invited to express their opinions about the school. Band Boosters, Blazer Club, Kiwanis, and

Rotary Club also afford stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback to the school.

Most stakeholders interviewed praised the administration of the school for the smooth operation of the school; however, a few students interviewed shared concerns that they disagree with some priorities of administrators (i.e., tucked in shirts). For the most part, stakeholders felt that school administrators' effective and efficient management directly correlates to student success.

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

- Students and teachers feel their contributions to the school community are meaningful and valued.
- The administrative team is proactive, innovative, involved, and respected.
- Teachers and students feel they are a part of a professional learning community.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Inform students and staff how to locate information regarding school board policies and procedures.

Finding: Elkhart Central High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 3: Teaching and Learning

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The school provides a solid curriculum in all subjects based on implementation of recent educational research, use of relevant data on student performance, engaging classroom activities and environments, and positive teacher/student relationships. Through required curricular mapping done using a week-to-week approach, teachers are able to articulate classroom and student expectations consistently and following state and core curriculum standards. Students shared during group interviews that a strong sense of support and genuine caring from the faculty (built in part by the non-academic advisory program) allows them to discover their interests in and passions for learning in a very positive way. Regular meetings of the 82 data teams allow for teacher collaboration within departments and consistent and frequent data analysis and immediate curricular decision-making. School-wide emphasis on monthly writing prompts in support of writing across the curriculum provides additional data for these teams and administrators to examine. Although the relevance of cross-curricular writing prompts in non-core classes is sometimes questioned by some students, teachers are diligent in developing individual and team strategies to help emphasize its importance in developing student skills and higher-level thinking regardless of subject.

Administrators indicated that the school has been awarded a grant to increase AP opportunities and professional development, increasing the opportunities for enrichment and higher order thinking. School leaders shared and records confirm that the school offers various opportunities for students to acquire college credits while still in high school. One parent noted that his child had recently graduated with 20 college credits.

The school has developed a culture and climate of data collection and disaggregation for the purpose of instructional and curricular decision-making, as well as remediation interventions. This culture and climate is noted by administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Implementation of the 8 Step Method and resulting subject-based data teams has allowed for departments and individual teachers to make use of relevant student information in placement and instruction. Freshman Academies allow for close tracking of first-year students to allow for a more successful transition into higher-level learning. Double blocking of classes within the Academies allows students to focus on developing necessary skills early in their high school careers. "Bubble students" identified in English 10 and Algebra are placed in remediation groups during advisory for three week windows, or until the following assessment. Additional remediation opportunities occur during Blazer Connections, an after-school available each day in the media center. Student achievement data are also used in non-core disciplines to enhance instruction.

QAR team members observed in approximately 50 classrooms a variety of instructional methods allowing students to participate in instructional activities, including one-on-one student/teacher interaction, independent project work, coaching, lecture, teacher-initiated questioning, and SMART Board usage. Administrative presence throughout the day and throughout the building was cited by students and teachers as being a positive motivator for classroom behavior and learning. Most classrooms observed were engaging and positive; however, in a small number of classrooms, students were ritualistically compliant (passive – aggressive) in their behavior or inattentive to teacher instruction (i.e., sleeping, cleaning out purses during a teacher-directed activity).

The presence and use of technology throughout the building is evident. Computer-assisted design (CAD) and technology-based classes are well-supported by the district's technology department with current and relevant software. The media/television and robotics classes make impressive use of current technologies with students. Teachers cited that math classrooms are equipped with SMART Board technologies, and other classrooms will be receiving them within the next year; however, the QAR team did not have the opportunity to observe the use of SMART Boards or technologies other than TVs / video monitors and overhead / document cameras.

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

- The use of data to support and direct instruction in all academic subjects is impressive and is motivated toward continued growth and advanced implementation of curricular objectives in core and non-core classes.
- Strong collegial support for continued instructional improvement within departments and data group assignments is evident and strengthens and supports classroom instruction in a positive manner.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Investigate a wider variety of instructional or technology-based activities to more fully engage disinterested students.

Finding: Elkhart Central High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 4: Documenting and Using Results

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The school's Executive Summary cites that the school's improvement is led through a combination of the application of the 8 Step Instructional Process and through the leadership of the school improvement committee and expertise of the data teams. The school's academic and achievement growth is tracked and analyzed through a locally-developed specialized complement to PowerSchool called OSCAR and monthly data team reports. While academic and achievement growth is expected and tracked in all coursework, the school works toward the focus goals of increasing writing achievement through a monthly writing across the curriculum initiative and improving ECA scores.

The school uses the 8 Step Instructional Process and process checks to guide instructional and improvement decisions. Students take district-wide pre- and post-assessments. The assessments are derived from common calendars/pacing guides, as a part of the 8 Step Instructional Process. Data are entered into OSCAR and data teams meet twice monthly to analyze data and determine "bubble students" in each content area. Data teams report monthly to administrators via standard report templates, which allows for administrative monitoring of the process. Bubble students in English 10 and Algebra are then selected for a "pull out from advisory" program, reporting to an English or algebra remediation room. Four English teachers and four algebra teachers receive these students for three weeks of remediation, or until the next assessment. Bubble students in other areas are remediated through traditional coursework in the classroom or via period 8/9 after-school remediation.

While the 8 Step Instructional Process allows for data-driven decision-making in all content areas, this focused remediation for English 10 and algebra students moves the school toward the school-wide goal of increasing ECA scores in both content areas. Additionally, the school keeps a picture data wall in a teacher workroom to track which students are on track to graduate based on their credits and ECA scores. Individual pictures and color-coding track each student in each grade cohort, 9 through 12. Students see a separate data wall in the hallway which shows what percentage of each class is "on track to graduate."

Additionally, teachers cite that they attended a professional development training last year on the creation of effective writing prompts and the appropriate and consistent use of a standardized rubric to assess writing prompts, including the submission of sample scored essays. These prompts and samples are available, according to teachers, on an online database/website. Teachers cite they use this bank of samples as common course teams to select monthly writing prompts. The English 9 team representative reported that they have moved to standardizing these selections district-wide between the two high schools. Teachers of singleton courses indicate that they have the autonomy to select their individual prompts each month; however, all scores are entered into OSCAR for administrative review. Even though teachers and administrators describe the use of "common" writing prompts, the QAR team heard mixed messages from teachers about how these prompts are created from available banks, leading the team to question the degree to which writing prompts are actually "common" across all sections of the same course, regardless of who the teacher is or the grade level of students in the course.

Teachers cite that the 8 Step Instructional Process and data analysis has progressed and become a part of

the culture and climate of the building and the basis for curriculum, remediation, and enrichment decision making. Teachers are expected to meet monthly deadlines for data entry, report analysis, and bubble student identification. Additionally, teachers use the collected data to direct their curricular decisions and to revise and rethink their instructional strategies. Finally, regular data team meetings and administrative monitoring ensure the fidelity of the process.

The school notes as a strength: "AP scores overall improved over a 3-year period while the number of participants almost doubled." Administrators presented data that confirm that the school ranks fourth of the seven county high schools in percentage of students scoring a 3, 4, or 5 on AP examinations. Further evidence of the success of students on AP examinations is data that verify the students "outperformed the state average" in 11 of the 19 tests offered. The school notes that "improved end-of-course assessments are a ticket to graduating!!;" cohort pass rates for both mathematics and language arts show statistically significant gains over the last three years (20 percentage points in mathematics, 6 percentage points in languages arts. During the same time period the graduation rate increased from 68.8 percent to 86.7 percent. Students SAT scores rank second in the county, even though a higher percentage of students take the SAT than in some other schools. The school leads the county in percentage of students pursuing college and is proud to be ranked 11th in the state for College and Career Readiness.

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

- The school utilizes the 8 Step Instructional Process to analyze student academic progress and to direct immediate decision-making, including the identification and remediation during advisory of "bubble students" in English 10 and Algebra I.
- The school's data teams monitor student academic progress with common monthly pre- and post-assessments, identify "bubble students" in all courses, and report progress via standardized data reports to administration and department chair persons so that data-driven decisions can be made.
- The school uses a common rubric to assess monthly writing prompts across the curriculum and enters the data into OSCAR and into monthly reports to communicate progress to administration.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Explore the need to mandate a common writing prompt across common course/data teams to ensure the fidelity of the 8 Step Instructional Process.
- Evaluate the need to engage students in understanding the purpose of the writing initiative, including teaching students how to set individual growth goals/learning targets.

Finding: Elkhart Central High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 5: Resource and Support Systems

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The school has and deploys sufficient human, material, and facilities resources to support effective programming for 1,750 students. The principal confirmed that professional staff members are certified and well-qualified for their teaching assignments and teacher qualifications are consistently matched with the subject area assignments. The QAR team observed and school officials confirmed that sufficient staff members are assigned to provide programming focused on the vision and mission.

The school noted in the Self Assessment that "All staff members have gone through a structured and substantial induction program." As the school is implementing the writing strategy, teachers participate in training in how to use the common writing rubric to score writing prompts in all subjects. Teachers work together formally and informally, in departments and across subjects, to become more comfortable with and adept at using the common scoring rubric. Administrators and teachers shared in interviews that they have participated in professional development focused on cultural competency and how to build positive relationships with students as a means to support student learning.

As noted in the Self- Assessment and confirmed by administrators and teachers, the school uses a data team approach to analyze and interpret data in order to provide most effective instruction to meet identified student needs. Data teams meet monthly to review student achievement data and to identify the "bubble kids" – those students who might benefit from additional reinforcement or re-teaching. Reports of these meetings include data summaries and suggested Tier 2 instructional interventions that are provided over a "three-week window" to focus on identified student needs – with the objective of getting students back into the mainstream. Students with greater need are "double-blocked" for mathematics and language arts to provide more time for learning and more focused instruction.

Teachers and administrators shared with the QAR team that information from the data teams increases positive communication among staff members, allows more effective instruction to meet individual student needs, and establishes a cooperative approach to using data as a major component of the decision-making process. While the school provides a common reporting format, not all data teams are yet using the common format.

Teachers shared and the district instructional technology director confirmed that the district provides technology hardware and software based to assure that teachers have what they need – though perhaps not everything teachers want – to implement identified school improvement strategies. The district prioritizes acquisition requests to establish and sustainable instructional technology in all classrooms as well as the training that teachers need in order to use the technology effectively.

Guidance counselors meet with students at least annually to help students make course selections that ensure progress toward graduation and preparation for life after graduation. The school employs eight paraprofessionals who provide support for students with special needs in all core subjects, keyboarding, and physical education. The school provides services for students whose first spoken language is not English, noting that the numbers of students qualifying for these services continues to increase each year.

The school assigns each 9th grade student to one of five academies to assist with the transition from middle school to high school. Teachers and students shared during interviews that the academy experience helps students adjust and develop skills necessary to be successful in high school. Each student is also assigned to an advisory group that meets three days each week. Teachers provide relationship-building activities during the advisory period and review grades with individual students. Students participate in clubs and other co-curricular activities two days each week during the advisory time. Students and teachers noted in interviews that Blazer Connections provides an informal after-school program where any student can "drop-in" for tutoring, study time, or extra resource time in the media center. Athletes, in particular, are encouraged by coaches to attend Blazer Connections. Administrators, teachers, and students shared the benefits of the Students with a Goal (SWAG) program: helping black male students develop a positive attitude toward education, while learning and practicing skills required for success in school. The Olweus bullying prevention program has shown verifiable results.

The guidance department also uses an online data collection system for career planning, Indiana Career Explorer, that provides students with career planning information and provide accessible responses and career goals that might be helpful for counselors, teachers, students, and parents. Every student is signed up and data are collected to improve learning opportunities; however, training in how to use access and use the data is limited.

Current programs are adequately funded, from general fund appropriations as well as from specifically focused grants. Funds are allocated based on prioritized needs to support programs that align with the vision and mission. The school uses standard accounting procedures and financials are audited as part of the district audit. The school notes among its challenges the need to "Identify the areas most affected by budget cuts and seek news ways to elicit support and funding to achieve our desired objectives."

The condition and upkeep of the building is excellent. The building is attractive and clean and students respect their space. The QAR team found that students cleaned up after themselves and that classrooms are orderly and ready for instruction. The QAR team make particular note that students are polite and use appropriate and respectful language at all times, which is atypical in today's society. The school has two safety resource officers (SRO) assigned; these Elkhart police officers provide service both inside and outside the school, practicing community policing strategies. In terms of emergency plans, the school has all written emergency policies and procedures and conducts fire drills and other emergency preparedness drills as required by Indiana law.

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

- The professional teaching staff is well-qualified and strongly committed to the vision and mission of the school.
- The school provides a plethora of support services to help each student achieve at high levels and develop those skills necessary to be successful after graduation.
- The school uses a data team approach to analyze and interpret data in order to provide most effective instruction to meet identified student needs; data teams meet monthly to review student achievement data and to identify the "bubble kids" – those students who might benefit from additional reinforcement or re-teaching.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Consider ways to complement current business partnerships with additional support from federal agencies, foundations, and other non-profit funders to support extended programming.

Finding: Elkhart Central High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 6: Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The school communicates with its stakeholders in a variety of ways including monthly newsletters, monthly parent meetings, parent meetings for ESL/ELL students with onsite interpreter, Showcase Open House, teacher websites, automated phone calls, traditional phone conversations, and by committee/community liaisons. The school uses these communications to provide important announcements, progress reports, and grade updates, to create needed parent/teacher conferences for at risk students and ELL students, to inform parents and community members of student successes and achievements, and to provide feedback of overall school performance and data collection. The school's interactive website provides teachers the means to communicate classroom expectations, activities and learning opportunities, and links to helpful information to improve or sustain student success. The website is also used to provide access to the password-protected grade management systems and career planning resources. Examples of student accomplishments are posted to the website. According to community members who were interviewed, the school uses various communication methods to share positive stories and evidence of success in order to dispel negative perceptions of the school; however, according to the parent and community representatives, an unfounded negative public perception persists in the minds of some community members despite the current positive school environment and efforts to communicate success.

According to students, parents, and support staff members who were interviewed, administrators have an open-door policy for needed communication and are willing and available to hear suggestions, complaints, and provide feedback according to interviewed students, parents, and support staff. Even though not all students are aware, the school provides a suggestion box for students to share ideas for improvement on school activities; on the other hand, most students stated that they feel they have a voice in what goes on in their school. Parents shared that they feel like they can bring concerns to the administration and that they will be heard. The school requires that teachers update grades twice a week and expects teachers to respond promptly to parent contacts.

The school creates opportunities for the community stakeholders to be a part of the learning development through the Principal's Parent Advisory Council, the Blazer Club, various booster organizations, and business connections; however, school leaders shared that parent participation in school improvement is limited, especially among underrepresented populations. Interviewed parents and business partners indicate that they feel a sense of connection to and value for the school, and most parents interviewed are currently or have served on a booster committee. Parents and community representatives noted that school administrators are easy to work with and foster on-going opportunities for at risk students to achieve successful learning. Rotary Club representative confirmed that the school maintains good rapport with the mentors who invest in the lower 20% of student population. A representative of DREAMSworks, a program that works with the top 20% of students who come from tough or low economic backgrounds, further confirmed that the administration promoted a positive rapport between agencies and promotes

collaboration with community members.

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

- The administration creates and fosters positive, productive working relationships with members of the learning community that open up lines of communication, provide feedback, and create a strong sense of connection to the school with members of the school community.
- The school utilizes technology to disseminate information and data to members of the learning community and continually pursues new 21st Century methodologies to improve learning and the school environment.
- The school continues to discover new ways to promote students successes and overall achievement to the school community.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Design and implement a plan for marketing and self-promotion in the community to highlight school achievements and overturn negative public perception.

Finding: Elkhart Central High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 7: Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The school utilizes monthly data team reports to ensure that all student performance in all subject areas lead to achievement and success. These data reports also help align Tier 1 with Tier 2 instruction. ECA cohort pass rates for English 10 and Algebra 1 are used to identify "bubble students" who receive remediation during the advisory period. On-track progress for graduation for all students is monitored by guidance. Intervention is quickly provided for students who are no longer on track to graduate on time. To help all teachers know which students need support and interventions, the school has posted an interactive data wall in a teacher workroom – data are updated weekly to assure up-to-date information.

The school currently collaborates with other stakeholders through groups such as Blazers, Principal's Parent Advisory Council, and CARES (community support program). Teachers also coordinate with staff members from other area schools. Teachers and administrators reported that school leaders and the AdvancED committee will continue to monitor and update the all parts of the school improvement process. No indication was given that any of these partnerships would be discontinued. Although the school reaches out to many diverse groups, the QAR team found that non-English-speaking stakeholders may have difficulty participating due to the limited availability of an interpreter. Student progress is reported in newsletters, the school website, the online gradebook, and local newspapers. However, it is not clear whether all stakeholders, specifically non-English-speaking parents, have access to this information. Although the school provides an interpreter, the availability of the interpreter is limited to three hours a day, two days a week for a total of six hours.

Teachers interviewed indicated that professional development was provided for the development of writing prompts, the grading of writing prompts, data analysis, development of assessments, and improving AP scores. All improvement and professional development directly correlates to the goal of improving student proficiency.

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

- A system is in place that ensures continuous school improvement.
- This daily schedule includes time for collaboration among stakeholders and the school calendar includes 10 contracted after-school meeting times throughout the year.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Involve all stakeholders in the improvement process.
- Ensure that all parents have access to information regarding their own child's progress and provide additional help for parents to understand what that information means.

Finding: Elkhart Central High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Conclusion

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

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

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the School Administration, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality throughout the visit. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through NCA-CASI-IN accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Ms. Mary L. Mickelson, Chair/Lead Evaluator (Indiana Wesleyan University)
- Mrs. Peggy Matanic, Vice Chair (Munster High School)
- Ms. Cheryl Wiles, Team Member (Jefferson High School)
- Mrs. Emily Brown, Team Member (Warren Central High School)
- Ms. Stacia Bolakowski, Team Member (Andrean Catholic High School)
- Mr. Britt Husman, Team Member (Southside High School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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