Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Maury County Schools
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North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are 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 and Policies for Quality School Systems. School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards and policies 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 required actions 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 required actions. The school district acts on the team's required actions 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 and policies.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and required actions 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.

**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 District Lead Evaluator 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.

**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 district. The report contains commendations and required actions for improvement.

**Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions.** The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the required actions. 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 required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district 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 district following action from the commission.
Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI Tennessee State Office (SACS-CASI-TN), a division of AdvancED, visited Maury County Schools on 03/18/2012 - 03/21/2012.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 49 administrators, 111 teachers, 75 support staff, 137 parents and business partners, 95 students, and 4 Board of Education members for a total of 471 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 6 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also 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:

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 with a school district 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 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 required actions that are provided below. The commendations and required actions 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 required actions.
Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Maury County 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.

Commendation 1

Commendation Statement:
Maury County Schools have maintained steady improvements in student performance over time despite budget constraints and continuous fluctuations in state expectations.

Evidence:
Student performance in most areas show steady growth. The Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) website reports substantial gains in the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) achievement.

Rationale:
The county has been able to maintain its focus and programs to support student learning while dealing with the immense challenges they have faced.

Commendation 2

Commendation Statement:
The strong stakeholder support for the schools, high expectations for students, and the nurturing and caring environment supported by the teachers and staff provide the bedrock for steady district growth and student performance.

Evidence:
The Quality Assurance Review team observed these characteristics in place in schools and classrooms across the district.

Rationale:
These factors are key in providing quality education and high level support for student growth.

Commendation 3

Commendation Statement:
The teachers of Maury County Schools are highly skilled in the utilization of data to drive instruction.

Evidence:
The steady increase in student performance is evidence of the great capabilities of MCS teachers in identifying and addressing student learning needs.

Rationale:
Steady growth in performance is sustained by the effective identification of student needs through performance
data and efficiently delivering the instruction the data indicate.

Commendation 4

Commendation Statement:
Maury County Schools have established a range of community partnerships that provide for the mental and physical health of Maury County students and personnel.

Evidence:
Mental and physical health services are strongly supported by the county through identification of the needs of student and district personnel via funding and personnel to support the services.

Rationale:
The commitment of the county to the wellbeing of students and district personnel exemplifies the comprehensive approach the district takes to quality education.

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 effectiveness of the school district. The Maury County Schools will be held accountable for making progress on each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the required actions.

Required Action 1

Required Action:
Involve all stakeholders in the development of the Purpose and Direction of the new AdvancED Standards for Quality.

Evidence:
All stakeholders hold the same very strong expectations of high performance, college and career readiness, life long learners, global competitiveness, and preparation for life in the 21st Century. These expectations have been incorporated into the existing vision and mission statements.

Rationale:
To maintain the current high levels of achievement and drive performance higher, the district must align all processes including instruction, equity of resources, planning, and especially the continuous improvement process with the expectations for performance.

Required Action 2

Required Action:
Articulate and implement a comprehensive Professional Development Plan.
Evidence:
The professional development offerings of the district are praised by teachers for helping to drive student and district performance to the current high levels. However, a formal professional development plan has yet to be articulated by the district.

Rationale:
A clearly articulated professional development plan aligned with the Purpose and Direction of the district will help to drive continuous growth of the district and higher levels of student performance.

**Required Action 3**

Required Action:
Ensure that the public relations and education programs are aligned with the Purpose and Direction of the district, informs all stakeholders, and promotes trust and support of the community, particularly those at the leadership and decision making levels impacting the district.

Evidence:
The Quality Assurance Review process revealed that not all stakeholders are fully knowledgeable of how the district works to meet stakeholder expectations for district and student performance.

Rationale:
To improve stakeholder involvement and support appropriate decision making at all levels, the district must ensure that all have complete awareness and understanding of how it meets the needs of student through its processes and resources.

**Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools:** The team reviewed the district'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 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 the school district.
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 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 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 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 required actions 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.
Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district 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.

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 required actions 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 required actions.

Standard 1: Vision & Purpose

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

**Description:**

Maury County stakeholders reviewed and agreed upon the vision and mission for the county in preparation for the Quality Assurance Review visit. The vision statement for Maury County is: "We are a quality education team with effective leadership and community support that focuses on all our students and provides excellent educational opportunities." The Standards Assessment Report (SAR) provided to the QAR team by the district stated: "This vision has served as the guide for the work of the stakeholders in the district." Stakeholders affirmed their involvement in the process to review the vision and mission. "The mission of the Maury County Public Schools is to provide progressive quality educational opportunities and experiences to all students to prepare them to succeed in a global environment."

Interviews with stakeholders across the county, the QAR heard additional, very strongly felt language concerning the vision and mission of the district, which caused the team to realize that while the written vision and mission statements are supported by all, an additional set of expectations are in place that provide even more compelling expectations for district and student performance. These phrases were voiced by all levels of stakeholders from the county commissioners to students and included: "high performance, college and career readiness, life-long learners, global competitiveness, and preparation for life in the 21st Century."

The written vision and mission are evidence in some documents provided for the QAR team and in various areas around the district. The team noted that schools have their own mission statements posted throughout the buildings. Some are clearly linked to the written district vision and mission. Discussions with school level personnel revealed highly developed professional knowledge and skills supported by the district through effective professional development initiatives driven at both the district and school levels. When the discussions moved to vision, mission, purpose, expectations, and the like, district personnel including central office individuals and parents were more likely to speak of the commonly held expectations than the formal written ones. The QAR team found this somewhat unusual among their
experiences with accredited institutions and inspiring in that these unwritten expectations were so uniformly voiced by stakeholders.

Maury County Schools maintains a descriptive profile of the community and population that includes various levels of demographics, socio-economic and population statistics, and information concerning the communities that the district serves. Of particular note are the three "Unit" schools that serve kindergarten through twelfth grade of which the communities are very proud and protective. Stakeholders at these schools affirmed to the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team that these are the hubs of the communities, providing a source of pride and unity for those residents. District office employees exhibit the same sentiment and support for these unusual schools, and equally for all district schools, describing strongly the unique characteristics of each site. School visits affirmed the unique qualities of each school as well as the high quality of instruction that is supported by the district.

The district has developed clearly stated beliefs and goals, aligned with the vision and mission, for students and their performance, the roles of the community, the district leadership, and the "educational team" (identified in the SAR) composed of all stakeholders. The SAR stated: "System goals are focused on meeting and exceeding No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress. School goals are aligned with system goals. In addition, the system set goals to align with Tennessee's "First to the Top" reform initiative utilizing the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) and other state indicators.

The QAR team viewed various documents including policy manuals, handbooks, master plans and schedules, district technology plan, plans for building, renovations, and replacement, and other documents that were found to be generally in line with the written vision and mission statements. The team noted the difficulty of maintaining progress across district initiatives and support amid budget reductions, political maneuvering, and the "moving target" of state requirements and expectations.

Overall, the team found the district to be "ahead of the game," creative in some instances, and bravely taking firm stands in other areas in dealing with the great challenges of district operations and performance, such as the funding of medical insurance for employees and maintaining their low student-teacher ratio. The picture that came to the view to the team was one of a district admirably keeping pace with external demands for performance but not clearly establishing their own principles regarding system thinking and performance.

Discussions with school level personnel highlighted a disconnect between district and school levels concerning some district initiatives and guidance. Some school personnel simply did not know about some district initiatives and programs or indicated a lack of understanding of how these worked. Further conversations seemed to indicate a level of decision making and initiative by the district without the involvement of school level personnel, resulting in some initiatives not understood or implemented as envisioned by the district.

**Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:**
- High community expectations for student and district performance have sustained growth over time.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**
- Incorporate the commonly held expectations of district stakeholders into the Purpose and Direction of the district and align all aspects of system operation with these expectations.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall
assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Maury County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2: Governance & Leadership

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

Description:

The district is governed by a board of education consisting of eleven members although one seat is currently vacant. The board members have diverse backgrounds and are elected each to represent the stakeholders of the district. The director of schools and the board members receive training through the Tennessee School Board Association and work together to establish policies and guidance for the effective operation of the district. Current policies are accessible to all employees, members of the board, and citizens of the community through the district website. Student, staff, and parent handbooks provide evidence that procedures and policies are established and shared with all stakeholders. There are established procedures for a proposed policy or policy changes for submission to the board. Stakeholder perception of effectiveness of policies and procedures is measured through regular stakeholder surveys, interviews, and meetings.

The mission statement of Maury County Schools (MCS) was developed by a committee of stakeholders representing most constituencies of the district. Variations of this statement have been adapted and posted in the schools and on school websites. Some of the schools have developed a more concise statement that is easily remembered. Most maintain the intent of linking students, parents, and community as a part of the district. The central office administrative staff have developed an additional mission, "To Serve, Guide and Support." Documentation of the work of district office personnel and interviews with stakeholders across the district affirmed that district office personnel are true to their mission in providing service, guidance, and support to everyone in the district. The Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team determined that the variety of these mission statements indicates the flexibility of expectations and the sense of ownership across the district. The team also noted the possibility that this variety could tend to blur the focus and direction of district initiatives.

School leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement through many avenues throughout the school year. Parents and community stakeholders are provided opportunities to be included in the planning process. The team noted during school visits that parent volunteers are visible in many of the schools, recognizing some from previous interviews. The team also noted the level of respect that students show consistently for teachers, administrators, staff, visitors, and for one another. While it is generally understood that community and parent expectations support this level of respect, the QAR team discussed the consistency and strength of this finding across the schools in the district, ultimately determining that this behavior is consistently expected and modeled by the professionals in the schools through very intentional and incidental practices.

Parents affirm that administrators are accessible and approachable with statements concerning the family atmosphere and close knit atmosphere at each school. School leaders supply stakeholders with information and meaningful roles in the decision-making process by providing communication through surveys, parent-teacher meetings, district and school-parent contact, advisory councils, and Parent-Teacher-Student-Organization meetings, Coordinated School Health assistance, and community-school
involvement projects. These activities promote a sense of ownership in the school although school level personnel indicated some frustration with getting more than "the usual parents who do everything" involved consistently in school programs. This statement was supported when some of the same parents appeared in both district and school level interviews with the QAR team.

Communication with the public is strong through the website, automated phone calls, newsletters, teacher e-mails, phone calls, and notes sent home with students. School personnel and parents interviewed indicated that school information is sent through newsletters, email, parent letters and articles in the local paper. Parents are generally pleased with the level of information coming to them from the schools. The QAR team viewed various artifacts that indicate a significant level of information from the district is supplied; however, parents were not able to differentiate between information from the school or the district. In addition the QAR team found that some information on websites is out of date.

The central administrative office staff consists of administrators, directors, and supervisors who oversee the various areas of federal programs, maintenance, special education, career technical, transportation and safety, technology, school nutrition, instruction, attendance and discipline, budget and finance, as well as human resources. Each is trained and appropriately certified in his or her area of expertise. The QAR team noted through artifacts provided for the review and interviews with school personnel the various levels of professional development provided by the district to improve expertise and effectiveness in areas of responsibility.

School personnel were invited to participate in a leadership academy for administrators. A total of forty aspiring administrators enrolled to attend training after school hours. Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been formed at schools and meet to discuss strategies, data results, differentiated instruction, and other topics. Interviews in various schools with instructional personnel indicated that the structure and consistency of the PLCs varied significantly between the schools.

Each year the director and principals are formally evaluated on their performances and individual professional goals. All supervisors and administrators are trained to use the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) to evaluate the effectiveness of certified employees. A successful mentoring program has been implemented for new teachers. Mentors assist and provide support to all new teachers through collaboration, professional development, and classroom observations. A wide variety of professional development activities to promote professional growth are available to all certified staff although no formal professional development plan exists. Recommendation for professional development for teachers is based on the needs of the individual teacher, school level recommendation, and some district determination. Large portions of this training are provided through the PD360 web based training system, Battelle for Kids, onsite training, or workshops at various locations. Given the high levels of student performance, professional development is apparently effective though not guided by specific district-wide goals and objectives. Test data show that students are making progress in their achievement scores; however, they still fall behind state averages in some areas. The QAR team found evidence that a comprehensive goal plan with a concentration in math and reading is in the planning stages.

The district reported that they have aligned the 5-Year Strategic Plan with the vision and mission that were recently reviewed to guide the district. The plans and goals of each school are linked to the 5-Year Plan. The team noted that these linkages existed for the most part, but some were hard to determine. Student achievement data, both formative and summative, are used to evaluate system effectiveness to support student performance. Student data are analyzed at the board, district, school and classroom levels. Pacing guides, curriculum mapping, and teacher lesson plans are evaluated to verify their relevance to curriculum standards, the state's academic vocabulary, and assessment data. Compliance with applicable laws was evident through the extensive documentation of assurances, agreements, historical data, master calendar,
and various district plans. These plans revealed how time, resources, and student needs are in alignment with state and federal laws.

The district and individual schools are kept abreast of new data by the district and school data teams. The QAR team determined that the district approach to analyzing and applying the results from that data is systemic, but school level personnel told the team that the "application of those findings is still a work in progress." The team finally determined that while teachers have proven themselves to be very capable in analysis and use of data to inform their teaching, they see opportunities to improve their expertise. Teachers indicated that their professional learning communities, vertical and horizontal articulation discussions, and continued professional development offerings will provide these opportunities.

The QAR team determined through analysis of their own team data and collaborations that a formal comprehensive professional development plan, directly linked to the school improvement plans and aligned with district goals and objectives, could increase efficiency and effectiveness in various components of district and school processes, particularly in teaching and learning to support improved student performance. Teachers observed that such a plan should be equitably distributed and funded across all schools. The topic of equity in funding and distribution of resources at schools came up at various times during the QAR visit.

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

- Parents confirm that all administrators are accessible and approachable.
- Communication with the public is strong through the website, automated phone calls, newsletters, teacher e-mails, phone calls, and notes sent home.
- Students display respect for teachers, administrators, staff, visitors, and one another.
- Creation of an aspiring administrators academy ensures the system of a pool of trained leaders.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a professional development plan that is linked to the school improvement plan, district goals, and aligned with the Purpose and Direction of the district.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Maury County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3: Teaching & Learning

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

Description:

Maury County Schools (MCS) strive to provide the best education possible for its students. The district is filled with stakeholders who are proud of the system, the programs offered in each school setting, and the performance of their students. While the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) team noted that the state mandated curriculum changes in Tennessee have been a driving force in many curriculum decisions, MCS have made their own appropriate and beneficial enhancements to better the instruction for their students. According to the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) website, substantial gains have
been made in the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) achievement areas in grades three thru eight.

The district has been proactive in learning about their data by contracting with a former data specialist for the Tennessee Department of Education to assist in the area of data disaggregation. Representatives from the Maury County central office have conducted professional development for all teachers to enable them to accurately assess student gains and areas of need to allow the teachers a "hands on" approach when it comes to data and test results for students in their own classrooms. The QAR team was informed that the literacy coach positions, which are found in every school, are being restructured to include data disaggregation.

High expectations for student learning, while not always formally stated, are evident in every setting within the system. Benchmark testing is conducted on a regular basis with appropriate feedback given to students concerning strengths and weaknesses and to pinpoint any re-teaching of subject material. Some stakeholders indicated to the QAR team that they are still a bit unsure about some aspects of the standards-based report card which has been used for several years by grades K-2. The team observed that overall, the practice is being received positively. There is a partial inclusion of standards-based grading at the middle and high school levels. It is clear that Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are actively engaged and supporting horizontal and vertical alignment within the individual school settings. The team noted the general trend of grade level meetings in the pre-secondary schools over subject and department level meetings. New instructional and reporting methods, such as the "I Can Learn" 8th grade math program and the standards based K-2 report card, both of which are being used across the district, are ways in which the system is willing to be innovative for the benefit of the students.

During classroom visits in district schools, instruction was observed to be high quality in many instances, with some higher order questioning and discussion taking place in addition to the involvement of students in multiple day, group, and individual projects. Instruction tended to be large group and lecture utilizing classroom technologies mainly in presentation mode. There were many instances of small group, student to student, project based, and hands-on learning. Generally, the higher the grade level, the greater the trend toward teacher led, large group instruction. In contrast, the lower grade levels tended to involve students more directly with technology, exhibited more small group and individualized instruction, and higher levels of engagement.

Students in interviews generally were very positive concerning the use technology in their learning, all indicating their preference that more technology be used in their learning. The QAR team noted what appeared to be an evolution away from the individual computers in the classroom toward the hands on, interactive technologies such as Smartboards, document cams, and demonstration technologies. District personnel stated that classroom computers were still utilized for remediation and reinforcement type applications but these computers were dark to a very large extent in the classrooms during the QAR visit. The team observed some very high level interactive learning situations utilizing Smartboards though most involved only the teacher manipulating the technology. A few instances of student response technologies, "clickers," were in use and supported high student engagement in the lessons.

The district communicates student and district progress to stakeholders in various ways including: the use of local media to publicize scores, providing the Parent Portal for all grade levels, and promoting an environment in which high expectations are the norm. According to building level administrators, the restructuring of parent-teacher conferences has allowed for more participation from parents as well as more detailed information within those conferences. All parents interviewed stated that the Parent Portal was a widely used and beneficial tool in which multiple aspects of their child's academic life can be monitored.
Professional development within the district is embedded in the academic year and is primarily driven by the Tennessee School Improvement Planning Process (TSIPP) at the individual schools. Building level administrators are given the task of reviewing their school data and, with the assistance of their staff, determining the best focus for the professional development needs in their respective buildings. These are then submitted to the district for approval when a cost is involved. The result of this practice is that the material presented is more personal and timely, which is key in both the retention and practical use of information in the classroom setting.

While the professional development (PD) provided across the district has obviously been effective to support continued growth in student performance, the QAR team noted that professional development is not guided by a system-wide Professional Development (PD) Plan reflecting the specific system goals outlined in the Tennessee Comprehensive System-wide Planning Process (TCSPP) and those in the district 5 Year Plan. It was also noted that while professional development funds were available to all schools, there were pockets of faculty members who felt their school allotment for PD was lacking. The QAR team made several observations concerning this situation: continued growth in student performance will be very hard to maintain; a district PD plan could alleviate the perception by teachers that PD allotments are not equitable; and with the knowledge by teachers that analysis and application of results from data "... is still a work in progress..." the need for a systemic PD initiative is evident.

The student population has fluctuated with the economy, but the majority of the staff in the system have local ties and a vested interest in seeing the system succeed. This has led to an overwhelming feeling by all stakeholders that the MCS operates with a very caring and family-like environment, especially at the school level. According to both central office personnel and building level administrators, input is gathered from various sources prior to making instructional decisions. Stakeholders affirm that this communication is continual and effective.

Secondary schools offer an 8th grade orientation to make the transition to high school as smooth as possible for both the students and their parents. While some schools indicated that attendance at such events is somewhat lacking, others stated that their attendance is very good. It was noted by the QAR team during teacher and parent interviews that there is no orientation program for those students moving from an elementary setting into a middle grades environment or when moving from one school to another in general. Also, parental involvement declines in the middle grades and even more in the high school grade levels thus undermining parental initiatives there.

MCS strives to provide the same educational opportunities for all students. The majority of stakeholders feel that the instruction is of quality and prepares their students for future endeavors. A substantial dual enrollment partnership with Columbia State Community College offers students the opportunity to earn college credit prior to high school graduation. Those students entering a post secondary Trade and Industry school after graduation are provided with the opportunity to earn hours towards industry certification in a variety of areas through the Tennessee Technology Center at Pulaski and the Tennessee Technology Center at Hohenwald. At Spring Hill High School, students can attain the complete Industrial Technology Program Industry Certification in A+ and Net+. During the interview process, the QAR team was made aware that the implementation of some type of distance learning program has been discussed and is a possibility for the future.

Instances of perceived inequity in the distribution of funds, equipment and furniture, and materials and textbooks were noted by both parents and instructional personnel at various schools visited by the QAR team. Most notable were comments from teachers at newer schools in which resources were clearly abundant and concerned the older schools. The perception is that the older schools are not supplied the
level of resources to which they are entitled. Conversations with stakeholders at some of the older schools supported these perceptions to some extent. Clearly there exist the facility support issues expected among buildings that date back to 1921. However, stakeholders seem to accept these as part of maintaining the identity and high quality education for which they are so proud.

Of significance, during these emotional conversations about how stakeholders will accept the building issues to keep their children in community schools, were notes of textbook and resource shortages, teachers who kept their projectors off to conserve bulb life because they knew it would take a while to receive a replacement, and some observations by team members of very experienced chairs, tables, and other typical school equipment that could have been replaced long ago through a district rotation or relocation process. The QAR team discussed the difficulty of overcoming predictable stakeholder perceptions concerning the extremely old versus the brand new buildings within the district.

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

- A caring, accessible administrative staff is available at all schools.
- The district offers students the opportunity for dual enrollment coursework with approved credit hours toward a degree or industry certification.
- The Parent Portal is a valuable tool that is widely used by parents.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Develop and implement a system-wide Professional Development Plan.
- Provide an in-depth transition program for elementary to middle school and middle to high school.
- Take steps to ensure an equitable distribution of monetary funds, equipment, and professional development opportunities for all teachers and buildings within the district.
- Consider a distance learning program in schools lacking upper division classes.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Maury County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

### Standard 4: Documenting & 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.

**Description:**

MCS has established a robust set of data collection tools to support the high expectations for student learning. These tools include district developed portfolios, curriculum based measures, and formative and summative assessments. The data from these assessment measures are aggregated to describe student performance to the public and maintain the district profile.

Interviews with teachers and students confirm that data are being used to determine individual student needs. Each school has a specified time during the school day to provide enrichment and intervention strategies for all students based on data results. Board policy manuals include specific protocols to ensure that assessments are reliable, valid, and bias free.
The state report card provided by the state of Tennessee for all public schools indicates that the district received a "C" in achievement. The "C" is described as average based on cut scores established in the summer of 2010. ACT data from the state report card indicates that the district is slightly below the state composite average. Current assessment data indicate a continuous upward trend in reading, science and social studies. Math was identified by district data and throughout teacher interviews as an area of focus as Common Core comes into play. Artifacts indicate that the district hosted Educational Testing Service (ETS) and ACT workshops to help increase stakeholder awareness of the connection between elementary grade standards and these test scores and support increased student performance.

The district changed the formative assessment tool for the 2011-12 school year after an analysis of the previous tool did not yield the desired correlations with the state testing instrument. District leadership indicated during the standards overview to the QAR team that the previous tool was not effective in the support of improved student performance. The new tool is providing predictive data that is being utilized by the instructional coaches and teachers to develop intervention and enrichment opportunities for students. The QAR team learned in interviews with building administrators and teachers that the responsibilities of the literacy coaches provided throughout the district will be revised to those of instructional coaches. The new duties will include assistance to classroom educators in utilizing data to develop interventions and enrichment opportunities.

Parents are provided access to student grades, attendance, and discipline via the Parent Portal, which is user name and password protected. MCS maintains complete student records in a secure system as required by state regulations. Parents stated that access to student records is provided through the Parent Portal to allow them to track their child's progress at any time. Parents across the district voiced their appreciation of the Parent Portal and, surprisingly, students interviewed were equally supportive which may be another indication of the unity of stakeholders in supporting high student performance. Students and parents described how each student develops a SMART goal based on their assessment results.

Artifacts provide evidence of the school level quality assurance review (QAR) process that has been implemented by the district. The process includes a review the Tennessee School Improvement Plan (TSIPP) and yields recommendations for each school visited. The district reports that the process has been valuable and will be continued with visitation of five schools annually. The AdvancED QAR team noted the alignment of this process with the QAR accreditation process which should provide data from the school level to the district to strengthen support and improvement processes.

Communication gaps among community stakeholders concerning the goals and mission of the school system were noted by the QAR team. While interviewees are knowledgeable and appreciative of information that is supplied to them by the schools, they seem to know little about the district mission and goals beyond what is published in the local newspaper and reported on television and radio. The team is aware of the difficulty stakeholders might have in discerning between information supplied by the school and that by the district. While various publications of the district were clearly visible to the team, stakeholders seemed relatively unaware of district efforts to keep them informed, possibly indicating the need for a comprehensive district program of public relations and information to educate stakeholders on the work of the district.

The QAR team did not find sufficient evidence for a finding that the district uses its data to analyze the efficiency of district processes. The team discussed the myriad programs, initiatives, and processes maintained by the district and looked for indications that a method to analyze alignment with goals, effectiveness and efficiency of components, and some sort of cost-benefit analysis exists. No overall systemic process of this type was found that would supply data to inform and improve district functions. Combined with the data gathered concerning perceived inequities in resource allocations, the lack of
knowledge of stakeholders concerning the work of the district, the discrepancy between the formal vision and mission and that which is lived by stakeholders, and the lack of data for the district to analyze their own work, the issue of aligned systemic district operations came sharply into focus.

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

- Formative and summative assessment data are utilized to align student learning with the district goal of college and career ready graduates.
- Instructional coaches are assigned to all district schools to develop data teams and provide support for classroom instruction.
- The district has developed an assessment process, which includes a review of each school’s SIP and a quality assurance review visit from the district office staff.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Develop a comprehensive and continuous public relations message that: reports student performance and system effectiveness to all stakeholders; educates them on district initiatives and processes; and promotes the engagement of stakeholders in the education process.
- Consider a method to assess district programs and initiatives for efficiency, effectiveness, and alignment with district goals and objectives.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Maury County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

**Standard 5: Resource & Support Systems**

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

**Description:**

MCS actively recruits and retains a highly qualified staff. The Human Resources Supervisor ensures that all applicants are highly qualified and conducts a screening as a first step in the hiring process. Applicants who receive a positive screening are then interviewed by the administrator who posted the job opening. The applicant is interviewed and recommended to the Director of Schools for employment. The new teacher is assigned a mentor within the school. Approximately 15% of the teaching positions in the district are filled with waivers and the district employs 100 teachers over the Basic Education Program (BEP). Teachers at schools visited by the QAR team indicated their awareness that the screening conducted as the first step of the hiring process is done by a single individual. While no problem was indicated with the process, the team felt it significant that teachers brought this to their attention.

In the profile and demographics sections of the Standards Assessment Report and by district personnel, information was provided concerning the racial and ethnic diversity of the student populations of the schools and the district as a whole. The personnel stated that providing diversity in the professional population to match that of the student population is an ongoing challenge because of the stability in the teaching and administrative ranks and the lack of diversity in qualified applicants when positions open. The team observed the diversity of the student populations in schools and that of professional personnel during visits. While the district is aware of the lack of diversity, the team is satisfied by
observation of professionals in the schools and the practices of the district that commitment to and appreciation of equity and diversity through its personnel is maintained.

MCS uses the Teacher Evaluation Accelerator Model (TEAM) to evaluate all certified staff and administrators. The TEAM model includes observations and student data to rate teachers and administrators in levels of effectiveness. Non-certified personnel are evaluated annually by their supervisor. All personnel were able to clearly describe the evaluation process to the team and indicated their satisfaction that the process is fair and provides them the opportunity to respond and improve their work.

Maury County teacher salary and benefits are competitive with surrounding districts resulting in little turnover in the district. During interviews administrators and teachers expressed a desire to remain in a district where they feel valued and appreciated for their work.

The First to the Top (FTTT) grant provides funding to purchase PD360, a web-based professional development program which is available to all teachers and administrators. Interviews with the instructional staff confirmed the use of PD360 to complete the annual 30 hour requirement of professional development. However, teachers indicated the use of PD360 is sporadic across the district. Both school and district personnel indicated that the district is continuing to improve the variety of ways professional development is delivered and referenced several areas of need which include the Framework for Rigor, use of Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge, and implementation of the Common Core Standards.

A review of school improvement plans, which should provide consistent guidance for professional development and allocations of resources, revealed inconsistencies in the alignment of the plans to the vision, mission, and goals. The team found loosely aligned mission statements at some schools which could result in school goals distanced from those of the district.

The Director of Schools manages the financial resources efficiently and effectively, ensuring compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations. The Board of Education works with the director to balance the overall budget and structures funding around priorities for student learning. The Budget and Finance Manager is assigned the responsibility for managing the financial resources. He solicits prioritized needs from each central office department and each school administration and provides feedback to them through each step in the budget process. Principals are responsible for all financial transactions and budgets for their schools. Title I schools work in concert with the Director of Federal Programs and receive additional federal funding based on the identification of students.

Many of the schools in the district, along with the central office facilities, are aging and in need of replacement or renovation. The administration is diligent in ensuring that each is safe and has a crisis management plan in place at each location. The QAR team observed the school safety officers on site at each school and heard stories of the effectiveness of these officers in dealing with students and difficult situations. The Supervisor of Transportation and Safety ensures that safety drills are practiced in coordination with the local fire and police departments.

The Director and Board of Education have developed a capital projects plan that supports quality education for all students. Spring Hill Middle School is the newest facility in the district and two new elementary schools are included in the board’s five year facility plan, one east and one north of the urban center of Columbia. District personnel stated that plans to renovate and replace may be placed on hold given current fiscal conditions.
Because of overcrowding the elementary and middle school grade configuration was changed from K-5 and 6-8 to K-4 and 5-8 grade structure. Stakeholders expressed a preference for the former grade structure but understood that overcrowding was the reason for the change. The district personnel stated that some assistance is provided to students, parents, and school personnel in the transition. The QAR team noted that a consistent plan addressing the needs of students and parents at each school could ease the stress of transition between school transition points. When students at the middle school level were asked about the difficulties of these transitions, their stories were vivid and the students emphatic that they need help during these times, indicating that school level personnel, particularly counselors, did what they could to help but "they have jobs to do, too."

The central office staff has been diligent in eliminating portable classrooms at each school site; however, two portables remain at the central office and house the federal programs and special education departments. The board room for the Maury County Board of Education is located at the alternative school, underscoring the difficulties the system faces with facilities and funding. The QAR team notes the low student-teacher ratios in classrooms and understands that, to maintain these numbers, significant concessions must be made in other areas. The team also observed firsthand the difficulties in coordination, communication, and facilitation of services and resources among district office personnel who are spread out among several buildings. Simply stated, the team noted instances in which "the ball had been dropped" during operations that, had personnel been centrally located, could have been executed with ease. The team noted that remodeling of buildings and offices for the programs housed in portables should be a part of the overall district building and facilities plan guided by the Purpose and Direction.

Technology is in place in most classrooms; however, the QAR team noted that technology is lacking in some older buildings. The district technology plan addresses the need for additional technology in all schools and provides a structure to support equitable resources throughout the system. The team noted after a review of the plan and visits to six school sites that a revision of the technology plan may be in order given the constantly evolving nature of technology, student expectations and expertise, and teacher understanding, acceptance, and ability to integrate technology into their teaching. Teachers and parents are aware of the disproportionate technology resources across the district and some apparently accept this as part of the difficulties concerning funding, facilities, and related issues. However, one statement made during interviews at an older community school caught the attention of the QAR team: "Our students grow up here. They don't know what it's like (at other schools, in other places), so they don't know the difference." The team noted that if this statement is an indication of the willingness to accept status quo and is prevalent particularly in the community "unit" schools and across the district in expectations for unit schools, it seriously undermines what stakeholders voiced as the vision for their students: "... high performance, college and career readiness, life long learners, global competitiveness, and preparation for life in the 21st Century."

All Title I Schools are provided sufficient funding for instructional technology. The Supervisor of Career and Technical Education (CTE) allocates funds to the CTE programs in the district. With new state reform measures in place, districts will be expected to participate in the web based platform for all mandated student achievement tests in the fall of 2014. The QAR team discussed the need to survey the technology needs for each school to ensure that the district will meet this state goal by the deadline.

The School Health Coordinator supervises the Coordinated School Health (CSH) grant and has formed partnerships with multiple agencies in the community to support the health and well-being of students and personnel. The coordinated approach improves student health and capacity to learn through the support of families, communities, and schools working together. Each school in the district provides guidance services for all students during the school day. During interviews with students and observations at the schools, it became evident that guidance personnel fulfill a critical need for the diverse population at
schools. District and school administrators voiced a need for additional nurses to serve the schools. Currently there is one nurse per four schools.

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

- The Board of Education works effectively with the Director of Schools to balance the budget and structure all funding around priorities for student learning.
- The district has formed partnerships with multiple agencies in the community to support the health and well-being of students and personnel.
- Despite budget restraints, there have been steady improvements in student achievement across the district.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:**

- Implement a transition plan to ease the stress of changing schools.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive professional development plan.
- Ensure that the building, facilities, and resources plans provide equity of resources and opportunities across the district, facilitate the work of the board and all district programs, and are guided by the guiding principles held by all stakeholders for district performance.
- Consider the use of a team of district office personnel in the first step of the hiring process.

**Finding:** Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Maury County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

**Standard 6: Stakeholder Communications & Relationships**

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

**Description:**

The Maury County Schools Board of Education and district personnel labor to foster effective communication and relationships with and among its stakeholders. Stakeholders agree the district provides a safe and secure environment for students to obtain a well-rounded education for the students. The district intentionally supports an atmosphere of pride and school spirit which generates the feeling of community schools. Many faculty members are graduates of Maury County Schools and want to maintain each school as a positive force within the community. Stakeholders and students expressed pride in their schools and described the positive relationships with and among schools and stakeholders to the QAR team. Students and parents feel that faculties care about and support the communities in which they serve. School administrators welcome stakeholder involvement and encourage active participation.

Parents, students, teachers, and students expressed their gratitude for the county providing each school with a full time, on-site School Resources Officer, an initiative that fosters the sense of safety, watch care, and security within the schools. This commitment provides strong evidence to the community of the responsibility the district assumes for all stakeholders.

Board members conduct three monthly board meetings per year at community sites. Prior to the meeting an open forum is provided for stakeholders to address any concerns. The board members also conduct sack lunch meetings at schools to encourage community members to have lunch with them and discuss
issues.

The majority of schools have active Parent Teacher Organizations and some Parent Teacher Student Organizations. Parents were vocal about involving their children in leadership processes and providing a voice for them in the school. These and Parent Volunteer programs provide stakeholders with a sense of ownership in the schools’ success.

Through effective communication and collaboration centered on student learning, the district strives to be responsive to parent expectations and satisfaction. There are regularly scheduled meetings with parents, teachers, students, and advisory teams. Teachers are also available during planning times to communicate with parents. The district has the understanding, commitment, and support of its stakeholders. The QAR team observed through interviews and the review of artifacts that communication and strong relationships exist. This is further evidenced by the level of trust of and support by stakeholders for the district. Students, teachers, parents, and support staff agree that the district communicates positive information through email, newsletters, agendas, phone calls, radio, the local newspaper, the web-based Parent Portal, the automated calling system, the school calendar, and district and school websites. The team noted that not all information on websites was current. While parents were in general agreement concerning information from the district, the team found that parents were primarily aware of school-level information and did not differentiate between information between the district and school. The team discussed the interesting fact that despite these meetings and attempts at disseminating important information, stakeholders, including some high in the decision making chain, lacked understanding of many district initiatives.

Parents expressed concerns about the transition of students from the K-4 environment to the 5-8 environment. These parents felt that their voice was not heard at the district level concerning this issue. Students indicated their concerns, some telling their stories about dealing with a new building, unfamiliar teachers, upper and lower lockers and locker times, understanding the new schedules and how to manage their books and supplies, and the "scariness" of being in unfamiliar territory. A parent-student orientation provided by the school receiving those students was one suggestion made by parents to ease the transition. Students suggested school visits in small groups for an orientation ahead of the transition so that they would "know what is going on" before the new school year.

Stakeholders are invited to take active roles in parent surveys, the district advisory teams, and the Pre K Advisory Council. The Grandparents Volunteer Program utilizes senior citizens to supplement instruction by tutoring students needing additional assistance. Volunteers of all ages are encouraged at the schools.

Stakeholders agreed that district resources are used to the fullest extent possible and funds are budgeted appropriately to provide a well-rounded education for all students. They also expressed a concern as to the equity among schools concerning the distribution of funds and resources.

Teachers expressed their appreciation of the administration’s open-door policy and felt that they “...do listen and value what we say.” Parents stated: "It's like family here. They love and care for our children. When I call the school, they return my calls and answer emails quickly. The central office staff is very approachable.” Comments from students included: "We have great teachers ... They treat us fairly ... They are always willing to help us ... They want us to do our best."

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

- Stakeholders feel comfortable expressing their concerns and participating in school activities.
- Stakeholders agree that teachers are caring and communicate effectively with parents concerning student achievement.
• Parent Portal is an effective way to communicate student progress to parents.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:
• Schedule regular and frequent updates to websites to ensure current information is accurate and up to date.
• Provide a transition program for 4th and 8th grade that includes parents and students.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Maury County Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

Standard 7: Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description:
Maury County Schools is engaged in a high quality process of continuous improvement that has resulted in continuous growth in student performance over the last several years. The QAR team became aware of the high level of collaboration across the district, the effective professional development provided for all professionals, the strong levels of support among stakeholders particularly parents and students, and the operation of professional learning communities at various levels that have driven improvement to date.

The district's vision is evident although alignment with schools across the district is not complete. Of significance to the continuous improvement effort is the "commonly held" vision that unites stakeholders in their expectations for district and student performance. All stakeholders are in agreement concerning high quality and "...progressive education opportunities and experiences to all students" (from the Standards Assessment Report). However, the current formal vision and mission of the district do not capture the strong beliefs that all stakeholders, including students, voiced when asked by the QAR team, "What is the vision (or mission) of Maury County?" The SAR states and stakeholder described the process through which the current vision and mission statements were reviewed and ratified. The QAR team could determine no reason that the convictions of stakeholders were not indicated as strongly in the official versions of these guiding statements as they were consistently stated by all stakeholders.

The district and individual schools have mission statements listed in their Tennessee Comprehensive System Wide Planning Process plans (TCSPP) and School Improvement Plans (SIP). Faculty, parents, and students commented on their desire to strive for, "Quality education for all students." Schools are free to form their own mission statements that, according to district personnel, should be at least loosely linked to the mission of the district. The QAR team did not find this linkage to be consistent at the schools. Each school has its own SIP, not all of which are aligned with the district improvement plan. A review of artifacts indicated that the schools and district have action plans for improvement goals and measurements for school improvement efforts. These goals include a focus on literacy and math as well as on graduation rates within the district. Faculty, parents, students could articulate these goals and understood their importance which indicated to the team healthy levels of involvement and timely information being supplied to stakeholders.
Artifacts and interviews support the finding of the team that the district maintains and updates community demographic information as well as student performance data. These data reveal the changes in district and community demographic makeup as well as the increasing levels of student achievement. The district establishes goals and improvement strategies based on these data. These goals and strategies are listed in the SIPs, were articulated during interviews with district personnel, and were visible during classroom observations by the QAR team.

The district apparently did not engage all stakeholders in the improvement process in the variety of committee membership opportunities specified in accreditation guiding documents. Leadership committees consisting of central office personnel and site principals were formed at the district level. Interviews confirmed that classroom teachers generally were not involved in these committees and were left out of this level in the school improvement process for accreditation. The process seemed to be that of decision making at the district level and passed down to the schools, possibly for the sake of efficiency. While most stakeholders had some level of awareness concerning the accreditation QAR process, the team found some employees who had absolutely no knowledge of the process other than the fact they had been ordered to report for an interview. The QAR team observed closely for indications that this was a consistent trend across the processes of the district. There were some instances at the school levels in which information, understanding, and implementation of district operations were not complete.

The district provides research based professional development (PD) and PD delivered by school personnel. Interviews revealed that this professional development meets the needs of individual teachers, schools, and the district as a whole. Faculty commented on the variety and depth of this professional development and praised its value. These comments and the continued growth in student performance over time indicate the effectiveness of the PD offerings. The QAR team heard from district office and teachers that some PD decisions are made at the district level while schools are allowed to determine their own PD and supply info on PD needs to the district. There is no formal professional development plan for the district.

Interviews confirmed that the district reviews and documents performance and improvement results regularly. These results are communicated to stakeholders via the district website, newsletters, and parent conferences. Interviewees noted the wealth of information available from the district regarding student and district performance. Parents and students cited the use and value of the Parent Portal in the dissemination of student level data and in keeping track of student progress. The QAR team noted with interest that students were strongly supportive of the Parent Portal and the subsequent ability of parents to keep an eye on them. Students confirmed a statement by parents in school level interviews, "We are all in this together." They also described ways in which their teachers help them improve their learning, provide personal guidance, and help them consider college and career options. The team reflected on the expectations of students for monitoring and guidance from adults that seem to be a part of the "community" norms established over time throughout the district. One district office employee stated, "We are a fairly large district with a small town feel."

Interviews with school leadership indicated that the district provides time and resources for improvement planning. Through creative scheduling teachers are allocated individual and departmental planning time. District leadership evaluates improvement efforts and sets improvement goals at regularly scheduled meetings for this purpose. District leadership also meets with site leadership to discuss issues, concerns, and directions for improvement. Assistance to schools is provided at various levels such as site-based planning, staffing, and technology. Principals and teachers commented on the numerous tools and resources the central office provides to support their school improvement efforts.

**Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:**
The district provides high quality professional development and consultants to staff. Schools determine their own professional development options in addition to those of the district. The district provides a wealth of data and supports teachers to analyze and utilize data to drive instruction. The district and individual schools are strongly united in their common goals of quality education for all students.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Promote alignment of the school improvement plans with the district improvement plan.
- Develop and implement a district wide professional development plan aligned with system goals.
- Engage all stakeholders in the improvement process by providing them meaningful roles.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Maury County Schools has 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.

Description

The AdvancED accreditation and the district's own improvement initiatives are utilized by Maury County Schools to enhance quality processes throughout the district. Through the internal Quality Assurance Review and the resulting Standards Assessment Report (SAR) the district identified and documented aspects of their operations that have been improved or that have been targeted for improvement. The district has implemented its own school level quality assurance review process, reviewing five schools per year, that provides schools with detailed guidance for growth and the district with important insights into how the district facilitates teaching and learning. The insights should ultimately guide the district to deepen systemic processes to support teaching and learning.

Stakeholders are unified in their vision and mission for the district: high performance, college and career readiness, life-long learners, global competitiveness, and preparation for life in the 21st Century. Students and schools have responded to these guiding principles with high performance. The district has responded to community expectations for high performance by fine tuning processes and programs, such as the performance assessment and reporting system, and has demonstrated high quality performance and growth over time. As a result, the community has come to expect continual quality performance from the district and students.

A staff of 100 teachers over the Basic Education Program funded by the state is maintained by the district. The QAR team recognizes the benefits of this courageous stand: low student-teacher ratios, higher student engagement levels because of smaller grouping, one-on-one instruction, decreased noise and distraction levels, and greater teacher focus on the needs of individual students. These effects were observed in many classrooms during classroom visits. However, the team found these advantages had not reached their fullest potential in many classrooms in that much instruction, particularly in higher grades, was large group and teacher directed from the front of the classroom. The team also found that technology integration and implementation, which should enjoy reciprocal benefits such as greater hands on technology use through smaller class sizes, varied widely from classroom to classroom and from school to school.

The Maury County is implementing new instructional reporting practices which include standards-based grading, innovative strategies and programs, and data teams at each school. The team discussed how sustained monitoring of student achievement and all district initiatives is imperative in quality assurance and continued growth.

The district provides for high quality professional development (PD) that help to drive consistent growth in student performance over time. Some PD is provided by the district and even more is driven at the school level by teachers and principals. The success of these initiatives is demonstrated by the continual growth in student performance. School level personnel commended the district facilitation of PD and noted that the ability to select PD offerings appropriate to them is an important feature. As Common Core, increased pressure for higher performance from stakeholders and the state, and such challenges as funding and population shifts come to bear even more greatly, the system must focus its efforts intensely on precise measures to stay ahead of the challenges.

The district identified its own greatest challenges in the SAR: "The system's greatest challenge is the many changes that are happening. Changes in principal and teacher evaluation and standards impact learning. Our
system is working (to) implement changes and ensure that students are learning at high rates." Additionally, the SAR states: "We see the value of utilizing technology to make this self-assessment easier, however we know that continuous efforts to engage stakeholders face to face will result in more involvement from them. We will continue to look for ways to empower stakeholders in helping students achieve and grow at high levels even as the standards and benchmarks become more rigorous."

The QAR team affirms these findings, notes the significant levels of progress achieved by the district, and the deft identification of the challenges the district faces. The team leaves Required Actions that are strategic in establishing deeper levels of systemic operation to support the steady climb in student performance though:

- clear articulation of the expectations that all stakeholders hold for student and district performance;
- alignment of all processes of the district with these expectations;
- professional development specifically targeted to address the professional growth needs identified by teachers and through the Quality Assurance Review; and
- engagement of all stakeholders in the improvement process through information, education, and involvement in decision making at all levels.

**Strengths**

- District level staff visits each school to model the Quality Assurance Review process then supports each school in conducting their own review.
- The entire range of stakeholders voice the same high expectations for the performance of students and district.
- The internal review process undertaken was successful in two ways: the district clearly identified the greatest challenges they face and in doing so, demonstrated their capacity for assessment and analysis of their processes.

**Opportunities**

- Educate all stakeholders of performance and system effectiveness.
- Coordinate systematic assistance to schools in school improvement efforts.
## Schools Visited

The Quality Assurance Review team visited the following schools during the visit to the Maury County Schools on 03/18/2012 - 03/21/2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
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</table>
Conclusion

The commendations and required actions 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 required actions 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 required actions for improvement that the school district will need to address. Following this review, the school district 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 district leadership, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the district and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS-CASI-TN accreditation with AdvancED.
Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Drew Moore, Chair/Lead Evaluator
- Laura Harper, Vice Chair (Independent Education Consultant)
- Ms. Jeanine D. Thompson, Team Member (Welch Unit School)
- Ms. Cindy Young, Team Member (Giles County School System)
- Mr. Shawn A. Carter, Team Member (Macon County Board of Education)
- Ms. Wanda Berry, Team Member (Hickman County School System)

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.

**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.