AdvancED

External Review

Homer Community School

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Introduction to the External Review Process

Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools, and designed primarily to distinguish schools adhering to a set of educational standards. Today the accreditation process is used at all levels of education, and is recognized for its ability to effectively drive student performance and continuous improvement in education.

Institutions seeking to gain or retain accreditation must meet AdvancED standards specified for their institution, demonstrate high levels of or improvement of student performance if applicable, and provide evidence of stakeholder satisfaction with the operation of the institution. The accreditation standards focus on conditions and processes within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards, student performance, and stakeholder feedback.

Institutions participate in an External Review by a team of highly qualified evaluators who examine the institution's adherence and commitment to the accreditation criteria. The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation as it energizes and equips the leadership and stakeholders of an institution to achieve higher levels of performance and address those areas that may be hindering efforts to reach desired performance levels. External Review is a rigorous process that includes examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of instruction, learning, and operations.

The AdvancED External Review Team used the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators and related criteria to guide its evaluation, looking not only for adherence to standards, but also for how the institution functioned as a whole and embodied the practices and characteristics of quality.

Using the evidence at their disposal, the AdvancED External Review Team arrived at a set of findings contained in this report. The report is presented in three sections: Findings, Conclusion, and Addenda.

Part I: Findings

The Findings section presents the External Review Team's evaluation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators. It also includes Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement identified by the External Review Team, observations of the Learning Environment, as well as Required Actions.

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

Standards help to delineate what matters. They provide a common language through which an education community can engage in conversations about educational improvement, system effectiveness, and achievement. They serve as a foundation for planning and implementing improvement strategies and activities and for measuring success. AdvancED's Standards for Quality were developed by a committee comprised of effective educators and leaders from the fields of practice, research, and policy who applied professional wisdom, deep knowledge of effective practice, and the best available research to craft a set of robust standards that ensure excellence and continuous improvement. The standards were reviewed by internationally recognized experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research.

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, conclusions concerning Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards, and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team. Indicators are evaluated and rated individually by the External Review Team using a four-level performance rubric. The Standard Performance Level is the average of indicator scores for the standard.

Standard 1: Purpose and Direction
Purpose and direction are critical to successful institutions. A study conducted in 2010 by the London-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that "in addition to improving performance, the research indicates that having a sense of shared purpose also improves employee engagement" and that "...lack of understanding around purpose can lead to demotivation and emotional detachment, which in turn lead to a disengaged and dissatisfied workforce."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution commits to a shared purpose and direction and establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the institutions' vision that is supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	3.33

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	•Accreditation Report •Interviews •Documentation or description of the process for creating the school's purpose including the role of stakeholders •Purpose statements - past and present	4
1.2	The school's leadership and staff commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	•Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the school's statement of purpose •Interviews •Observations •The school's statement of purpose •Accreditation Report	3
1.3	The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	•The school data profile •Agenda, minutes from continuous improvement planning meetings •Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders •Interviews •Accreditation Report •The school continuous improvement plan	3

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. Stakeholders were involved in the process to revise and create the mission, vision, and motto of Homer Community Schools.   1.1

    Administrators, school board members, staff, students, parents, and community members were invited to collaborate on the revision of Homer Community Schools mission, vision, and motto. The school district brought in an outside expert to lead the process and the product was voted on by all staff members. Continuous improvement is a process that reflects the common beliefs of stakeholders in a school district. By bringing together stakeholders, Homer Community Schools is ensuring that everyone has a common understanding of the purpose and mission of the school system.

2. Homer Community Schools has created a continuous school improvement process   1.3
    committed to shared leadership.

    Artifacts, the leadership presentation, interviews, and observations, all provided
    the external review team with insight into Homer Community School's revised
    continuous school improvement process. Homer Community School has created
    an impressive continuous improvement process through a shared leadership
    approach. All certified staff members serve on one of the following committees:
    Culture and Environment, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, ILCD, Safety
    and Crisis Team, Student Assistance Team, Technology, or Professional Learning
    Communities. These committees are lead by an overarching Leadership Team
    comprised of thirteen administrators and teachers. The committees meet regularly
    in the form of Professional Learning Communities to address the continuous needs
    of the school. Homer Community School District is following best practice in
    continuous improvement by involving all certified staff in the process as well as
    including all stakeholders in decision making. The external review team
    encourages the school district to continue this quality system of continuous school
    improvement.

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Monitor implementation of effective instructional practices consistently across all   1.2
    classrooms.

    Through classroom observations and stakeholder interviews, it was discovered
    that pockets of effective instructional practices are evident in classrooms but are
    not consistent throughout the district. Research-based instructional practices are
    proven to increase student achievement. Classrooms should be monitored on a
    regular basis to ensure that effective instructional practices are the norm. All
    students should receive a rigorous curriculum with high expectations for student
    success. Homer Community Schools is encouraged to utilize their recently formed
    Professional Learning Teams and Professional Learning Communities to continue
    to have collaborative conversations focused on student learning and achievement.

Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

Governance and leadership are key factors in raising institutional quality. Leaders, both local
administrators and governing boards/authorities, are responsible for ensuring all learners achieve while
also managing many other facets of an institution. Institutions that function effectively do so without
tension between the governing board/authority, administrators, and educators and have established
relationships of mutual respect and a shared vision (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998). In a meta-analysis of
school leadership research, Leithwood & Sun (2012) found that leaders (school and governing
boards/authority) can significantly "influence school conditions through their achievement of a shared
vision and agreed-on goals for the organization, their high expectations and support of organizational
members, and practices that strengthen school culture and foster collaboration within the organization."
With the increasing demands of accountability placed on institutional leaders, leaders who empower
others need considerable autonomy and involve their school communities to attain school improvement
goals. Leaders who engage in such practices experience a greater level of success (Fink & Brayman,
2006). Similarly, governing boards/authorities that focus on policy-making are more likely to allow school
leaders the autonomy to make decisions that impact teachers and students and are less responsive to
politicization than boards/authorities that respond to vocal citizens (Greene, 1992).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world

that a successful institution has leaders who are advocates for the institution's vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders. The institution's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.			3.5
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the school.	•Student handbooks •Governing body policies, procedures, and practices •Staff handbooks •Accreditation Report •Interviews •School handbooks •Strategic Plan Budget	4
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	•Accreditation Report •Interviews •District Profile	4
2.3	The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	•School improvement plan developed by the school •Accreditation Report •Stakeholder input and feedback •Interviews	4
2.4	Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school's purpose and direction.	•Interviews •Accreditation Report •List of PD District Profile	3

2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.	•Accreditation Report •Interviews •District Profile	4
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and student success.	•Accreditation Report •Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice and student success noted •Observations •Representative supervision and evaluation reports •Interviews	2

Powerful Practices	*Indicator*
1. The governing body creates educational policies and is committed to the continuous school improvement process. The governing body provides direction and policies to meet state laws and regulations. School board agendas and minutes, teacher and student handbooks, and board policies provide evidence that the governing body operates as a cohesive unit supporting student learning. The school board has created a five year strategic plan to address instruction, professional development, technology, staffing, parent/community involvement, facilities and grounds, and finance. The governing body sees the importance of professional development and provides opportunities for teachers and administrators to attend national conferences. The fiscal dedication to Professional Learning Communities has provided teachers the ability to be actively engaged in the continuous improvement process.	2.1

Opportunities for Improvement	*Indicator*
1. Increase communication between administrators, teachers, and staff to move the continuous improvement process forward. The school has committed itself to incorporating Professional Learning Communities into the continuous improvement process. Evidence from interviews, observations, and artifacts indicated that continued collaboration and communication are needed to fully implement PLCs effectively. The external review team encourages Homer Community Schools to continue to build a collaborative culture through the PLC process. Integrate conversations on data driven decision making to increase student learning which will result in higher student achievement.	2.4

Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning

A high-quality and effective system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership"

(Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of quantifiable and intangible characteristics, which include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The school's curriculum and instructional program should develop learners' skills that lead them to think about the world in complex ways (Conley, 2007) and prepare them to have knowledge that extends beyond the academic areas. In order to achieve these goals, teachers must have pedagogical skills as well as content knowledge (Baumert et al, 2010). The acquisition and refinement of teachers' pedagogical skills occur most effectively through collaboration and professional development. These are a "necessary approach to improving teacher quality" (Colbert et al, 2008). According to Marks, Louis, & Printy (2002), school staff that engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective schools, "supports teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations. Teachers give students feedback to improve their performance.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.			3.08
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The school's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	•Interviews •Observations •Student Goal Setting Curriculum Document	3
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	•Observations •Interviews •Accreditation Report	3

3.3	Teachers engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	•Professional development focused on these strategies •Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource •Interviews •Observations •Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool	2
3.4	School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	•Supervision and evaluation procedures •Recognition of teachers with regard to these practices •Interviews •Accreditation Report	2
3.5	Teachers participate in collaborative learning communities to improve instruction and student learning.	•Accreditation Report •Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees •Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings •Interviews	4
3.6	Teachers implement the school's instructional process in support of student learning.	•Observations •Interviews •Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance •Accreditation Report •Samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student learning	3
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the school's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	•Accreditation Report •Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to school beliefs and values about teaching and learning •Interviews	3

3.8	The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress.	•Survey results •Interviews •List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days •Accreditation Report	4
3.9	The school has a formal structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.	•Accreditation Report •Survey results •Interviews •Goal Setting Notebooks	4
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	•Accreditation Report •Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting •Strategic Plan	3
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	•Results of evaluation of professional learning program. •Interviews •Accreditation Report •PLC/PLT	3
3.12	The school provides and coordinates learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	•Observations •Interviews •Accreditation Report	3

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. Professional Learning Communities and Professional Learning Teams provide leadership and direction for the continuous improvement process.   3.5

   The school system has provided resources and time to implement an effective culture of professional learning. Professional Learning Communities and Professional Learning Teams meet monthly and discuss the following topics: SMART goals, action plans, data, curriculum, instruction, etc. All teachers participate and the groups have shown a positive impact on the school culture. The newly created curriculum revision cycle and process are impressive. Homer Community School is well on its way to creating an effective, collaborative system based on student learning.

2. The school has multiple communication methods to engage families in the education of students.   3.8

    Stakeholder interviews and school artifacts provided evidence that Homer Community School uses a variety of communication tools to engage families in the education of their students. The school utilizes multiple means of communication including: a school website, Facebook page, parent/teacher conferences, evening community assemblies, morning programs for parents, notes home to elementary families, Pride assemblies, Power School, etc. All of these communication tools provide opportunities for stakeholders to be aware and involved in their child's education.

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Monitoring and conducting regular formal and informal classroom observations will ensure the implementation of appropriate instructional strategies.   3.4

    Stakeholder interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts indicate a need for accountability of instruction. Monitoring classrooms ensures that high expectations and learning targets are communicated to students. Through conversation and feedback, teachers can adjust their instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Teachers are encouraged to engage in self-reflection and goal setting to improve their professional practice. Interviews provided evidence that the addition of an elementary principal will be an asset in increasing accountability for all staff members. The school has purchased technology resources for teachers and students. The external review team encourages the school to increase student use of technology to create a more digital learning environment.

Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems

Institutions, regardless of their size, need access to sufficient resources and systems of support to be able to engage in sustained and meaningful efforts that result in a continuous improvement cycle. Indeed, a study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Pan, 2003) "demonstrated a strong relationship between resources and student success...both the level of resources and their explicit allocation seem to affect educational outcomes."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, to meet special needs, and to comply with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staffs who are well qualified for their assignments. The institution provides a safe learning environment for students and staff. The institution provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.		3.57
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level

4.1	Qualified professional and support staff are sufficient in number to fulfill their roles and responsibilities necessary to support the school's purpose, direction, and the educational program.	•School budgets for the last three years •Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff	4
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.	•Accreditation Report •School schedule •School calendar	3
4.3	The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	•Records of depreciation of equipment •Observations •Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements •Interviews •Accreditation Report •Documentation of emergency procedures such as fire drills, evacuation and other emergency procedures. •Safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes	4
4.4	Students and school personnel use a range of media and information resources to support the school's educational programs.	•Interviews •Observations •Data on media and information resources available to students and staff •Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information	3
4.5	The technology infrastructure supports the school's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	•Technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure	4
4.6	The school provides support services to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	•Student assessment system for identifying student needs •Accreditation Report •Interviews •Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education •Observations	4

4.7	The school provides services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	•List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning •Accreditation Report •Description of referral process	3

Powerful Practices   Indicator

1. The school facilities are very well maintained.   4.3

   Homer Community School facilities are conducive to student learning. Policies are in place to maintain a safe learning environment. The school facilities appear very safe and clean. The school board demonstrates a commitment to future facility upgrades. A quality school environment provides staff and students with the resources to engage in continuous improvement.

2. The school has been proactive by implementing programs to meet students' physical, social, and emotional needs.   4.6

   Artifacts, observations, and stakeholder interviews articulated the school district's effort to provide a safe, welcoming learning environment. Homer Community School has implemented a variety of programs to identify student needs. The school programs include: Stand for the Silent, Steps to Respect, TIPS- an anonymous bullying reporting site for students, Second Step, Positive Behavior Supports, Noble Knight, and the Homer CODE (Character, Optimism, Dedication, Excellence). Teachers assist students in a goal setting process where students analyze their achievement data and set personal and academic goals for the school year. Teachers help students monitor their progress in achieving their goals. The school also started a preschool program this year which is a significant and worthwhile investment toward increasing student performance. These programs and activities help to create a safe learning environment where all students can achieve.

Opportunities for Improvement   Indicator

1. Examine and allocate school resources to increase curriculum opportunities.   4.2

   Stakeholder interviews indicated that the Homer Community School District has limited course offerings in Advanced Placement areas.   Some other areas of concern are family consumer science and providing more distance learning courses. Continue to examine data to make school improvement decisions based on student needs.

2. Provide more professional development in the area of technology.   4.4

   Classroom observations and stakeholder interviews provided evidence that professional development in using technology as an instructional tool is needed. Teachers have begun to encourage students to use technology resources such as Odyssey and Fast Math. Some teachers are using interactive SMART Boards to enhance their instruction. Technology needs to be used to create a digital learning environment where students are actively engaged in their learning. Homer Community School students and staff will benefit from professional development trainings to maximize the usage of technology available in the classrooms.

Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement

Systems with strong improvement processes are moving beyond anxiety about the current reality and focusing on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, that is, data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, & Wohlstetter (2007) from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California indicated that data can shed light on existing areas of strength and weakness and also guide improvement strategies in a systematic and strategic manner (Dembosky et al., 2005). The study also identified six key strategies that performance-driven systems use: (1) building a foundation for data-driven decision making; (2) establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement; (3) investing in an information management system; (4) selecting the right data; (5) building school capacity for data-driven decision making; and (6) analyzing and acting on data to improve performance. Other research studies, though largely without comparison groups, suggested that data-driven decision making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Lafee, 2002; McIntire, 2002).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures. The system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine strategies to improve student performance. The institution implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained, and the institution demonstrates progress in improving student performance and institution effectiveness.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.		3.2
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The school establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	•Accreditation Report •Interviews •District Profile	3
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze, and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions.	•Interviews •List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning •Accreditation Report •PLC/PLT	3

5.3	Professional and support staff are trained in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data.	•Interviews •Observations •Accreditation Report •Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data	3
5.4	The school engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	•Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data •Accreditation Report •Examples of use of results to evaluate continuous improvement action plans •Evidence of student growth •Observations •Interviews	3
5.5	Leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.	•Minutes of board meetings regarding achievement of student learning goals •Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals •Accreditation Report •Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups •Interviews	4

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. The school maintains a comprehensive school improvement profile and plan.   5.5

    Artifacts and interviews indicate that the school has an established school improvement process and plan. All staff members serve on a school improvement committee and their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Stakeholders have access to the school's profile and student data. An assessment calendar and comprehensive assessment system are in place. The school utilizes the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Second Step Edition (DESSA-SSE) to collect data on student behavior in addition to student achievement and stakeholder perception data. The assessment data is analyzed during Professional Learning Community (PLC) team meetings to set SMART goals and drive curricular decisions. Stakeholders receive communication regarding the school improvement process, school goals, and plans through multiple means.

Opportunities for Improvement	*Indicator*

1. Formalize a process to require staff to analyze and implement instructional strategies based on best practices from data analysis.

   Artifacts and interviews indicate that the school needs to create a formalized process for training staff in data analysis. Data is being collected and staff are informed of the districts' strengths and challenges. Opportunities are provided for teachers to discuss the data during Professional Learning Communities and Professional Learning Teams. After reviewing the data, research best practices based on the analyzed need. Implement researched based best practices into daily classroom instruction.

Indicator: 5.3

Learning Environment

Every learner should have access to an effective learning environment in which she/he has multiple opportunities to be successful. The Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT) measures the extent to which learners are in an environment that is equitable, supportive, and well-managed. An environment where high expectations are the norm and active learning takes place. It measures whether learners' progress is monitored and feedback is provided and the extent to which technology is leveraged for learning.

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External review team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a 4 point scale with 4=very evident, 3=evident, 2=somewhat evident, and 1=not observed. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the 7 learning environments included in ELEOT.

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool

Environments	*Level*
A. Equitable Learning Environment	2.2
B. High Expectations Environment	2.6
C. Supportive Learning Environment	3.1
D. Active Learning Environment	2.7
E. Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.4
F. Well-Managed Learning Environment	3.1
G. Digital Learning Environment	1.3

Part II: Conclusion

Summary of the External Review

In off-site and on-site review sessions, the AdvancED External Review Team examined artifacts and evidence provided by the institution. During the on-site portion of the review, the team reviewed additional artifacts, collected and analyzed data from interviews, and conducted observations.

An External Review Team composed of five members representing AdvancED and the Nebraska State Department of Education visited Homer Community Schools in Homer, Nebraska, on March 20-22, 2013. The external team met with the school's leadership team on the evening of March 20. The leadership team provided the external team with an overview of the continuous improvement process at Homer Community Schools and then had dinner with the team. The external team convened to conduct an initial rating of all standards and indicators based on documentation that had been provided to the team prior to arrival on-site.

During the on-site visit beginning on March 21, members of the external review team interviewed a total of 128 stakeholders. This total included: 3 administrators, 68 students, 23 parents and board members, 25 teachers, and 9 support staff. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the systems of the school and processes in relation to the five AdvancED standards:
1. Purpose and Direction
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Resources and Support Systems
5. Using Results for Continuous Improvement

The external team observed 35 classes using the ELEOT observation tool. All members of the team participated in these observations, as well as the interview process. The feeling of the team was that the classroom observations were a valuable tool in assessing the school.

The school was well prepared for the visit and spent the time and resources necessary to present the team with a clear and solid picture of the school. Artifacts were organized and made available to the external team which added to the knowledge gained during the presentations, observations, and interviews. A shared feeling of the team was that the stakeholders and the entire school community were open and honest in their self-assessment and were forthcoming in the information presented to the team in interviews concerning the school improvement process and the efforts of the school to improve student learning.

Using the evidence collected, the team engaged in dialogue and deliberations concerning the degree to which the institution met the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators.

All stakeholder groups were represented in the process that was convened to revise and create Homer Community School's mission and vision statements. Through collaboration a clear direction was

established for the school. The school has implemented Professional Learning Communities and Professional Learning Teams to guide the work of the continuous improvement process. A leadership team of administrators and teachers was created to guide the efforts of all staff members. The shared leadership approach has had a positive impact on the school. Students and parents expressed the need for more rigorous classes and opportunities for students. Through the use of classroom observations and feedback, administrators can assist teachers in the implementation of research based effective instructional practices.

The governing body has designed an impressive five-year strategic plan to focus efforts on the continuous improvement process at Homer Community School. The school board has created policies that comply with Nebraska state law. Shared leadership between the governing body and leadership team should be utilized to continue to implement Professional Learning Communities. More training on data analysis and applying the analyzed data to daily instruction are needed by staff members. A systematic teacher evaluation process is needed in the district. Interviews with stakeholders and observation indicated that classrooms are not observed on a regular basis and feedback for improving classroom instruction is minimal. The implementation of a quality evaluation system will increase teacher accountability, improve instruction, and lead to higher student achievement.

The school has begun an impressive curriculum revision and adoption process through the use of its Professional Learning Communities. Teachers are having collaborative conversations around state standards and are creating SMART goals to provide learning targets for students. The school's preschool program is implementing developmentally appropriate instructional strategies. Stakeholders indicated that the preschool has made a positive impact on the school district. Parents and other stakeholders were complementary of Homer Community School's communication efforts. By using multiple modes of communication, the school informs stakeholders about student assessment, grades, and opportunities to be involved at the school. Parent Forums are utilized to relay pertinent information about the school as well as gather feedback from stakeholders to assist in the continuous improvement process. A rigorous curriculum with high expectations for all students was an observed need for the school. Administrators conducting more classroom walk-throughs will assist in creating consistent classroom learning environments for all students. Teachers should participate in professional development that will help them with data analysis and learn effective classroom instructional practices that will have a direct impact on the school's improvement goals.

Homer Community Schools is very welcoming and safe. The school's facilities are well maintained and resources are effectively allocated to ensure the continuous improvement process moves forward. The school's Culture and Environment Committee has implemented multiple behavior programs to create a positive school climate. All stakeholder groups indicate that the school is moving in a positive direction. A need for more Advanced Placement courses and opportunities for high ability students was expressed by multiple stakeholder groups. The school board and administrative team expressed they are addressing this issue and are planning to add more rigor and requirements to their course offerings. Technology resources are provided by the district. Through classroom observations and interviews with stakeholders, it was evident that professional development is needed for students and staff in using technology to create a digital learning environment.

The leadership team has developed a quality profile and improvement plan. Data is shared with teachers and staff and analyzed annually in the fall. A process for continuous improvement has been established and is being carried out through regular Professional Learning Community meetings. Some classroom teachers know how to analyze the data, but this practice should be expanded. Analyzing student achievement data and applying the results to classroom instructional practices will assist in improving student performance across the district.

During the on-site review, members of the External Review Team evaluated the learning environment by observing classrooms and general operations of the institution. Using data from these observations, the team evaluated the quality of instruction and learning that took place classified around seven constructs or environments: equity, high expectations, support, engagement, progress monitoring and feedback, management, and use of technology.

Teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues through Professional Learning Communities and Professional Learning Teams. Teachers have created SMART goals for their PLTs and developed learning targets for their students. The learning environment was welcoming and students felt comfortable taking risks in class. Classrooms were well organized and learners were highly engaged. Behavior expectations were also well understood. In most classrooms, students were involved and active. Teachers have been trained in APL and consistently apply these strategies. In some instances, the external team observed students using Smart Boards and computerized programs, but did not see high levels of the use of technology throughout classrooms. Inconsistent instructional practices were also observed. The school needs to create a common language of instruction with high expectations and rigor for all learners.

Progress monitoring is conducted by some classroom teachers; however, a process for monitoring and evaluation of teaching practices must be implemented with fidelity. Student goal setting practices are to be commended. Students are taking an active role in their learning and self-monitoring their progress. A Student Assistance Team works to provide assistance for struggling learners. LLI is an effective intervention utilized to support learning.

The external review team would like to express our appreciation for the hospitality shown during the visit. It was apparent that the administration, leadership team, teachers, students, and support staff worked hard to make certain that the team had every need met. Not only were adults very welcoming, but students were respectful, always polite and willing to share their thoughts, and were positive about Homer Community Schools. A sincere thanks to all who spent time in interviews, prepared food, or were otherwise involved with the visit. We conclude our report by recommending the AdvancED Accreditation Commission grant Homer Community School a new five-year period of accreditation.

Required Actions

1. Adopt and implement a systematic and systemic supervision and evaluation process for all staff that results in improved accountability, professional practices, and increased student success.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 2.6

Evidence indicated that a formalized and scheduled evaluation process for teachers and staff is needed in the school district. During interviews, stakeholders indicated this as an area of need. The team also reviewed the evaluation tool and procedures and concluded that an evaluation system based on research-based best practices needs to be implemented. The administrative team indicated that efforts are being made to increase teacher and student accountability in the district. Classroom walk-throughs are an effective means to provide feedback to teachers and staff. Formal evaluation and walk-through data collected from monitoring and evaluation procedures should guide the analysis of instructional strengths, areas of concern, and possible direction for professional development. By increasing visibility, administrators can hold teachers accountable for student learning. The institution is required to make a systematic and systemic supervision plan and monitor the implementation of the plan. The end goal is improved student performance across the district. School systems must communicate common expectations for all stakeholders in order for it to operate effectively. Quality feedback provides opportunities for staff members to monitor and adjust instructional practices to increase student performance.

2. Engage students in individualized learning through effective instructional strategies by consistently requiring teachers to monitor and adjust instruction based on multiple sources of data.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.3

Evidence from interviews, observations, and artifacts indicated that classroom teachers need to utilize data to monitor and adjust their classroom instruction to meet the needs of all learners. During interviews, virtually all stakeholders identified increasing classroom rigor and course offerings as a need of the school district. Classroom observations and district data provided additional evidence that rigor and high expectations for students are not consistent across the grade levels. The school board and administrative team discussed increasing graduation requirements and course offerings to address higher standards for students. Strong and effective teachers prepare students for success at their current level of instruction and prepare them for the next level. Create a common language of instruction at Homer Community School in which all stakeholders have a clear definition of the expectations. Research and implement instructional strategies that are proven effective for the school district's student population. Continue to provide opportunities for teachers to learn how to analyze student data and adjust their instruction based on the data.

Part III: Addenda

Next Steps

The institution 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 Powerful Practices section to maximize their impact on the institution.
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 institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
5. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Required Actions. Institutions are required to respond to all Required Actions. The Required Actions should be completed before the Accreditation Progress Report is submitted. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to monitor and ensure that the system has implemented the necessary actions to complete the Required Actions. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the completion of the Required Actions and the resulting improvement.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the External Review, the Team submits the final report to AdvancED for review and for action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and upon the institution. Upon receiving its accreditation, the institution should share its achievement with internal and external communities.

About AdvancED

In 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), both founded in 1895, along with the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form AdvancED: one strong, unified organization dedicated to education quality. In 2011, the Northwest Accreditation Commission (founded 1917) joined NCA CASI and SACS CASI as part of AdvancED. AdvancED is the world's largest education community, representing 30,000 public and private schools and systems across the United States and in 75 countries worldwide and educating 16 million students. The Northwest Accreditation Commission joined the AdvancED network in 2011.

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI share research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help educational institutions continuously improve.