

Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Southwest Primary Learning Center

Deborah Young, Principal

Review Dates: 11/11/2008 - 11/13/2008



AdvancED is the unified organization of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE).

Quality Assurance Review Report

Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI	3
Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review	4
Summary of Findings	5
Commendations	5
Recommendations	6
Next Steps	6
Standards for Accreditation	8
Standard 1. Vision and Purpose	8
Standard 2. Governance and Leadership	8
Standard 3. Teaching and Learning	9
Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results	10
Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems	11
Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships	12
Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement	13
Conclusion	14
Appendix	15
Quality Assurance Review Team Members	15
AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools	15

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

In 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 continuously improve.

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

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

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

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

A key aim of the Quality Assurance Review is to verify that the school is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

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

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

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

Using the Report - Acting on the Recommendations. The school uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The NCA CASI/SACS CASI State Office is available to assist schools in addressing the recommendations. Following the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, the school must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress the school has made on the team's recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school is addressing the recommendations.

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited the Southwest Primary Learning Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico on 11/11/2008 - 11/13/2008.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed the Principal, 5 members of the administrative team, 3 students, 6 parents, and 4 teachers. In addition, three Board members, local librarian and one community volunteer were interviewed. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

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

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

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

Commendations

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

- **Southwest Primary Learning Center is a small learning community where administrators, parents, and staff focus on the students' needs.**

The school has at least three hours of uninterrupted instructional time; access to supplies, materials and updated technology; individualized student plans prepared at the beginning of the school year; and the caring atmosphere exhibited by the staff.

The small community provides a family atmosphere where teachers feel supported and know what is expected and are free to teach. Teachers related that they feel respected as professionals and empowered to teach their very best. Staff stated all their material needs are met by the administration.

- **Despite a plethora of obstacles, the core team of administrators, the founders of Southwest Primary Learning Center, and others have created a successful and innovative, technology-centered, parental choice charter school community.**

A 2,100 student waiting list demonstrates the success of the school. In addition, the Southwest Primary Learning Center has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) three consecutive years.

Parents have chosen this alternative educational setting in order to provide a safe, challenging, skills-based environment for their children.

Recommendations

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

- **The state required lottery for admission to the next educational level causes anxiety within families. Southwest Learning Center's leadership team should investigate the possibilities of changing the present law about the charter school lottery system in order to provide continuity for children within the school of their parent's choice.**

Students, parents and staff are concerned about the lack of continuity with students that have been enrolled in their school and now must face the possibility of returning to another school.

Parents of Southwest Primary Learning Center students have expressed the need for continuity in their children's educational environment. Having to submit to another lottery for admission to the secondary program causes anxiety in the family.

- **Investigate ways to combine community resources for the benefit of all students.**

Issues continue to surface over extra-curricular and co-curricular activities between charter schools and other entities.

Students' goals should always be the primary focus of the entire Albuquerque educational community. A joint public and charter school team might collaborate to solve these student-centered problems.

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

Next Steps

The school should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to

- maximize their impact on the school.
3. Develop action plans to address the recommendations made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the recommendations.
 4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school's efforts to improve student performance and school effectiveness.
 5. Following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the team's recommendations. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the recommendations. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
 6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork, provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help schools with their improvement efforts. Available any where, any time, the network can be queried for information on a variety of school improvement subjects. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides research, handbooks, and tools to assist schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for more information on the range of resources available to you.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for state review and for action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school should celebrate its achievement with the school community. The NCA CASI accreditation seals are available at www.advanc-ed.org/communicationskit for accredited schools and districts to post on their website and to use in school communications. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and lapel pins are also available and can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

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

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the Southwest Primary Learning Center demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

Standard 1. Vision and Purpose

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

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

All stakeholders, Public Education Department, Southwest Learning Center Board, staff, parents, and the community are knowledgeable of the vision and mission of this school.

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

- The mission of the Southwest Learning Center is communicated via the school's web site and through communications with parents.
- The administration and staff ensure that the school's focus is centered on their students.

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

- Southwest Primary Learning Center should develop a Strategic Plan that addresses issues such as, acquiring the current building and relationships with other public schools.
- In addition, specific Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS) goals should be developed that are based on instructional need and supported by data in order to sustain and continue to improve students' skill development.

Finding: Southwest Primary Learning Center has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 2. Governance and Leadership

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

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

Southwest Primary Learning Center is led by an individual Board of Directors and five administrators who are shared with the other two schools on campus.

Written policies and procedures have been developed for effective operation of the school, including acceptable use for technology, crisis management, bullying, and Board and Charter operations.

The five member administrative team works well together to provide the executive function of the school. Southwest Primary Learning Center's charter and policies meet federal and state statutes.

Administration provides time for staff to review standardized test scores for instructional improvement and for staff to review results with parents.

Administrators and staff are dedicated to high academic standards for all students.

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

- Southwest Primary Learning Center has a dedicated administrative team who are effective, visionary leaders.
- The Southwest Primary team has updated their Technology Plan, including financial expectations, to continue to provide optimal educational tools and settings for their students.
- The administrative team annually reviews the continued successful AYP progress with all their stakeholders.
- After receiving parental requests, the school leadership has created an after-school program, that includes sporting and other options for their student body.
- An independent, outside agency school organization evaluates and provides suggestions for improvement of the entire staff.

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

- The school's leadership should utilize a parent survey to understand how parents can become more involved in the charter school setting.

Finding: Southwest Primary Learning Center has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 3. Teaching and Learning

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

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

The Southwest Primary Learning Center meets and exceeds the New Mexico standard grade level standards. Higher order thinking skills are expected in periodic group projects. Some staff have altered their instructional topics to better promote students' success on the annual mandated assessments. The Skills Tutorial Software program, aligned by staff to the curriculum, augments their on-going daily instruction.

The leadership team and staff work to keep structured, daily instructional time for their students. In-service opportunities are provided to all staff, while the students continue to attend class with substitute teachers.

Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, initial parent conferences and succeeding parent conferences are held to share on-going skill level development with families.

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

- Southwest Learning Center has a strong team of teachers who are dedicated to the students and the school's mission.
- The entire teacher's day is focused on the needs of the students. A 24 hour tutorial program is available to all students.
- The Southwest Primary Learning Center's internal Power School software provides a 24 hour access and communication to the individual students and their families about their on-going educational progress.
- The school's leadership team purchased laptop carts to better assist the primary students with developing technology skills.

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

- The school's leadership and teaching teams should create a transition plan for incoming students who are newly chosen by the lottery.
- A Staff Development Plan should be developed that supports the school's Educational Plan for Student Success.

Finding: Southwest Primary Learning Center has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results

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

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

The Southwest Primary Learning Center has met and exceeded adequate yearly progress for the last three years on the New Mexico Standards Based annual assessment. The three year continued success with the state assessments is shared with the entire community through banners, newspaper articles, and the school's main web page.

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

- Staff utilize basic curriculum tests, NM state assessments and other project-oriented assignments to determine the progress of their students.
- Weekly assessments and other communications are given to students and the results are shared on the school's Power School software. The school's assessments display sustained growth for the students at the Southwest Primary Learning Center.
- The school's Power School software system provides ready access about student's progress to students, parents, and staff and is maintained on a school protected site.

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

- The leadership team should use comparison and trend data from other similar sized charter schools in

- evaluating and affirming its effectiveness in the teaching and learning setting.
- Southwest Primary Learning Center should utilize assessment data to set goals for a continuous improvement plan.

Finding: Southwest Primary Learning Center has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems

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

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

The Southwest Primary Center utilizes a Mentor Program to assist its Level I staff to improve their education and skill levels.

Staff are assigned responsibilities based on their New Mexico licensure.

All staff are required to create a personal Professional Development Plan.

Sufficient staff are employed to meet the grade level assignments and other speciality needs of the school.

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

- The school maintains an inviting environment for the community and allocates sufficient resources for the benefit of the students and the staff.
- The school has been successfully audited.
- The Technology Plan reflects a three year increase in budgetary funds to update the infra-structure of hardware and software systems in the school.
- The school facility is well maintained and adequately meets the needs of the present community.
- Evidence showed required student fire drills and Fire Marshall inspections.
- A Crisis Management Plan is provided to all staff.
- The local public librarian provides some monthly support for visiting classes.
- An Educational Assistant helps provide tutorials for those with special needs.
- The leadership team at the Southwest Primary Learning Center engages in successful grant writing practices that provide 21st Century technology equipment, art materials, and capital outlay projects.

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

- Investigate a means of acquiring ownership of the presently utilized building.

Finding: Southwest Primary Learning Center has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

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

The Southwest Primary Learning Center communicates with families through their web page, email, and Power School program. The staff and administration have an open door policy and daily opportunities for parent communication in the parking lot at dismissal time. The school communicates its successes through banners, emails, data graphs.

The parental Quality of Education Survey indicated that overall parents are pleased with the school, but are looking for further opportunities for involvement in the school.

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

- At the beginning of each school year, the staff holds individual conferences with students and their parents to outline skill development goals for the year.
- Two additional parent conferences are scheduled during the year, and additional conferences are held as needed.
- The Power School program provides parents 24 hour access to their student's academic progress.
- The leadership team recruited possible students through a marketing campaign that included radio and TV ads and direct mailings to parents.

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

- During the parent interviews, parents suggested that the leadership team enhance parental communication through development of a newsletter.
- The leadership team should update the Employee Handbook and link the Parent Handbook to the web page.
- The local librarian suggested that the staff create a plan of action for her assistance with teaching of library skills to the students.

Finding: Southwest Primary Learning Center has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

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

The staff adhere to the state standards and benchmarks in their curriculum and instruction. The school updates its EPSS annually.

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

- Based on parental requests, after-school programs including homework club, activities, and intramural sports have been added to the academic program.
- The school has a well written plan for administering Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and disability plans (504s) for children with special needs.

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

- The current EPSS goals are expressed in terms of increasing student performance on the NM Standards Based Assessment. Southwest Primary Learning Center staff should develop EPSS goals based on the analysis of student's performance on the NM Standard Based Assessment performance and then the assessment becomes the evaluation of the success of these goals.
- Parents expressed an interest in knowing exactly what skills are expected and taught at each grade level.

Finding: Southwest Primary Learning Center has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Conclusion

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

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

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

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Mrs. Nancy Suedkamp, Chair (Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary School)
- Mrs. Johnee Simrell, Team Member (Our Lady of Fatima School)
- Dr. Kathryn Weil, Team Member (Solomon Schechter Day School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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