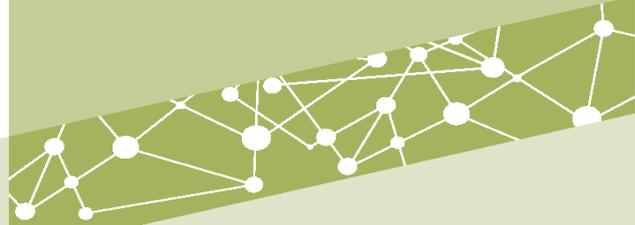**November 5-8, 2017**

AdvancED®
Engagement
Review Report

AdvancED®

AdvancED® Performance Accreditation

» **Results for:**

Decatur County School System
100 S. West Street
Bainbridge, Georgia 39817

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Introduction

AdvancED Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review

Accreditation is pivotal to leveraging education quality and continuous improvement. Using a set of rigorous research based standards, the accreditation process examines the whole institution—the program, the cultural context and the community of stakeholders—to determine how well the parts work together to meet the needs of learners. Through the AdvancED Accreditation Process, highly skilled and trained Engagement Review Teams gather first-hand evidence and information pertinent to evaluating an institution's performance against the research-based AdvancED Performance Standards. Using these Standards, Engagement Review Teams assess the quality of learning environments to gain valuable insights and target improvements in teaching and learning. AdvancED provides Standards that are tailored for all education providers so that the benefits of accreditation are universal across the education community.

Through a comprehensive review of evidence and information, our experts gain a broad understanding of institution quality. Using the Standards, the review team provides valuable feedback to institutions that helps to focus and guide each institution's improvement journey. Valuable evidence and information from other stakeholders, including students, also is obtained through interviews, surveys and additional activities.

As a part of the Engagement Review, stakeholders were interviewed by members of the Engagement Review Team to gain their perspectives on topics relevant to the institution's learning environment and organizational effectiveness. The feedback gained through the stakeholder interviews was considered with other evidences and data to support the findings of the Engagement Review. The following chart depicts the numbers of persons interviewed representative of various stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Groups	Number
Superintendent	1
Board of Education	6
Leadership (System & School Levels)	35
Teachers	48
Parents	33
Community	21
Students	59
Total	203

Once all of the information is compiled and reviewed, the team develops the Engagement Review Report and presents preliminary results to the institution. Results from the Engagement Review are reported in four ratings represented by colors. These ratings provide guidance and insight into an institution's continuous improvement efforts as described below:

Color	Rating	Description
Red	Needs Improvement	Identifies key areas that need more focused improvement efforts
Yellow	Emerging	Represents areas to enhance and extend current improvement efforts
Green	Meets Expectations	Pinpoints quality practices that meet the Standards

Color	Rating	Description
Blue	Exceeds Expectations	Demonstrates noteworthy practices producing clear results that exceed expectations

AdvancED Continuous Improvement System

The AdvancED Continuous Improvement System (CIS) provides a systemic fully integrated solution to help institutions map out and navigate a successful improvement journey. In the same manner that educators are expected to understand the unique needs of every learner and tailor the education experience to drive student success, every institution must be empowered to map out and embrace their unique improvement journey. AdvancED expects institutions to use the results and the analysis of data from various interwoven components for the implementation of improvement actions to drive education quality and improved student outcomes. While each improvement journey is unique, the journey is driven by key actions. AdvancED identifies three important components of a continuous improvement process and provides feedback on the components of the journey using a rubric that identifies the three areas to guide the improvement journey. The areas are as follows:

Commitment to Continuous Improvement	Rating
The institution has collected sufficient and quality data to identify school improvement needs.	Exceeds Expectations
Implications from the analysis of data have been identified and used for the development of key strategic goals.	Exceeds Expectations
The institution demonstrates the capacity to implement their continuous improvement journey.	Meets expectations

Continuous Improvement Journey Narrative

Decatur County School System provided evidence of an extensive history of systematic continuous improvement. The Engagement Review Team reviewed a plethora of evidence regarding the system's commitment to defining, maintaining and strategically pursuing continuous processes to support improved levels of student achievement. The Board of Education leads the system and school-level leadership in the strategic planning process and ensures that board policies and procedures pave the way for continuous improvement efforts to occur. Evident by a myriad of documents, the continuous improvement process is firmly grounded in the system's mission, "Excellence, Engagement, and Accountability for All". The mission statement has been branded over the last five years and was often referred to as doing things "The Bearcat Way".

Decatur's Strategic Plan is monitored and evaluated annually by all stakeholder groups. This is done through Comprehensive LEA Team meetings (CLPT), Circles of Adults Focused on Education (CAFÉ) community meetings, school leadership and system level collaborative team meetings, school level collaboration, parent surveys, staff and student surveys, and individual school opportunities that generate stakeholder feedback throughout the school year.

In the spring of each year, a comprehensive needs assessment process begins and is followed by summer school improvement sessions that result in updated school and system improvement plans which reflect jointly developed system non-negotiables. These plans are then implemented using the short-term action planning process where improvement actions and goals are implemented and monitored in 60-90-day cycles.

School and system leaders review data and evidence to ensure that progress is being made. Directed by the system-level administration, each school in Decatur County engages in an ongoing comprehensive process to review the school's purpose for student success. It was very evident to the team that this process is embedded in the system's culture and has become "The Bearcat Way" of conducting business.

School leadership teams are guided by the system leadership in the improvement process in numerous ways: large and small group discussion; documents that pose questions to answer; professional learning communities;

state assessments; local formative and summative assessments, et al. Data trends and implementation practices are further monitored by system leaders via school visits, artifact reviews, and face-to-face meetings. Expectations for improved professional practices are demonstrated by discussions in multiple ways to include leadership retreats, monthly meetings, and written communication.

During interviews with system and school leaders, the team learned that the system has adopted the philosophy that improvement in classroom instruction is the key to improving student learning. When asked about expectations for quality teaching to occur, 100 percent of the leaders selected 'using data to differentiate instruction'. When asked about how confidence as a leader is demonstrated, the top three choices were: 'setting goals to improve; acknowledging problems rather than ignoring them; and seeking opinions of others before making decisions'. "Improvement is a result of our deliberate and intentional planning efforts," said one leader.

The system has aligned and allocated human, fiscal, and material resources to support the continuous improvement process. Policies and practices are coordinated to support improvement priorities, and there are monitoring processes to inform the improvement efforts. Most stakeholder groups demonstrated engagement and collective commitment to the improvement process. When asked about improvement evidence, stakeholders cited growth in numerous areas to include graduation rate, ACT, and SAT. "Student growth as measured by the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) is sporadic, and we are not pleased," shared one leader. The superintendent stated, "I want Decatur County School System to be number one among the systems in our Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) area, and we are not there yet." Another said, "We are not where we want to be, but our commitment, our laser-like focus on student learning and our structured, formalized improvement efforts will get us there."

AdvancED Standards Diagnostic Results

The AdvancED Performance Standards Diagnostic is used by the Engagement Review Team to evaluate the institution's effectiveness based on AdvancED's Performance Standards. The diagnostic consists of three components built around each of the three Domains: **Leadership Capacity**, **Learning Capacity** and **Resource Capacity**. Point values are established within the diagnostic and a percentage of the points earned by the institution for each Standard is calculated from the point values for each Standard. Results are reported within four ranges identified by the colors representing Needs Improvement (Red), Emerging (Yellow), Meets Expectations (Green), and Exceeds Expectations (Blue). The results for the three Domains are presented in the tables that follow.

Leadership Capacity Domain

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress toward its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its purpose and direction, the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives, the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways, and the capacity to implement strategies that improve learner and educator performance.

Leadership Capacity Standards		Rating
1.1	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.	**Exceeds Expectations**
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learners.	**Exceeds Expectations**

Leadership Capacity Standards		Rating
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.	**Exceeds Expectations**
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.	**Exceeds Expectations**
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	**Exceeds Expectations**
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.	**Exceeds Expectations**
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.	**Exceeds Expectations**
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.	**Exceeds Expectations**
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.	**Meets Expectations**
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.	**Exceeds Expectations**
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.	**Exceeds Expectations**

Learning Capacity Domain

The impact of teaching and learning is the primary expectation of every system and its institutions. The establishment of a learning culture built on high expectations for learning, along with quality programs and services, which include an analysis of results, are all key indicators of the system's impact on teaching and learning.

Learning Capacity Standards		Rating
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.	Emerging
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.	Emerging
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs and skills needed for success.	Meets Expectations
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.	Emerging
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.	Exceeds Expectations
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is aligned to standards and best practices.	Exceeds Expectations
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.	Meets Expectations
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational future and career planning.	Meets Expectations
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.	Exceeds Expectations

Learning Capacity Standards		Rating
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.	Exceeds Expectations
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.	Meets Expectations
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.	Exceeds Expectations

Resource Capacity Domain

The use and distribution of resources align and support the needs of the system and institutions served. Systems ensure that resources are aligned with its stated purpose and direction and distributed equitably so that the needs of the system are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes support for professional learning for all staff. The system examines the allocation and use of resources to ensure appropriate levels of funding, sustainability, and system effectiveness.

Resource Capacity Standards		Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.	Exceeds Expectations
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations
3.6	The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.	Exceeds Expectations
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.	Meets Expectations
3.8	The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.	Exceeds Expectations

Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®) Results

The eProve™ Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®) is a learner-centric classroom observation tool that comprises 28 items organized in seven environments aligned with the AdvancED Standards. The eleot provides useful, relevant, structured, and quantifiable data on the extent to which students are engaged in activities and/or demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, and/or dispositions that are conducive to effective learning. Classroom observations are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes. Results from eleot are reported on a scale of one to four based on the degree and quality of the engagement.

eleot® Observations	
Total Number of eleot® Observations	**65**
Environments	**Rating**
Equitable Learning Environment	2.54
Learners engage in differentiated learning opportunities and/or activities that meet their needs	1.98
Learners have equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	3.00
Learners are treated in a fair, clear and consistent manner	3.21
Learners demonstrate and/or have opportunities to develop empathy/respect/appreciation for differences in abilities, aptitudes, backgrounds, cultures, and/or other human characteristics, conditions and dispositions	1.97
High Expectations Environment	2.39
Learners strive to meet or are able to articulate the high expectations established by themselves and/or the teacher	2.38
Learners engage in activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	2.62
Learners demonstrate and/or are able to describe high quality work	2.02
Learners engage in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks that require the use of higher order thinking (e.g., analyzing, applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	2.46
Learners take responsibility for and are self-directed in their learning	2.48
Supportive Learning Environment	2.93
Learners demonstrate a sense of community that is positive, cohesive, engaged, and purposeful	2.87
Learners take risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	2.76
Learners are supported by the teacher, their peers and/or other resources to understand content and accomplish tasks	2.97
Learners demonstrate a congenial and supportive relationship with their teacher	3.13
Active Learning Environment	2.50
Learners' discussions/dialogues/exchanges with each other and the teacher predominate	2.86
Learners make connections from content to real-life experiences	2.24
Learners are actively engaged in the learning activities	2.86
Learners collaborate with their peers to accomplish/complete projects, activities, tasks and/or assignments	2.03
Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.39
Learners monitor their own learning progress or have mechanisms whereby their learning progress is monitored	2.19
Learners receive/respond to feedback (from teachers/peers/other resources) to improve understanding and/or revise work	2.73
Learners demonstrate and/or verbalize understanding of the lesson/content	2.67
Learners understand and/or are able to explain how their work is assessed	1.97
Well-Managed Learning Environment	2.96
Learners speak and interact respectfully with teacher(s) and each other	3.19
Learners demonstrate knowledge of and/or follow classroom rules and behavioral expectations and work well with others	3.11
Learners transition smoothly and efficiently from one activity to another	2.67
Learners use class time purposefully with minimal wasted time or disruptions	2.89
Digital Learning Environment	1.75
Learners use digital tools/technology to gather, evaluate, and/or use information for learning	1.98
Learners use digital tools/technology to conduct research, solve problems, and/or create original works for learning	1.79

eleot® Observations	
Total Number of eleot® Observations	**65**
Environments	**Rating**
Learners use digital tools/technology to communicate and/or work collaboratively for learning	1.48

eleot® Narrative

The Engagement Review Team conducted 65 classroom observations during the onsite Engagement Review using the eleot® instrument. The team observed classrooms at all grade levels from kindergarten through grade 12 and in all content areas, including special education. The overall eleot® rating was 2.52 on a 4.0 scale. The Well-Managed Learning Environment with an average rating of 2.96 and the Supportive Learning Environment with an average rating of 2.93 were the highest rated environments. The Digital Learning Environment with an average rating of 1.75 was the lowest rated environment.

With the highest ratings being in the Well-Managed Learning Environment, team members observed students who were respectful of their teachers and of fellow students. Students at the five schools that were visited demonstrated knowledge of and followed classroom rules. As students transitioned from center to center in some classrooms, as well as during the change of classes at the upper levels, the transitions were smooth and efficient. In approximately 72 percent of the classes observed, class time was used purposefully with minimal wasted time.

The high ratings for the Supportive Learning Environment were a result of students demonstrating a strong sense of community that was positive and cohesive. Students were willing to take risks in learning without fear of negative feedback. They exhibited a congenial and supportive relationship with their teachers. When the team asked students how they would describe a typical day at school, 36 of the 59 interviewees responded, "Every day is a good day." Forty-five of the 59 students responded, "I feel like I have everything I need to learn."

An average rating of 2.54 for the Equitable Learning Environment was a result of students being treated in a fair, clear and consistent manner. They also had equal access to classroom discussion, activities and support. Differentiation was the area needing improvement in the Equitable Learning Environment. In approximately 50 percent of the classroom observations, students were in whole group activities completing the same assignments that were not varied depending on understanding of content or student needs. When interviewed, 22 of the 59 students said their teacher most often used whole group activities while 31 students said their teachers sometimes mixed the activities with whole and small group.

Active Learning Environment's average rating was 2.50 as students in approximately 63 percent of the classrooms observed were having discussions/ dialogues/exchanges with each other and the teacher. In approximately 50 percent of the classes, students collaborated with their peers to accomplish projects and assignments.

Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment had an average rating of 2.39. Team members observed students receiving feedback about their learning to improve their understanding and to revise their work. Most students were able to verbalize an understanding of the lesson/content. What students did not demonstrate was how to explain what methods would be used to assess their work. When asked 'How do you know you are learning', over 60 percent of the students stated it was when they got their grades on their tests.
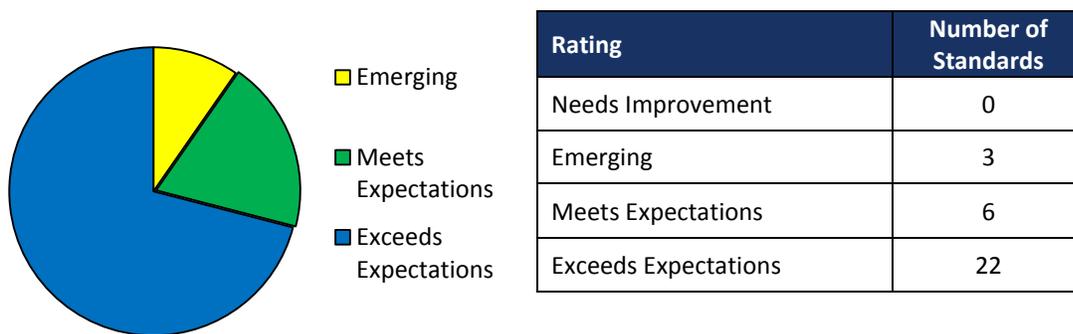
High Expectations, with an average rating of 2.39, was an environment with one of the lowest ratings of the seven environments. Many students were engaged in challenging activities and took responsibility for and were self-directed in their learning. Yet, the course work was not rigorous and very few higher-level questions were asked. Some of the essential questions that teachers had on their boards included such words as explain, compare and contrast, and analyze. However, the team observed limited use of such higher order questioning. In addition, students demonstrated limited ability to describe high quality work.

Digital Learning was the lowest rated environment at 1.75. There was technology equipment in most classrooms, but it was being used by students in only 44 percent of the classrooms observed. In those classrooms, some students were gathering information, conducting research, solving problems, and creating original works for learning. In approximately 37 percent of the classrooms, students were using technology in collaborative settings. Examples of student use of technology included such examples as graphing calculators in math classes and classroom sets of Chromebooks in English and foreign language classes. At the elementary level, technology was frequently used as one of the center assignments as students rotated from center to center.

In conclusion, the Engagement Review Team found well-managed and supportive learning environments throughout the system. The team found that classrooms had an atmosphere of mutual respect between students and teachers, as well as among students. Students demonstrated positive attitudes about learning and exhibited knowledge of classroom rules. Analysis of eleot® data coupled with interview polling results confirmed that differentiation, rigor and digital learning were areas needing improvement.

Findings

The chart below provides an overview of the institution ratings across the three Domains.

Rating	Number of Standards
Needs Improvement	0
Emerging	3
Meets Expectations	6
Exceeds Expectations	22

Powerful Practices

Powerful Practices reflect noteworthy observations and actions that have yielded clear results in student achievement or organizational effectiveness and are actions that exceed what is typically observed or expected in an institution.

Powerful Practice #1

The governing board is a cohesive and supportive unit that operates responsibly and clearly respects the autonomy of the administration to attain goals for student achievement and instructional growth, while effectively managing the day-to-day operations of the school system. (1.4, 1.5)

Primary Standard: 1.5

Evidence:
Evidence gathered through interviews with the superintendent, 35 system and school leaders, 33 parents, and 21 community members affirmed a caring and supportive governing body that embraces leadership and ensures autonomy so that all school leaders can operate effectively in their roles. One parent specifically stated, "We couldn't be in better hands," while other stakeholders specifically described the School Board as visible, trusting, and passionate. One stakeholder shared that board members are very approachable and always at school events. Others described the Board as a very cohesive board that is involved in budget priorities and taking care of the school system's resources. One comment from a stakeholder captured a strong theme about the board as he

stated, "There is an absolute genuine commitment to our children by Decatur's Board of Education."

The School Board is comprised of six elected officials, and experience ranges from two years to 19 years on the board. Interviews with internal and external stakeholders revealed the strong, cohesive bond between and among board members. The respect for and confidence in the board was evidenced by the passage of the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) in recent years to construct a high school and an elementary school. In addition, despite significant State austerity budget cuts in past years, the board had maintained financial stability and maintained budget reserves at 20 to 25 percent levels. When interviewed about the board's actions, one member stated, "We hire the superintendent. Everyone else answers to him." Another board member stated, "We do a good job of staying in our lane and letting administration and staff get the job done." A parent stated, "The Chairman of the Board of Education has such a professional way of conducting business. We are so fortunate. The depth and breadth of experience on our Decatur County Board of Education is phenomenal."

Powerful Practice #2
The superintendent and system administration are highly qualified, dedicated and visionary leaders who support and encourage collaboration and shared leadership, as well as fostering a caring culture that is consistent with the system's purpose and direction, to improve professional practices and organizational effectiveness. (1.6, 1.7, 1.10, 1.11)

Primary Standard: 1.11

Evidence:
The mission of Decatur County School System is "Excellence, Engagement, and Accountability for All". This mission had been branded over the past five years and was most often referred to as doing things "The Bearcat Way". It was communicated throughout the system from the top of the website to the top of the minds of teachers, administrators, and leaders in all that they do.

The superintendent and system leaders were seen as the catalysts that shape the culture of the system. "They lead by example," stated a stakeholder. "The superintendent is always asking why, and he is not accepting of the fact that it is how we have always done it. His directive is that we must do what is best for children," stated a system leader.

"Leadership from the instructional department at the system level is exceptional," stated an internal stakeholder. "They are supportive, highly visible in the schools, and lead the charge that positively impacts the educational efforts in the classroom and the entire system," stated another stakeholder.

Interviews and artifact reviews indicated that system leadership is focused on improvement and has a very structured support system that includes monthly reviews with principals, assistant principals, and lead teachers. The commitment to improving professional practices was also demonstrated through regularly scheduled instructional rounds with system and school leadership, as well as teacher level instructional rounds. Every 60 to 90 days, the system leadership conducts the short-term action plan review process to monitor the progress of the actions and goals at each school. In addition to the District Strategic Plan, there was a Curriculum and Instruction Strategic Plan that detailed the focus for each content area, as well as a commitment to increase the presence and effectiveness of instructional technology and digital literacy skills.

Staff repeatedly shared that collaboration and open communication, as modeled by the superintendent and system leadership, are norms of the school system. "We don't have to be pushed and pulled to get the job done. We are happy to march along together," shared a teacher. "Our commitment to Decatur Schools is personal," stated an employee who told of many returning to their home area to give back to the community who took care of them. "When you have strong, committed leaders, you want to give it your best," shared a teacher.

Powerful Practice #3
The school system has a well-documented, systematic continuous improvement process that includes a defined collaboration and input process. (1.1, 1.2, 1.3)

Primary Standard: 1.3

Evidence:
Artifacts and interviews provided a wealth of evidence of Decatur County School System's commitment to defining, maintaining and strategically pursuing continuous improvement. The continuous improvement process was firmly grounded in the unified mission of 'Excellence, Engagement, and Accountability for All' as community members, parents, instructional staff, support staff, and leadership at all levels engaged and participated in purposeful planning for organizational effectiveness and improvement.

The District Strategic Plan is monitored and evaluated annually by all stakeholders through Comprehensive Leadership Team meetings, community meetings, school leadership and system collaborative sessions, school level collaboration, parent surveys, staff and student surveys, and individual school opportunities that generate stakeholder feedback throughout the school year. The system and school comprehensive needs assessment process culminates in the spring of each year, followed by summer school improvement sessions that result in updated school and system-level improvement plans. These plans are then implemented using the short-term action plan process where improvement actions and goals are implemented and monitored in 60-90 day periods.

The review and improvement process was embedded in the culture of the school system. System leaders support and ensure that schools are collecting and reviewing data to support improvement. They monitor data trends and implementation practices via school visits, artifact reviews, and face-to-face meetings.

Based on interviews with 35 system and school leaders, the strengths of the school system are collaboration, goal setting, use of data, and effective implementation of Professional Learning Communities. Interviews with 48 teachers indicated that collaboration and Professional Learning Communities were the strengths of the school system. Eighty-five percent of the parents surveyed responded that the schools are doing everything they can to meet the needs of their children.

A strong piece of evidence regarding Decatur's commitment to continuous improvement was the system's review of the External Review Report from five years ago. Findings at that time included four Required Actions, and the system had successfully implemented three of the four actions to the level that some were now commendations. "We are never satisfied," shared an internal stakeholder. "We are always aiming for measurable results of improved student learning and professional practices."

Powerful Practice #4
The system effectively allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities. (3.1, 3.2, 3.8)

Primary Standard: 3.8

Evidence:
Training in funding areas with both system and school level personnel resulted in a better understanding of earnings and a clearer picture of needs versus wants for all Decatur County School System personnel. Concentrated training in master scheduling also supported maximum utilization of time and resources while better meeting the diverse needs of students. Strategic planning and collaborative conversations across all departments

and with building leadership allowed the system to maximize the allocated budgets. Strategic use of federal and local funds helped the system to increase the presence of technology, implement new core reading programs in grades 3-5, implement a literacy intervention program for grades 5-10, implement core resources for math in grades 6-8, and provide instructional technology software such as Odysseyware, ISTATION, ILEARN, Reading Inventory, and Moby Max to support classroom instruction. Instructional coaches and Lead Teachers were added to support the improvement of professional practices and to increase student achievement.

Additional grants were secured to focus on increasing access to technology and to train teachers and students to utilize and to improve digital literacy capabilities of students. Monies were also secured to fund School Resource Officers, safety modifications, and the connection of the communication system to the city and county emergency departments. Community partnerships funded a weekly Back Pack Buddy program that provides weekend and holiday meals for approximately 85 needy students. E-rate and ESPLOST budgets, along with local and federal allocations, had funded facilities improvements and increased bandwidth.

When the team asked about the Chief Financial Officer for the school system, a stakeholder responded, "He is not good. He is great." Records indicated a 20 to 25 percent fund balance in recent years. When students were interviewed, 45 of the 59 students shared, "I have everything I need to learn."

When teachers were interviewed, they were quick to note the strong professional learning opportunities that were provided to improve professional practices. Over 80 percent of the teachers listed Professional Learning Communities as their main source of professional learning. Attending conferences connected to areas of need was the second source of training mentioned by teachers. When PD Express, the management system for recording professional learning opportunities for staff, was reviewed, the team found 96 classes offered at the system level and 203 at the school level. Staff participation in these training opportunities was based on the evaluation results for an individual or student needs based on the analysis of test data. "We must support our teachers as they develop their skill set. We also continually re-tool Lead Teachers," stated a system leader.

Improvement Priorities

Improvement priorities are developed to enhance the capacity of the institution to reach a higher level of performance and reflect the areas identified by the Engagement Review Team to have the greatest impact on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

Improvement Priority #1
Develop and implement high expectations for all learning environments across the system to ensure more challenging, rigorous, and differentiated learning opportunities for all students. (2.1, 2.2)

Primary Standard: 2.2

Evidence:
When interviewed, the superintendent responded, "Having high expectations is our biggest challenge. We have to do more than talk about it. We must believe greatness exists in everyone. " Another leader shared, "We must prevent complacency."

Four non-negotiables had been developed by the system for teaching and learning. One of the four was to increase rigor and relevance. In reviewing the documentation for the instructional rounds, the team found specific topics related to the non-negotiables were emphasized each month. One month the areas of focus were the level and types of questions and large group versus small group instruction. Another month, the focus was on writing

across the curriculum and the difference between station teaching and true student collaboration. "If we want excellence, we must support teachers in improving their professional practices and hold students accountable for their learning," stated a system leader.

The team conducted 65 classroom observations using the eleot® tool in classrooms from kindergarten through grade 12. High Expectations Learning Environment was the second lowest rated environment with an average rating of 2.39. Areas needing improvement in this environment included level of rigor and tasks that required the use of higher order thinking. On occasion, students were asked to analyze, apply or synthesize but most of the observed student behaviors were at the factual and/or comprehension levels. The team observed limited examples of students being able to describe high quality work.

The average rating for Progress Monitoring Learning Environment was also at 2.39. The lowest component of Progress Monitoring was students understanding or being able to explain how their work was to be assessed. The average rating for that behavior was 1.97. In the Equitable Learning Environment, with an average rating of 2.54, differentiation was rated low at 1.98. Many of the observed lessons were whole group or small group with most of the students completing the same assignment. Digital Learning was rated the lowest of the seven environments with limited examples of students creating original works for learning, conducting research, or using technology to work collaboratively for learning.

When standardized test results were analyzed, most staff members were proud of the increase in graduation rate. Some mentioned the slight gains in SAT and ACT. Everyone stated that student achievement gains as measured by the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) were sporadic. "We are in the middle of the pack as compared to the school systems in our Regional Service Agency (RESA) area, but we want to be number one," stated the superintendent. Another leader stated, "We are continuously training and supporting staff to improve professional practices, but we have yet to make a significant impact on student learning."

Accreditation Recommendation and Index of Educational Quality™ (IEQ™)

The Engagement Review Team recommendsto the AdvancED Accreditation Commission that the institution earns the distinction of accreditation for a five-year term. AdvancED will review the results of the Engagement Review to make a final determination, including the appropriate next steps for the institution in response to these findings.

AdvancED provides the Index of Education Quality™ (IEQ™) as a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of standards and review criteria. A formative tool for improvement, it identifies areas of success as well as areas in need of focus. The IEQ is comprised of the Standards Diagnostic ratings from the three Domains: 1) Leadership Capacity; 2) Learning Capacity; and 3) Resource Capacity and the results of eleot classroom observations. The IEQ results are reported on a scale of 100 to 400 and provides information about how the institution is performing compared to expected criteria.

Institution IEQ	363.04

Conclusion Narrative

The team identified several pervasive themes that emerged during the time spent in the school system. It was obvious to the team that a strong sense of community and a 'family atmosphere' exist in the school system. Every person interviewed mentioned the spirit of collaboration and how it is such a joy to be a part of the caring culture in Decatur County School System. There is genuine care and concern for students. The existence of a sense of

pride and a commitment to shared values were heard repeatedly as an integral part of the success of the public schools in Decatur County.

The findings from the 65 classroom observations regarding a well-managed and supportive learning environment were indicative of the caring culture of the entire school system. The well-managed and supportive learning environments were observed in classrooms at all grade levels from kindergarten through high school. Students spoke and interacted respectfully with teachers and peers and readily followed classroom rules.

The strong, visionary leadership theme was characterized by the superintendent, as well as system-level administrators. They all have a clear direction and remain focused on the mission of the school system. The visionary leaders work well with the Board of Education, system and school staff, community members, and parents. The strong relationship between the governing body and the superintendent helps to create a caring culture that values collaboration and communication. The entire administrative team from the central office to the school level was characterized as a leadership team that works well together and is very accessible to stakeholders. The importance of building relationships was evidenced in all interviews with both internal and external stakeholders. In addition, the proactive and persistent communication efforts of the leadership team result in meaningful stakeholder involvement and a sense of pervasive ownership and investment from stakeholders and families.

The school system has maintained its finances and all other resources extremely well in recent years with a fund balance of 20 to 25 percent. Two schools have been constructed within the past ten years, and facilities plans include additional construction as funding becomes available. The technology infrastructure and equipment are modern and continuously updated. Such findings are indicative of an effective system that has a clear direction and stays focused on the mission of "Excellence, Engagement, and Accountability for All."

The themes of visionary leadership, commitment to shared values, a caring culture, a sense of pride and the importance of building relationships, a cohesive and supportive board, a clear focus on the mission, persistent communication efforts, community investment, and a genuine commitment to improve emerged during the review process. They permeate the entire school system and will be the forces that Decatur County School System can build upon to bring about student success and organizational effectiveness.

The system recognizes its challenges and has activities already planned in order to better focus on success for all students. Although the school system has enjoyed some success in graduation rate and student achievement, there is a documented need to provide more challenging, rigorous, and differentiated learning opportunities for all students. To address these challenges, the school system is implementing system-wide protocols to drive collaborative data usage to inform instruction, offering job embedded learning for all teachers, and implementing Professional Learning Communities at each school.

Using the Improvement Priority as a road map can form a foundation for growth and improvement. The Improvement Priority is the one thing that the team identified as preventing the school system from being as effective as it could be in meeting the system goal of continuous improvement. Fully implementing high expectations for all learning environments can have a major impact on improving student performance and system effectiveness. By addressing this identified action, the school system may enhance its capacity to reach a higher level of performance and find success for every student.

Next Steps

The results of the Engagement Review provide the next step to guide the improvement journey of the institution in their efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all learners. The findings are aligned to research-based criteria designed to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness. The feedback

provided in the Accreditation Engagement Review Report will assist the institution in reflecting on their current improvement efforts and to adapt and adjust their plans to continuously strive for improvement.

Upon receiving the Accreditation Engagement Review Report, the institution is encouraged to implement the following steps:
- Review and share the findings with stakeholders.
- Develop plans to address the Improvement Priorities identified by the Engagement Review Team.
- Use the findings and data from the report to guide and strengthen the institution's continuous improvement efforts.
- Celebrate the successes noted in the report
- Continue your Improvement Journey

Team Roster

The Engagement Review Teams are comprised of professionals with varied backgrounds and professional experiences. All Lead Evaluators and Engagement Review Team members complete AdvancED training and eleot® certification to provide knowledge and understanding of the AdvancED tools and processes. The following professionals served on the Engagement Review Team:

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Dr. Cheryl Allread, Lead Evaluator	Dr. Allread's career spans over 45 years. She retired from Marion County Schools in South Carolina after having taught math and science for 7 years, serving as principal for 11 years, as assistant superintendent for instruction for 11 years, and as district superintendent for 7 years. After retirement from 36 years working in Marion County, she began working as a consultant with the S.C. State Department of Education, serving as Liaison for low-performing schools/Palmetto Priority Schools. She also conducted academic audits, served as principal mentor, and served as a leadership coach in instructional supervision. Dr. Allread currently serves as Field Consultant for AdvancED in S.C. and works as Lead Evaluator for AdvancED in schools and systems across the United States and internationally, as well as continuing to work as a consultant with schools and systems in instructional supervision.
Dr. Sandra W. Nethels	Dr. Nethels is currently employed in Effingham County, Georgia, where she began her career in 1988. Her experiences include teaching kindergarten and first grade for 18 years prior to becoming an assistant principal at the secondary level. In 2012, she became the Special Programs Coordinator for the school system as she monitors Title I and Title II programs, as well as coordinating services for the homebound and hospitalized students of the district.
Mr. Mike Beasley	Mike Beasley's career in education spans over 21 years. He currently serves as Principal of Blackville-Hilda High School in South Carolina, as well as Athletic Director for Barnwell 19 School System. Prior to this position, Mr. Beasley taught physical education and served as the transportation director, coach, and administrative assistant. He has also been active with the state's athletic associations, as he has served as officer for the South Carolina Coaches Association, the South Carolina Athletic Administrators Association, the Coaching Association of Women's Sports, and the Class A Athletic Conference. In addition to his educational responsibilities, Mr. Beasley serves as Mayor of the town of Blackville, S.C.

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Dr. Phillip Brown	Dr. Phillip Brown currently serves as Principal of North Oconee High School in Georgia and has been in that position since 2011. Prior to this, he served as a middle school principal and assistant principal. Dr. Brown started his career as a middle school mathematics and science teacher. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Georgia and Bachelor's, Master's, and Educational Specialist degrees from Valdosta State University.
Mrs. Carole Cote	Mrs. Cote's 24-year educational career began as a first grade teacher in Oklahoma. Upon a military transfer to Myrtle Beach AFB, South Carolina, she worked for the Horry County Department of Social Services as a foster care case manager for 2 years. Transferring again with her military family, Mrs. Cote worked 3 years as a long-term substitute teacher in Virginia. In 1995, Mrs. Cote returned home to the Bibb County Schools in Macon, Georgia, where she has worked as a special education teacher at the Alternative School, elementary education teacher, teacher support specialist, grade level chairperson, school-level professional learning representative, assistant principal, and now as elementary school principal.

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AdvancED is a non-profit, non-partisan organization serving the largest community of education

professionals in the world. Founded on more than 100 years of work in continuous improvement,

AdvancED combines the knowledge and expertise of a research institute, the skills of a management

consulting firm and the passion of a grassroots movement for educational change to empower

Pre-K-12 schools and school systems to ensure that all learners realize their full potential.