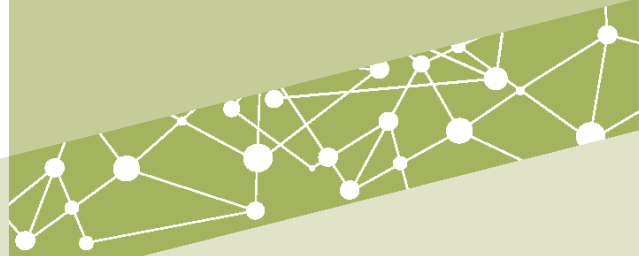**October 1-4, 2017**

AdvancED®
Engagement
Review Report

AdvancED® Performance Accreditation

Results for:

Gilmer County School System
134 Industrial Boulevard
Ellijay, Georgia 30540

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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
Board Members	5
Superintendent	1
Administrators	25
Instructional Staff	37
Support Staff	16
Students	71
Parents/Community Members	21
Total	176

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.	Meets Expectations
Implications from the analysis of data have been identified and used for the development of key strategic goals.	Meets Expectations
The institution demonstrates the capacity to implement their continuous improvement journey.	Emerging

Continuous Improvement Journey Narrative

The Engagement Review Team (Team) found numerous evidences to indicate the system's commitment to continuous improvement. Statements made during stakeholder interviews and staff presentations, a review of various artifacts and evidences and observations during school visits revealed that the system has established a systemic, systematic process to enhance continuous improvement. While sharing the Institution's Overview presentation, the superintendent provided a comprehensive report of the development and implementation of the strategic planning process. With the district having four superintendents in four years (prior to the new superintendent's appointment), staff indicated that feelings of instability, mistrust and isolation were prevalent. Stakeholders indicated that the advent of new leadership resulted in great optimism for the system, with various stakeholder groups assisting in the development of the strategic plan, including the vision, mission and belief statements.

Thus, the system has begun to move forward in its continuous improvement journey through the development and implementation of action plans to meet the five target areas of the strategic plan. The process was initiated in April of 2016, with Georgia Leadership Associates serving as facilitator. The planning process successfully engaged 66 stakeholders, including the superintendent, school and district level administrators, teachers, school governance team members, community members, parents, non-certified staff and students. The facilitator indicated that the Board's role was "to authorize, oversee and monitor the planning process." The Team found evidence of Board involvement through a strategic planning orientation session, presentations by staff during board work sessions, and a board retreat to discuss the proposed document prior to board-approval.

A review of numerous artifacts and evidences revealed that the system gathered and analyzed quality data to identify areas for improvement. The system identified the following five operational goal areas, assigning subcommittees for each one: (1) High Academic Achievement and Success for All; (2) Parent and Community Engagement; (3) High Performing Culture and Workforce; (4) Operational Effectiveness; and (5) Fiscal Accountability. The superintendent indicated that agendas for all meetings of all groups, systemically, were aligned to the five target areas of the strategic plan. Strategic plan reviews were conducted at each monthly meeting of administrators, with subcommittee chairs sharing updates.

The system recently conducted a comprehensive needs assessment and completed the 2017-2018 District Improvement Plan, as required by the Georgia Department of Education. The Team determined that both system and school leaders worked strategically and collaboratively to implement programs and strategies to achieve the established goals. The system's leaders instituted a systematic process for implementing and monitoring each goal area, thus enhancing the continuous improvement journey.

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.	Meets Expectations
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learners.	Meets Expectations
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.	Emerging
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.	Meets 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.	Emerging

Leadership Capacity Standards		Rating
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.	**Emerging**

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.	**Meets Expectations**
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.	**Needs Improvement**
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.	**Meets Expectations**
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is aligned to standards and best practices.	**Meets Expectations**
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.	**Exceeds Expectations**
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational future and career planning.	**Emerging**
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.	**Emerging**
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.	**Meets Expectations**
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.	**Exceeds Expectations**
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.	**Meets 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

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.	Meets Expectations
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.	Meets 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.	Meets Expectations
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.	Emerging
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.	Meets 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.	Meets 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.	Emerging
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.	Emerging

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	**51**
Environments	**Rating**
Equitable Learning Environment	2.75
Learners engage in differentiated learning opportunities and/or activities that meet their needs	2.35
Learners have equal access to classroom discussions, activities, resources, technology, and support	3.24
Learners are treated in a fair, clear and consistent manner	3.33
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	2.08
High Expectations Environment	2.71
Learners strive to meet or are able to articulate the high expectations established by themselves and/or the teacher	2.96
Learners engage in activities and learning that are challenging but attainable	2.88

eleot® Observations	
Total Number of eleot® Observations	**51**
Environments	**Rating**
Learners demonstrate and/or are able to describe high quality work	2.47
Learners engage in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks that require the use of higher order thinking (e.g., analyzing, applying, evaluating, synthesizing)	2.55
Learners take responsibility for and are self-directed in their learning	2.67
Supportive Learning Environment	3.13
Learners demonstrate a sense of community that is positive, cohesive, engaged, and purposeful	3.02
Learners take risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback)	3.02
Learners are supported by the teacher, their peers and/or other resources to understand content and accomplish tasks	3.16
Learners demonstrate a congenial and supportive relationship with their teacher	3.33
Active Learning Environment	2.66
Learners' discussions/dialogues/exchanges with each other and the teacher predominate	2.73
Learners make connections from content to real-life experiences	2.55
Learners are actively engaged in the learning activities	3.08
Learners collaborate with their peers to accomplish/complete projects, activities, tasks and/or assignments	2.29
Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment	2.50
Learners monitor their own learning progress or have mechanisms whereby their learning progress is monitored	2.22
Learners receive/respond to feedback (from teachers/peers/other resources) to improve understanding and/or revise work	2.90
Learners demonstrate and/or verbalize understanding of the lesson/content	2.94
Learners understand and/or are able to explain how their work is assessed	1.96
Well-Managed Learning Environment	3.06
Learners speak and interact respectfully with teacher(s) and each other	3.12
Learners demonstrate knowledge of and/or follow classroom rules and behavioral expectations and work well with others	3.18
Learners transition smoothly and efficiently from one activity to another	2.86
Learners use class time purposefully with minimal wasted time or disruptions	3.10
Digital Learning Environment	1.64
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	1.41
Learners use digital tools/technology to communicate and/or work collaboratively for learning	1.53

eleot® Narrative

The Engagement Review Team conducted 51 classroom observations using the eleot classroom observation tool. The system's overall average score was 2.68 on a four-point scale.

The Supportive Learning Environment received the highest average rating of 3.13. The Well-Managed Learning Environment placed second, with an average rating of 3.06. Ranking third was the Equitable Learning Environment, with a 2.75 average rating. The High Expectations Learning Environment ranked fourth, receiving an average rating of 2.71. The next highest rated area was the Active Learning Environment, receiving an average rating of 2.66. In sixth place was the Progress Monitoring and Feedback Learning Environment, receiving an average rating of 2.50. The Digital Learning Environment ranked seventh, with an average rating of 1.64.

The highest rated items were C4 and A3, both receiving an average rating of 3.33. Item C4 indicated, "learners demonstrated a congenial and supportive relationship with their teacher." Item A3 revealed that "learners are treated in a fair, clear and consistent manner." Items F1 and F2, receiving average ratings of 3.12 and 3.18 respectively, revealed that learners "speak and interact respectfully with teacher(s) and each other," and that they "demonstrate knowledge of and/or follow classroom rules and behavioral expectations and work well with others."

One of the lowest rated items was E4, with an average rating of 1.96. This rating revealed that students did not demonstrate an understanding of or the ability to explain how their work was assessed. Other items receiving low ratings included G1, with a 1.98 average rating, G2 with 1.41 and G3 with 1.53. Such ratings indicated that students had minimal opportunities to use digital tools and technology to gather and use information for learning; to conduct research and/or create original works; or to communicate and collaborate for learning. These results correlated with student inventory results, which indicated that less than 50 percent of students "used technology to complete assignments, such as researching, finding information, communicating and/or creating something new" in all classes.

The Team's findings revealed minimal opportunities for learners to engage in rigorous coursework, discussions or tasks requiring higher order thinking skills. In addition, the Team observed only a few instances in which students collaborated with their peers to complete projects and activities. Although students in some classes were seated in cooperative learning groups, they were not engaged in collaborative discussions with their peers. In some instances, discussions with group partners were discouraged to reduce the noise level in the classrooms. These findings coincided with student inventory results, which indicated that less than 50 percent of students "worked with other students in pairs or small groups" in all classes.

Students were observed using class time purposefully. They were actively engaged in the learning activities, had equal access to classroom activities and resources, demonstrated a positive sense of community and took risks without fear of negative feedback.

The eleot data confirmed statements shared during interviews and interview polls with various stakeholder groups, validating the caring, family environment referenced during interview sessions. Students were provided positive learning experiences by teachers who demonstrated support, care and concern for their success and well-being. Teachers worked collaboratively to enhance student achievement.

Findings

The chart below provides an overview of the institution ratings across the three Domains.
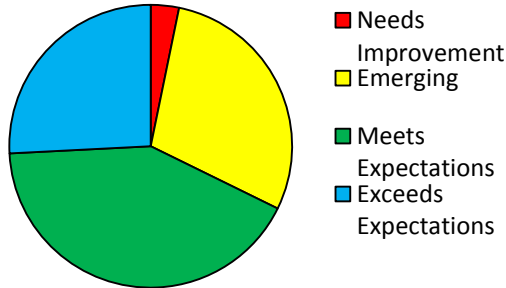
Rating	Number of Standards
Needs Improvement	1
Emerging	9
Meets Expectations	13
Exceeds Expectations	8

Legend for pie chart:
- Needs Improvement
- Emerging
- Meets Expectations
- Exceeds Expectations

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 system has a comprehensive strategic planning process in place that has created a shared commitment to student success.

Primary Standard:
1.8 Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.

Evidence:
Statements made during stakeholder interviews, presentations by staff, a review of the system's website and a review of the system's strategic plan revealed the development and implementation of a systemic focus and direction for the system. The system effectively engaged 66 stakeholders in the initial strategic planning process and during the annual review of the plan.   Agendas for school board meetings, cabinet meetings, principal and assistant principal meetings and school governance team meetings were all aligned to the five goal areas of the strategic plan. Interviewees indicated how this process reinforced the commitment and focus of staff, ensuring that the work was aligned to the vision.

Powerful Practice #2

The system has established a robust, systemic Professional Learning Communities (PLC) process to address the academic needs of all students.

Primary Standard:
2.7 Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learner's needs and the system's learning expectations.

Evidence:
A review of artifacts and multiple interviews with system and school administrators, teachers and students throughout the system revealed that the curriculum-based PLCs were well-embedded in a systematic process. Administrators and teachers systemically have incorporated procedures to enhance the academic rigor of

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instruction to increase student achievement and success.   The Team reviewed various documents indicating the actions taken to enhance the instructional program through the PLC process. The PLCs have provided the mechanism for teachers to meet, collaborate and analyze data to make well-informed curricular and instructional adjustments. The system's use of a universal screener, namely Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), and the iReady Adaptive Diagnostics for interventions confirmed the system's commitment to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to receive a high-quality education.

Opportunities for Improvement

Opportunities for Improvement are those actions that will guide and direct institutions to specific areas that are worthy of additional attention.

Opportunity for Improvement #1:
Evaluate, codify and publicize the outcomes for all goals included in the system's strategic plan.

Primary Standard:
1.3   The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.

Evidence:
The Team determined through stakeholder interviews, a review of artifacts, (including the strategic plan, MAP data, dual enrollment data, minutes of meetings and the system's Annual Report), and observations during school visits that the system instituted procedures to collect, analyze and utilize data in the development of the strategic plan. The Team also noted that the plan offered structure and a strong sense of purpose and direction for staff systemically. Although the system presented progress reports to internal stakeholders through subcommittee chairs on a regular basis, the Team found no evidence to support such reporting to all stakeholder groups. The Team concluded that documenting and reporting goal outcomes to all stakeholder groups will enhance the system's strategic planning process.

Opportunity for Improvement #2:
Develop and implement a comprehensive process to evaluate personnel services, as well as new programs, processes and protocols, ensuring that financial resources are budgeted and expended appropriately.

Primary Standard: 3.4
3.4   The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.
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.

Evidence:
A review of artifacts and evidences, (including the Charter Application, board policies, and the Employment Handbook), statements made during the Institution Overview presentation, and discussions during stakeholder interviews revealed that several new programs, processes and protocols were recently implemented. While the Team recognized that it is difficult to determine effectiveness and efficiency of programs and services in a year, the Team found no evidence of a comprehensive program evaluation process in place to provide trend data for decision-making.

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, implement, monitor and evaluate a formal structure where each student is well-known by an adult who can advocate for his/her educational experience.

Primary Standard: 2.4

2.4   The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.

2.8   The system provides programs and services for learners' educational future and career planning.

Evidence:

A review of the master schedules, statements during interview sessions and results of student inventories revealed the lack of a consistent systemic process for assigning adult mentors to students. Following multiple conversations with staff and students, the Team found that the high school offered an advisory program during the lunch block. However, the Team found little evidence through interviews and artifacts to show that all students systemwide had access to an adult advocate or mentor to ensure that their academic, social and emotional needs were being met. Some high school students shared that the advisory session was optional while others did not consider it beneficial.

Student inventories revealed that less than 50 percent of students (a) met or talked with an adult, other than their teachers, to help with learning needs; (b) used the services of the counseling office; or (c) explored and started to plan for college and/or career opportunities. Although counselors were available, students did not take advantage of their services. The Team found little evidence to indicate that students were encouraged to seek career counseling. The lack of an adult mentoring program further precluded students from developing meaningful relationships with adults who could assist them in setting goals and preparing for future careers.

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

The Engagement Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission that the institution earn 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	317.88

Conclusion Narrative

The Gilmer County School System has established a positive, caring culture while focusing on its mission of "Every Child, Every Opportunity, Every Day." When asked to provide one-word descriptors of the system, stakeholders responded with such terms as growing, caring, rural, passionate, exciting, team-oriented, community, family, supportive, enriching, genuine, dependable, reliable, living, empowering, supportive, developing, moving forward, positive, safe-haven, dynamic, learning, unified, focused, educating, encouraging, engaging, prescriptive, home, welcoming, quality, fair, sufficient, working, progressing and dedicated. Perhaps the most telling comment of all was, "I love coming to work!" The system has had numerous and varied challenges in the last few years and, as indicated by stakeholder descriptors, has experienced a paradigm shift in the last two years.

In 2014, the system was placed on "Advisement" status by AdvancED due to allegations of inappropriate board governance issues. The concerns were addressed and the system was subsequently moved to "Accreditation" status. Since that time, new board members have been elected and a new superintendent has been hired.

All board members were provided training, with each board member having an individual training plan. All board members participated in governance training offered by the Georgia School Boards Association as well as annual retreats for additional training to enhance the efficacy of the board. Board members also conducted self-assessments following each board meeting, a strategy to ensure accountability in performing their roles and responsibilities with fidelity. In addition, the superintendent and Board instituted a formal process to review board polices. The Team was informed that all board policies had been reviewed and revised within the last two years.

Although the Team determined that training was regularly provided for board members and that board members reviewed education law systematically at monthly board meetings, ratings from three observations of board meetings revealed ratings of "somewhat evident" for the statement, "The Board demonstrates knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities."   The ratings also indicated "somewhat evident" for the statement, "The Board demonstrates a thorough knowledge and understanding of policies and procedures."

Statements from various stakeholder groups confirmed that the superintendent has worked diligently with the Board to create a climate of transparency in all matters at all levels throughout the organization. The stakeholders exhibited an overall sense of community and positivity systemwide.

Several themes emerged during the Engagement Review. One focused on the numerous changes in leadership at both the school and district levels. Staff indicated that in addition to having four superintendents in four years, changes in school and system-level leadership also occurred. Stakeholders further shared how well the staffs collaborated, demonstrating more unity than in previous years. Another theme centered on the alignment of school and system improvement plans, enhancing the systemic focus on continuous improvement.

Strengths of the system included the visionary leadership of the superintendent; the variety of communication methods used with stakeholders; programs offered for leadership development; the community collaboration and partnerships established.

While there were many positive activities taking place, the Team identified several opportunities for growth. One such area was parental engagement. As system and school staff conducted the educational business of the system, active parental engagement was described as minimal. The Team was informed that while many parents attended sports activities, parents were often unable to attend other school functions, (such as parent-teacher conferences), due to a lack of transportation, work schedules, (with some working several jobs), and other personal matters.

Although the Team recognized the numerous strategies employed to enhance teaching and learning, increasing rigor in the instructional program was also considered a need. In addition to establishing formal Professional Learning Communities, the system implemented a universal screener to provide a mechanism for teachers to

collect student data for analysis and use. An extension period was created for kindergarten through eighth grades and has provided opportunities for students to receive remedial or enrichment skills based on their MAP scores. Four academic coaches were hired to support teachers with instructional planning and data analysis. However, the Team's eleot observation results indicated an overall average rating of 2.55 on a scale of 4.0 for item B4, which stated, "Learners engage in rigorous coursework, discussions, and/or tasks that require the use of higher order thinking (e.g., analyzing, applying, evaluating, synthesizing)."

The Team found that the Response to Intervention (RtI) process had not been employed at the high school level. The process was effectively implemented at both the elementary and middle schools, assisting teachers to better meet the academic needs of their students. The vertical alignment of the curriculum was also identified as an opportunity for growth.

Improving technology was a priority of the system, as evidenced by the provision of Chromebooks and interactive smart panels in classrooms; the progress made toward the 1:1 device initiative for students; the provision of technology specialists at all schools; and training offered for staff in the use of instructional technology. However, the Team's classroom observation results revealed limited use of available technology during instruction. The system has utilized technology to enhance communication with stakeholders.

Information shared during both the Institution Overview and the Improvement Journey presentations revealed that several newer programs, processes and protocols had been implemented over the past few years. The system explored all possible local, state and federal sources to provide services, programs and materials to foster student success and achievement. Flexible student schedules were designed to maximize quality based education (QBE) earnings while providing students remediation or acceleration opportunities. Personnel policies were developed to assist the system in recruiting, hiring and retaining highly qualified staff. The system has dedicated financial incentives to assist in recruiting and hiring bus drivers, as well as rewarding staff for excellent attendance.

Although the facilities were clean and well-maintained, the system faced the challenge of decreased student enrollment and increased costs of repairing aging buildings. Such issues were addressed in the system's five-year facilities plan. The system established a deadline of June 2018 for the identification of an upcoming ESPLOST campaign.

The Gilmer County School System has established strong partnerships with community agencies to develop and implement the comprehensive system and school safety plans; fund full-time resource officers at each school; and participate in reviewing and revising the system's vision, mission and belief statements. Community stakeholders expressed great pride in the schools, referring to them as the focal point of the community. Developing and sustaining relationships with all stakeholder groups was a primary focus for the system.

The Team found many positive programs and activities being implemented in the Gilmer County School System. System and school leaders are encouraged to continue to work collaboratively to realize their vision of "… developing lifelong learners who enrich their community …"

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. Rozalyne P. Wright **Lead Evaluator** 	Dr. Rozalyne P. Wright, Education and Diversity Consultant, earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Spanish from Bethune-Cookman College (University) in Daytona Beach, Florida; her master's degree in administration from the University of Tampa; and a doctorate in educational leadership from Nova Southeastern University. She began her educational career in 1972 as a classroom teacher at R. B. Cox Elementary School in Dade City, Florida. Her 17 years of experience at Cox Elementary School included classroom teacher, migrant language arts resource teacher, assistant principal, and principal. In 1989, she relocated to Highlands County, serving as coordinator of personnel and director of elementary and federal programs. In March 2001, she relocated to Naples, Florida, and served as director of diversity prior to assuming responsibilities as executive assistant to the superintendent for Collier County Schools. She retired from the Collier County School District in 2008 and, subsequently, established ZORAD Consultative Services, LLC. She has served on the Florida State SACS Committee and was the 2005 Florida recipient of the John M. Davis Distinguished Educational Achievement Award. Dr. Wright has conducted numerous and varied accreditation reviews and has supervised instructional and administrative interns for several universities. She currently serves as Lead Evaluator for school and system Engagement Reviews.

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Dr. Claire Miller **Associate Lead Evaluator** 	Dr. Claire Miller has served as a public school educator for 24 years. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy Studies with a concentration in Educational Leadership, a Master's in Educational Leadership, and a Bachelor of Science in Education. Dr. Miller is currently the Chief Academic Officer for Oconee County Schools. Her team is responsible for curriculum, instruction, assessment, academic support programs, professional learning, special education, federal programs, school improvement, technology, state reporting, athletics, student support services, and Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education. Prior to working in Oconee County Schools, she served as the Secondary Curriculum Director, Executive Curriculum Director, and Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning in Barrow County Schools. She also served as a building leader and classroom teacher. Dr. Miller has presented at national and state educational conferences and is active in professional organizations. She recently completed the Georgia Education Policy Fellowship Program and the Georgia Superintendent Professional Development Program. Dr. Miller currently serves as the Treasurer for the Georgia Association of Curriculum and Instructional Leaders and is also a Past-President of the organization. She has served on several accreditation reviews and is Vice-chair for the Georgia AdvancED Council.
Dr. Stephanie Luci Chattman 	Dr. Chattman has been dedicated to serving families for the past twenty-five years. She began her career in education as a special education teacher in the DeKalb County School District. She was named Teacher of the Year in 2009 at Hawthorne Elementary and was recognized for excellence in co-teaching by Georgia State University. She eventually decided to go into educational leadership because she wanted to be able to make a difference on a broader spectrum. Dr. Chattman was appointed assistant principal at Laurel Ridge Elementary in 2011 and served there for three years. She then received a promotion to become the principal at Evansdale Elementary in 2014. She has served the Evansdale community for the past three years where she manages a French Immersion program and an AdvancED STEM certified school-wide program. Dr. Chattman received her master's, specialist, and doctorate advanced degrees in Educational Leadership from Georgia State University. She has also previously served on AdvancED accreditation teams. Dr. Chattman is also a member of the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders and Georgia Association of Elementary Principals.

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
Mr. Gary Rivers	Mr. Gary Rivers has served in multiple educational capacities spanning his entire career with a love for teaching, encouraging and empowering students and teachers alike. He served as a secondary special education teacher and a special education transition coordinator for a combined five years. He also served as a middle school assistant principal for six years and an elementary school principal for six years. Presently, he is in his second year as a middle school principal. He had the opportunity to lead his school through the AdvancED process in 2013 and served in a leadership role on two other accreditation processes. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Marketing, a Master of Science in Education with concentration in Collaborative Special Education and an Educational Specialist (Ed. S.) in Educational Administration. In 2006, his school received the Alabama Attorney General's Safe School Award. His school was named a Council for Leaders of Alabama Schools (CLAS) Banner School in 2008 and 2014.
Dr. RaNae Fendley	Dr. RaNae Fendley is currently the Executive Director of Student Support Services for the Jasper County Charter System (JCCS), a position she has held for four years. Prior to her employment with JCCS, she served as Director of Student Services for Newton County Schools, Covington, GA, for 22 years. Dr. Fendley also serves as the Jasper County Family Connection Chairperson and the Coordinator for the county's Local Interagency Planning Team (LIPT). She received her bachelor's degree in community counseling, her master's degree in school counseling, and most recently, her doctorate in Educational Leadership from Georgia State University. She was the AdvancED coordinator for her district's review in May 2017, and also has experience as an AdvancED review team member.

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About AdvancED

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.