Report of the External Review

for

ACE Learning Centers

209 St. Louis Street

Florissant, MO, 63031
US

Dr. Gene Reynolds, President/Owner

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Introduction to the External Review

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

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

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

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

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

Part I: Findings

The Findings section presents the External Review Team's evaluation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators. It includes Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement identified by the External Review Team, as well as evaluations of Student Performance, the Learning Environment, Stakeholder Feedback and Assurances.

Accreditation Standards and Indicators

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

This section contains a detailed evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, identification of Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards (if appropriate), and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review team.

The AdvancED Standards and Indicators are the first of three primary areas of evaluation for AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. Using indicator-specific performance levels, the External Review Team evaluates the degree to which the institution meets each indicator on a scale of 1 to 4. The scores assigned to the indicators are averaged to arrive at a single score. This score, along with scores from evaluations of student performance and stakeholder feedback, will be used to determine the accreditation status of the institution.

Average Indicator Score for this Institution	3.03

Standard 1: The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

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

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

Standard 1			
The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	• Accreditation Report • Examples of communications to stakeholders about the school's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook) • Observations • Documentation or description of the process for creating the school's purpose including the role of stakeholders	3.0
1.2	The school's leadership and staff commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	• Interviews • Observations • Survey results • The school's statement of purpose • Accreditation Report • Parent testimonials	4.0
1.3	The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	• Observations • Survey results • Interviews • Accreditation Report • The school continuous improvement plan	3.0

Powerful Practices	*Indicator*

1. The school's leadership and staff are committed to excellence in achievement for all students.

    1.2

Students and parents in interviews and letters expressed an appreciation for the opportunities and guidance provided by teachers, directors, and the leadership team. ACE Learning Centers has provided hope for students who had explored all other avenues for a high school diploma. The learning centers are structured and learning expectations are clearly explained to parents and students prior to enrollment. All students complete a Career Planning Portfolio prior to graduation.   The Career Planning Portfolio includes an interest inventory, research of desired careers, and financial planning exercises. Students leave ACE prepared for the day after graduation.

Standard 2: The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.

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

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

Standard 2			
The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the school.	• Observations • Student handbooks • Governing body policies, procedures, and practices • Staff handbooks • Accreditation Report • Interviews	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	• Accreditation Report • Assurances, certifications • Interviews • Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies • Communications about program regulations • Observations • Governing code of ethics	3.0
2.3	The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	• Roles and responsibilities of school leadership • School improvement plan developed by the school • Accreditation Report • Stakeholder input and feedback • Maintenance of consistent academic oversight, planning, and resource allocation • Survey results regarding functions of the governing body • Observations • Agendas and minutes of meetings • Interviews	3.0
2.4	Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school's purpose and direction.	• Examples of collaboration and shared leadership • Observations • Interviews • Examples of decisions aligned with the school's statement of purpose • Accreditation Report • Examples of decisions in support of the school's continuous improvement plan	3.0
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.	• Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys • Communication plan • Accreditation Report • Observations • Interviews	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and student success.	• Accreditation Report • Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation • Supervision and evaluation documents with criteria for improving professional practice and student success noted • Observations • Job specific criteria • Representative supervision and evaluation reports • Interviews	3.0

Standard 3: The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.

A high-quality and effective educational system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership" (Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of quantifiable and intangible characteristics that include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The institution's curriculum and instructional program should develop learners' skills that lead them to think about the world in complex ways (Conley, 2007) and prepare them to have knowledge that extends beyond the academic areas. In order to achieve these goals, teachers must have pedagogical skills as well as content knowledge (Baumert, J., Kunter, M., Blum, W., Brunner, M., Voxx, T., Jordan, A., Klusmann, U., Krauss, S., Nuebrand, M., & Tsai, Y., 2010). The acquisition and refinement of teachers' pedagogical skills occur most effectively through collaboration and professional development. These are a "necessary approach to improving teacher quality" (Colbert, J., Brown, R., Choi, S., & Thomas, S., 2008). According to Marks, Louis, and Printy (2002), staff members who engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective institutions "supports teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

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

Standard 3
The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The school's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	• Survey results • Lesson plans • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Graduate follow-up surveys • Learning expectations for different courses • Course schedules • Course descriptions • Observations • Descriptions of instructional techniques	3.0
3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	• Curriculum guides • A description of the systematic review process for curriculum, instruction, and assessment • Observations • Common assessments • Surveys results • Interviews • Accreditation Report • Products – scope and sequence, curriculum maps • Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum	3.0
3.3	Teachers engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	• Agenda items addressing these strategies • Professional development focused on these strategies • Authentic assessments • Examples of teacher use of technology as an instructional resource • Interviews • Observations • Examples of student use of technology as a learning tool • Student work demonstrating the application of knowledge • Findings from supervisor walk-thrus and observations • Surveys results • Accreditation Report	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.4	School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	• Supervision and evaluation procedures • Observations • Surveys results • Interviews • Examples of improvements to instructional practices resulting from the evaluation process • Accreditation Report	3.0
3.5	Teachers participate in collaborative learning communities to improve instruction and student learning.	• Accreditation Report • Agendas and minutes of collaborative learning committees • Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings • Survey results • Observations • Interviews • Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration	3.0
3.6	Teachers implement the school's instructional process in support of student learning.	• Observations • Interviews • Examples of learning expectations and standards of performance • Accreditation Report • Survey results • Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the school's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	• Accreditation Report • Records of meetings and walk thrus/feedback sessions • Observations • Survey results • Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff • Descriptions and schedules of mentoring, coaching, and induction programs with references to school beliefs and values about teaching and learning • Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices • Interviews	2.0
3.8	The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress.	• Observations • Survey results • Interviews • Accreditation Report	3.0
3.9	The school has a formal structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.	• List of students matched to adult advocate • Accreditation Report • Survey results • Interviews • Observations • Curriculum and activities of formal adult advocate structure • Master schedule with time for formal adult advocate structure • Description of formal adult advocate structures	4.0
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	• Accreditation Report • Observations • Survey results • Interviews • Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	• Interviews • Survey results • Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs • Accreditation Report • Crosswalk between professional learning and school purpose and direction • Observations	3.0
3.12	The school provides and coordinates learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	• Observations • Interviews • Survey results • Accreditation Report • Data used to identify unique learning needs of students	3.0

Powerful Practices   *Indicator*

1. ACE Learning Centers have a formal structure where each student is known by one adult which promotes the purpose and mission of achievement, commitment, and excellence for all students.

   3.9

   Students and teachers build strong relationships with positive daily interaction which was extremely evident during observations in each ACE Learning Center. During students' interviews the question was asked if the student had a problem, who they would talk to in the Center. Every student answered, without hesitation, that their teacher was there to help and support them. Teachers, in their interviews, described the formal structure developed in all ACE Learning Centers for supporting the students' educational experience including the following artifacts: Bell Ringer Weekly Documents for academics, schedule and lesson planning, and attendance; weekly student/teacher meetings; weekly student reflection sheets, goal-setting with students, and progress contracts with students and parents. Low student/teacher ratios of 8:1 or better with the high school and 5:1 with the middle school allows teachers to provide quality instruction and support.

Standard 4: The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.

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

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

Standard 4			
The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.1	Qualified professional and support staff are sufficient in number to fulfill their roles and responsibilities necessary to support the school's purpose, direction, and the educational program.	• Observations • Survey results • Interviews • Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff • Accreditation Report • Assessments of staffing needs • Documentation of highly qualified staff	3.0
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.	• Accreditation Report • Survey results • School schedule • Interviews • School calendar	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.3	The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	• Observations • Survey results • Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements • Accreditation Report • Documentation of emergency procedures such as fire drills, evacuation and other emergency procedures. • System for maintenance requests	3.0
4.4	Students and school personnel use a range of media and information resources to support the school's educational programs.	• Interviews • Accreditation Report • Survey results • Observations • Data on media and information resources available to students and staff	3.0
4.5	The technology infrastructure supports the school's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	• Technology plan and budget to improve technology services and infrastructure • Observations • Survey results • Interviews	3.0
4.6	The school provides support services to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	• Survey results • Schedule of family services, e.g., parent classes, survival skills • Accreditation Report • Interviews • Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education • List of support services available to students • Observations	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.7	The school provides services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	• List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning • Observations • Accreditation Report • Survey results • Description of IEP process • Interviews • Description of referral process	3.0

Opportunities for Improvement   *Indicator*

1. Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.   4.2

    Both students and teachers indicated in interviews that the presence of a single interactive white board or even a digital projector would greatly enhance the small group sessions. During observations at one site, students could be seen gathered around a single laptop computer viewing examples when the example could have easily been projected onto one of the walls of the conference room. Also, teachers scribbled information on white boards which they had to continually erase, when those same examples could be captured, saved, and uploaded for students to use at their terminals later with any simple interactive white-board software program. It is the recommendation of the review team that ACE investigate the viability and associated costs of adding an interactive white board (or a projector at the least) to each of its school sites.

2. The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.   4.3

    Though the sites were generally clean and well maintained, the fact that each site had only one restroom servicing as many as 80 students per day (not including staff) represented an opportunity for improvement. In addition, one of the school sites had considerable concerns in regards to safety, health, and cleanliness. Staff at that site reported being responsible for cleaning their facility. It is the recommendation of the review team that ACE investigate the costs associated with adding a second restroom to each site. Further, the review team recommends that ACE either investigate the viability of hiring a professional cleaning agency, or that ACE clarify procedures and practices involved in cleaning and sanitizing the school sites at the end of the school day.

Standard 5: The school implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.

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

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

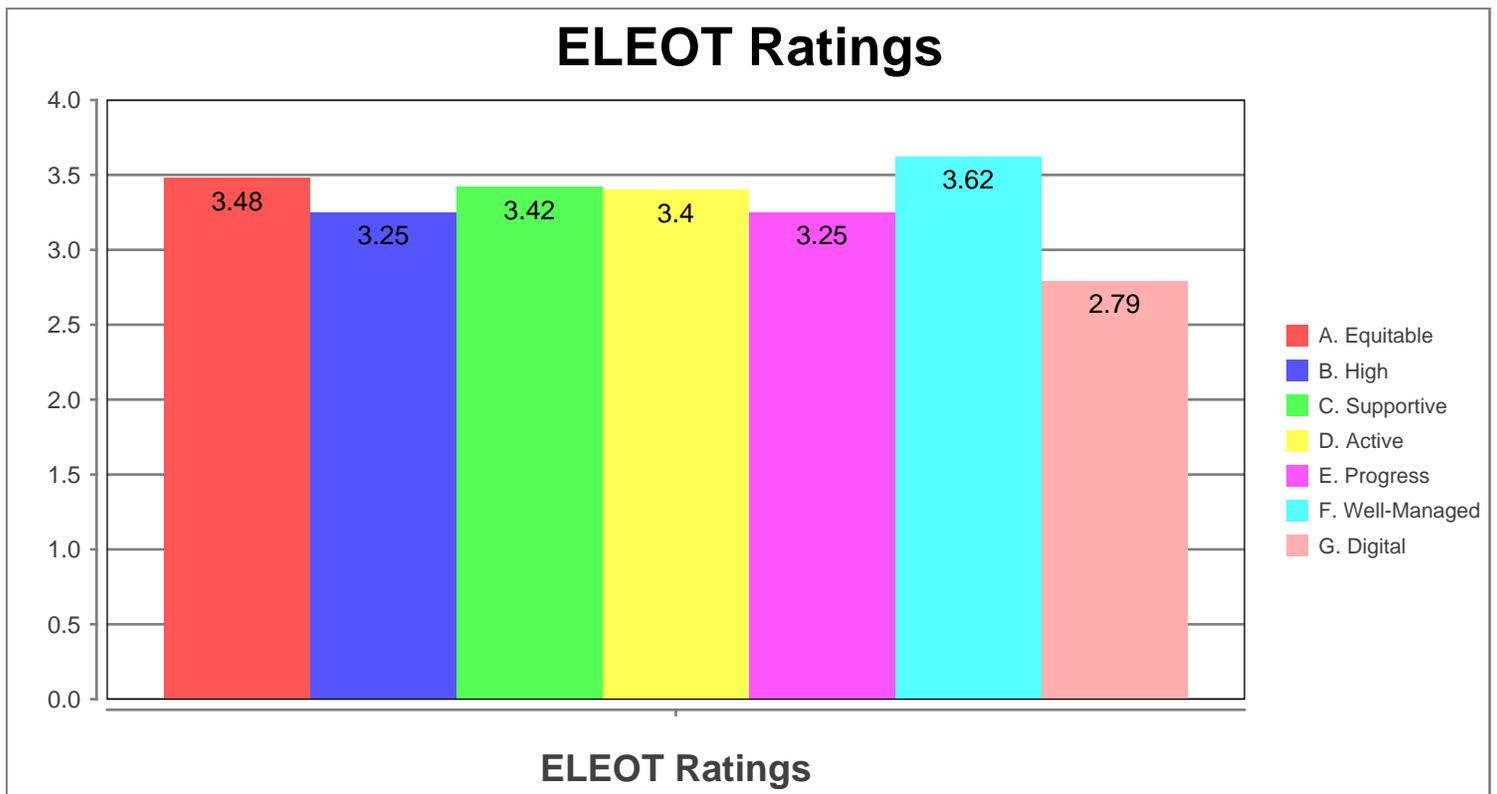| Standard 5			
The school implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.			
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.1	The school establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	- Accreditation Report - Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols - Observations - Survey results - Interviews - Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local assessments on student learning and school performance - Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze, and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions.	• Survey results • Interviews • Written protocols and procedures for data collection and analysis • Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning • Observations • List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning • Accreditation Report	3.0
5.3	Professional and support staff are trained in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data.	• Policies specific to data training • Interviews • Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data • Documentation of attendance and training related to data use • Survey results • Observations • Accreditation Report • Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
5.4	The school engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	• Student surveys • Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data • Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning • Accreditation Report • Examples of use of results to evaluate continuous improvement action plans • Evidence of student readiness for the next level • Evidence of student growth • Observations • Evidence of student success at the next level • Interviews	3.0
5.5	Leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.	• Observations • Minutes of board meetings regarding achievement of student learning goals • Communication plan regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders • Survey results • Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals • Accreditation Report • Executive summaries of student learning reports to stakeholder groups • Interviews	3.0

Learning Environment

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

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External Review Team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a four-point scale. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the seven learning environments included in ELEOT.

ELEOT Ratings

Environment	Rating
A. Equitable	3.48
B. High	3.25
C. Supportive	3.42
D. Active	3.4
E. Progress	3.25
F. Well-Managed	3.62
G. Digital	2.79

ELEOT Ratings

Student Performance

Student Performance on assessments is the second of three primary areas of evaluation for AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. Institutions are asked to collect and analyze student performance data, then submit the data and the analyses to the External Review Team for review. The External Review Team evaluates the quality of the assessments used by the institution, the degree to which the institution properly administered the assessments, analyzed and acted on the results, and the overall performance of students using a set of rubrics. The scale is from 1 (low performing) to 4 (high performing). Results of that evaluation are reported below.

Student Performance Evaluation	
Evaluative Criteria	Performance Level
Assessment Quality	3.0
Test Administration	4.0
Quality of Learning	3.0
Equity of Learning	3.0

Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholder Feedback is the third of three primary areas of evaluation in AdvancED's Performance Accreditation model. The AdvancED surveys are directly correlated to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators; they provide not only direct information about stakeholder satisfaction but also become a source of data for triangulation by the External Review Team as it evaluates indicators.

Institutions are asked to collect and analyze stakeholder feedback data, then submit the data and the analyses to the External Review Team for review. The External Review Team evaluates the quality of the administration of the surveys by institution and the degree to which the institution analyzed and acted on the results. The scale is from 1 (low performing) to 4 (high performing). Results of that evaluation are reported below.

Stakeholder Feedback Evaluation	
Evaluative Criteria	Performance Level
Questionnaire Administration	4.0
Stakeholder Feedback Results and Analysis	3.0

Part II: Conclusion

Summary of the External Review

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

ACE Learning Centers, located in Florissant, Missouri, hosted the AdvancED External Review on April 2-3, 2014. ACE Learning Centers provide students who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school an alternative path to receive a high school diploma.   ACE provides educational programs for middle school and high school students who have not been successful in the traditional classroom environment. The organization has 12 centers serving students from at least 6 school districts.

The Educational Leadership Team of ACE Learning Centers welcomed the AdvancED External Review Team with hospitality and kindness for the duration of the visit. The organization was well prepared for the External Review. Artifacts were available on a flash drive and some key documents and professional development materials were available for review in the team workroom.

The External Review Team conducted interviews with 5 parents, 27 students, 6 support staff, 18 teachers, and 7 administrators.   Interviews supported information provided to the team in the self-assessment and the artifacts. Parents expressed a great appreciation for the opportunities that the ACE program has provided for students.

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

ACE Learning Centers provide a personalized, technology-rich learning program for the non-traditional middle school or high school student. As explained in the Executive Summary, the senior graduation rate for 2012-2013 was 86% with 400 of the 465 students graduating. Also stated, the total number of students successfully completing the school year at ACE for 2001-2013 was 11,235 out of a total of 12,472 students participating in the program for a 90% completion rate. ACE Learning Centers are meeting and exceeding the expectations of Standard 3 as indicated by the high percentage graduation rate and completion rate.

The ACE Learning Centers formal structure where all school personnel establish long-term interactions with individual students promotes the success of each student. The evidence of this structure was implicated in the Executive Summary; the Self-Assessment, the Student Surveys, during student interviews, during teacher interviews, and during observations in every Center. External Review Team members witnessed this structure being implemented upon entering each Center. A positive culture was created by all teachers and directors personally greeting students and performing a systematic check-in. Consistent routines and practices were evident throughout each session and in all Centers. The ACE Centers Daily Staff Responsibilities artifact outlined these procedures and these were effectively implemented in all Centers.

With the addition this year of the formal assessments Star Reading, Star Math, and Reading Plus, teachers and directors stated during their interviews and in observations at the Centers, that they now are able to accurately

determine each student's level and abilities and then able to prepare a differentiated and individualized learning program for each student.

The blended instructional model of Computer-Aided Instruction and Teacher-Led Instruction provides students with an individualized and a collaborative learning experience. During classroom observations, students were seen working independently with teachers as facilitators. At each session, a small group of students were interacting collaboratively with a teacher. This Collaborative Community Center had the learning expectation posted, "I do, We do, and You do." All students were actively participating in the lesson.

During a student interview, the student was asked why they liked attending ACE Learning Center. The student's response was, "I feel I am more responsible for my learning!" What a true testament for the exceptional educational program at ACE Learning Centers.

ACE Learning Centers have resources and provide services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students. They are able to accomplish that in many ways. They have highly qualified professional and support staff members at each site. Their resource allocation is sufficient to support the learning program, and their facilities meet or exceed standards for safety and cleanliness. The schools have a solid technological infrastructure base. Students and teachers have access to a wide range of media and information through multiple avenues. The schools tend to the affective needs of students through not only formal counseling support, but also through a structure and practices that emphasize individualization and maximize one-on-one opportunities between students and teachers.

ACE reported a staff-to-student ratio of 6:1, which the review team was able to confirm during their observations at the school sites. According to official documents, ACE currently has almost 800 students enrolled and has 44 certified staff members. Each site observed had 4-6 certified staff members on hand, with anywhere from 10-25 students per three-hour session. Instructional time at the sites was focused on high quality instruction and self-directed learning. Each student at each site possessed an ACE folder which contained a syllabus. The syllabus had their course goals for the entire semester, and was developed in cooperation with the student and the counseling department at each student's home school. As the student progresses, the teacher to whom the student is assigned tracks their progress in their folder. In addition, the student has access to the information in their ACE folder through their computer terminal dashboard, as well as online access to the information. Students without computer access outside of school can download and print any work to be taken with them and completed outside of school.

The school sites maintain clean, healthy, and physically safe environments for teaching and learning. Each site keeps maintenance and inspection logs within their CAB (Center Accountability Binder), emergency drill log, and have clearly adopted emergency operations practices (adopted from the Hazelwood School District-February 2013). Schools have a broad technological framework at the heart of their teaching and learning processes. Each site has 25-30 computer terminals shared by as many as 3 students (one during each session). These computers are procured for the sites by the central office and maintained on a regular schedule. Site directors utilize the Podio online tech support request process, but also have the ability to call and request the roving IT support technician by phone. The site directors are responsible for procuring necessary physical resources, and teachers report in interviews getting virtually any resource they ask for (though they reported minimal needs). Teachers also consistently reported in interviews utilizing online resources to support their lesson plan development. Resources

obtained from the home districts were present at all sites. In addition, surveys indicated that stakeholders felt students and teachers had substantive access to a range of media and information resources.

By nature, structure, policy, and practice ACE provides support services to students through a variety of means for a variety of purposes. For example, through ongoing professional development staff are trained how to recognize and de-escalate students in crisis during CPI training. Staff were observed to be very attuned to the emotional state of their students, and willing to meet them at their point of need. Students consistently reported that staff were quick to respond to their emotional needs, and most quickly named an adult who they trusted and would go to in a crisis. Those who had yet to develop those relationships with staff still consistently reported that they knew and believed the teachers were there to help them. This one-to-one responsive support was observed in action at every site evidenced by staff circulating, sitting with students for extended periods, and working extensively with students in small groups. Each school had a counselor. Outside agencies, such as Parents As Teachers, are also able to observe and work on-site with students. A Special School District teacher from each represented home school circulates to all of the ACE Centers to provide services for students who need IEPs.

Survey data, observations, interviews, and official documents all made clear that ACE provides the resources and services to support their goals of commitment to excellence and achievement. ACE gave itself a "Level 3" in its self assessment, and the review team, based on the evidence gathered, was able to confirm that rating.

The ACE Learning community exemplifies the best practices in the concept of continuous improvement within the educational climate of its learning centers. They demonstrated a number of exemplary practices in Alternative Education. It is interesting to note that the themes of emphasis in their program mirror the standards of AdvancED in many facets of their practices. ACE (Achievement, Commitment, Excellence) is the core function of this educational community.

The commitment of ACE Learning Centers to provide a comprehensive assessment system is documented in reviewing the Student Assessment Data Workbook, the Student Performance Matrix, and a monthly Composite Report. In addition to these documents, each site location has a Center Accountability Binder (CAB) that serves as a focal point for data collection and analysis. Data relevant to the ACE Three A's: Achievement, Attendance, and Attitude are compiled and reviewed on a biweekly basis by team members. This binder was examined at four locations visited by the External Review Team Member responsible for Standard 5.

It was noted that ACE recently hosted Student-Led Conferences, with 91% of parents attending their child's conference. In a traditional secondary school this percentage of attendance in parent conferences would be unusual, especially with low-achieving students.

Self reflection based on current data by students is certainly a valid assessment of progress of the program. As the average attendance at ACE is three semesters with a retention rate of 25%, the normal concepts of assessments may not be as applicable for this educational community. As one parent shared regarding the Student-Led Conference (assessment), "It showed me that she was taking ownership of her education and behavior."

It should also be noted that reports are broken down by representative districts within the ACE Learning community. A separate report of student progress is prepared for each participating district. The cooperation of the participating districts provides evidence of the excellent collaborations fostered by ACE Learning Centers. A

number of the participating school districts were represented during the interviews and expressed supporting comments regarding the assessment of students from their respective districts.

One of the main themes of this community is the one-on-one approach to the academic milieu of the centers. While educators continue to search for the "silver bullet" of successful strategies in working with alternative students, the personalized approach of one-on-one, small groups (3-4), computer-aided instruction, and promoting a positive culture within the centers has served this educational endeavor very well. The External Review Team members during their visits observed positive environments and "business-like" climates at seven of the ACE Learning Centers locations. External Review Team members shared comments regarding the consistency of the culture of the seven locations. The ACE Learning Center community has removed the "drama" of the traditional secondary culture and instilled an achievement-driven environment.

ACE Learning Centers has been a "work in progress" since its inception in 2001. The concept of continuous improvement is a part of the fiber of this educational venture. Their efforts of improvement are well documented. They included meeting minutes, progress reports, graphical representations, surveys, and quality interviews with staff members. The leadership is both visionary and practical as they move ahead. This is an organization that has a very collegial leadership team and their collaborative work is greater than the sum of the efforts of individual team members.

As they look to the future, they have implemented a new software program (A+) in all of their centers this school year. Computers are being replaced to better accommodate the program and provide access to students on their home computers. They are evaluating their present professional development program for teachers with some changes in mind for more effective results. They are also exploring additional opportunities for expansion of the present program with participating districts and exploring additional districts while maintaining their present template (small storefront facilities). They want to continue to do what they do best with a proven format of success.

As the school moves forward in continuous improvement and refinement of the program, the following opportunities should be explored:

- Explore the enhancement of communication via the addition of a parent portal.
- Create a more positive perception of the ACE Learning Centers with the greater community that does not have any idea of the scope of the program.
- Continue the emphasis on data interpretation in professional development.

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

The External Review Team conducted 16 observations utilizing the Effective Learning Environment Observation Tool (ELEOT). ACE classrooms are technology based with small group instruction conducted by one teacher while another instructor monitors and helps students working on computer-based course work. The ratings for classroom observations are as follows: Equitable Learning Environment 3.48, High Expectation Environment 3.25, Supportive

Learning Environment 3.42, Active Learning Environment 3.40, Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment 3.25, Well-Managed Learning Environment 3.62, Digital Learning Environment 2.79.

The External Review Team observed a structured and consistent learning environment in the 7 centers observed during the review. Students were on task and engaged in their learning. Structures were in place to ensure that transitions were smooth and students guided their own learning.

In the past, accreditation reviews resulted in an accreditation recommendation on status. Labels such as advised, warned, probation, or all clear were used to describe the status of an institution relative to the criteria. Beginning with school year, 2013-14, AdvancED is introducing a new framework to describe the result of an accreditation review. Consistent with the modern focus of accreditation on continuous improvement with an emphasis on student success, AdvancED introduces an innovative and state-of-the-art framework for diagnosing and revealing institutional performance called the Index of Education Quality (IEQ). The IEQ is comprised of three domains of performance: 1) the impact of teaching and learning on student performance; 2) the leadership capacity to govern; and 3) use of resources to support and optimize learning. Therefore, your institution will no longer receive an accreditation status. Instead, your institution will be accredited with an IEQ score. In the case where an institution is failing to meet established criteria, the accreditation will be under review thereby requiring frequent monitoring.

The three domains of performance are derived from the AdvancED Standards and Indicators; the Analysis of Student Performance; and the Engagement and Involvement of Stakeholders. Within each domain institutions will be able to connect to the individual performance levels that are applied in support of the AdvancED Standards and evaluative criteria. Within the performance levels are detailed descriptors that can be a valuable source of guidance for continuous improvement. Upon review of the findings in this report, institutional leaders should work with their staff to review and understand the evidence and rationale for each Required Action as well as the corresponding pathway to improvement described in the performance levels of the selected Indicator.

The IEQ provides a new framework that recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement. Your institution's IEQ is the starting point for continuous improvement. Your actions for improvement that have a positive impact will be reflected in your IEQ score.

IEQ Institutional Score: 308

Teaching and Learning Impact: 305
(Standards 3 and 5, Student Performance Criteria)

Leadership Capacity: 318
(Standards 1 and 2, Stakeholder Feedback Criteria)

Resource Utilization: 300
(Standard 4)

The External Review Team recommends that ACE Learning Centers be accredited by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission for a five-year term of accreditation.

Required Action

1. Enhance the mentoring program to provide ongoing support for all new teachers.

    Related Indicator or Assurance: 3.7

    Description:
    The mentoring program should include ongoing support that provides regular communication, direction, and orientation of the policies and procedures of ACE.

    The program should also include a process that monitors professional growth and protects the integrity of ACE's teaching and learning practices.

Part III: Addenda

The External Review Team

Lead Evaluator:
Dr. Tina R Woolsey

Team Member:
Ms. Lynn Becker

Mr. Paul Crisler

Bilal Ewing

Next Steps

The institution should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the Powerful Practices section to maximize their impact on the institution.
3. Develop action plans to address the Required Actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward addressing the Required Actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
5. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Required Actions. Institutions are required to respond to all Required Actions. The Required Actions should be completed before the Accreditation Progress Report is submitted. The report will be reviewed at the appropriate state, national, and/or international levels to monitor and ensure that the system has implemented the necessary actions to complete the Required Actions. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the completion of the Required Actions and the resulting improvement.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Celebrating Accreditation

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

About AdvancED

In 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), both founded in 1895, and the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form AdvancED: one strong, unified organization dedicated to education quality. In 2011, the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) that was founded in 1917 joined NCA CASI and SACS CASI as part of AdvancED. AdvancED is the world's largest education community, representing 30,000 public and private schools and systems across the United States and in 75 countries worldwide and educating 16 million students.

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

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