

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Brighton Area Schools**

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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), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

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About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

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

In 2006, NCA CASI, SACS CASI, and the research and development arm of the accrediting associations, the National Study of School Evaluation, unified to form AdvancED. Dedicated to advancing excellence in education, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 23,000 schools in 65 countries, serving 15 million students.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help schools, school districts, and educational service agencies continuously improve.

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

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

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school district community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help school districts and their schools maximize student success and improve organizational effectiveness

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions. The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the required actions. Following the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, the school district must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress it has made on the team's required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district is addressing the required actions.

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

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the NCA CASI Michigan State Office (NCA-CASI-MI), a division of AdvancED, visited Brighton Area Schools on 05/02/2010 - 05/05/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 25 administrators, 103 teachers, 22 support staff, 54 parents and business partners, 83 students, and 5 Board of Education members for a total of 292 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 8 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documenting and Using Results
5. Resource and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Through its examination of the school district's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team prepared reports on each standard, highlighting strengths and suggestions for improvement specific to each standard. These reports can be found following this summary.

The Quality Assurance Review Team also examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team's findings in this area can be found following the standard reports.

The team used the standard reports and quality assurance findings to identify common themes, significant accomplishments, and pressing needs facing the district. These became the basis for the overall commendations and required actions that are provided below. The commendations and required actions should serve as the focus for the district as it acts on the team's findings. They represent the areas that the team believes will have the greatest impact in helping the district further its improvement efforts. The standard reports and quality assurance findings can be used to help reinforce and enrich the district's understanding of the commendations and required actions.

Commendations

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

- **District personnel at all levels make Brighton Area Schools a "destination district" in that it has the reputation as the place to be.**

The Superintendent of Schools is committed to leading the district through the current financial crisis while maintaining the integrity of the instructional programming for students and is supported by an experienced, professional Board. Caring and dedicated staff members at all levels of the district are committed to meeting the academic and personal needs of every student to create a sense of safety, security, and belonging for the respectful, self-motivated students who are focused on learning.

As a result, the level of stakeholder support and pride in the schools and its students is exemplary.

- **The academic performance of students is a result of the high expectations from parents, teachers, and administration that focuses on student learning.**

All stakeholder groups expressed their desire or expectation for students to do well in school, both academically and personally in the areas of clubs, sports, or other extra-curricular activities. The display of student work throughout the buildings clearly demonstrates the higher-order thinking skills and hands-on activities that students are engaged in doing. Students commented that these kind of learning activities are the most interesting to them.

High expectations and support from all levels of the district and the community have resulted in very high levels of student achievement and spotlights the long-standing reputation of the district.

Required Actions

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall effectiveness of the school district. The Brighton Area Schools will be held accountable for making progress on each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school district will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions. The district should refer to the detail provided in the standard reports for guidance and greater depth on the required actions.

- **Implement a comprehensive technology plan to address the infrastructure, hardware, software, and professional development needs of staff to meet the 21st Century learning needs of students.**

Interviews with district-level and build-level staff, as well as parents and students, confirm that the availability and use of technology in the classrooms as an instructional tool is woefully inadequate. The infrastructure is outdated and unable to support the hardware necessary to run the software programs for student learning. The Quality Assurance Review Team saw little hardware and scant use of technology in any classroom throughout the district.

To fulfill the district's mission statement of preparing Brighton students for the "global community" they will be entering following graduation, a concerted effort and comprehensive plan is needed to ensure that students are taught the critical technology skills necessary to be competent and successful competitors when they enter the global society and workforce.

- **Develop, implement, and monitor a systematic district-wide approach as part of the Board of Education's five-year plan to address: Response to Intervention, implementation and evaluation of programs and initiatives, professional development, School Improvement Plans, and the systemic use of data at the classroom level.**

Although all of these are currently in place, they are not consistently implemented and monitored in a way that will move the district forward from simply being a good, strong district to a truly great one. As Jim Collins says in his book *Good to Great*: "Good is the enemy of great!"

The systemic use of student performance data at the classroom level to inform instruction and intervention strategies is critical to increasing student achievement.

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

Next Steps

The school district should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.
3. Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school district's efforts to improve student performance and district effectiveness.
5. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork, provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help school districts and their schools with continuous improvement.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED

for review and action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school district. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school district should celebrate its achievement with the community. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and other related items can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

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

Standards for Accreditation

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

The Quality Assurance Review Team divided into standard teams to review each standard and prepare a standards report summarizing the team's findings. These standard reports, along with the quality assurance findings that follow these reports, provided the basis for the team's identification of over-arching commendations and required actions presented earlier in this report. The reports submitted by each team are provided on the following pages for the district's review and use. Each report reflects its respective team's unique voice, perspective, and deliberations. The reports can be used to help enrich and deepen the district's understanding of the overall commendations and required actions.

Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

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

Description:

"Learning for Life" is the current district vision statement for the Brighton Area Schools (BAS). The district mission statement is: "Each Brighton graduate is prepared as a lifelong learner to use academic and life skills to be self-sufficient, resourceful, an effective communicator and a productive citizen who contributes to our democratic society within a global community." This mission statement operationalizes the vision statement. The schools' mission statements were evident in all buildings. They were also displayed on the schools' websites, parent newsletters, and staff agendas. There is evidence that mission statements were reviewed or revised at the building level to ensure that they remain appropriate and timely for individual buildings.

The Brighton Area Schools has plans to engage in a new five-year strategic planning process beginning in the 2010-2011 school year. The current district vision statement was developed in the 1993-1994 school year. Given the fact that there has been considerable turnover in all central office positions, Brighton Area Schools is using this opportunity to reflect and possibly re-energize itself to provide excellent learning opportunities, as well as position itself for the future in spite of the financial challenges the district is currently facing.

Although each school has the required School Improvement Plan in place, the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) Team heard numerous examples during the visit that staff members are not able to explain the goals or contents of the plans. The plans are not living documents with everyone knowledgeable enough to work together as a team to achieve the goals and improve their schools.

The district has begun the process of engaging all stakeholder groups to commit to a shared purpose and direction that focuses on assessing student performance and system-wide effectiveness. Programs such as Data for Student Success (Data4SS) and Data Director are being used to collect and analyze student achievement data. Data results need to be shared in systematic ways with stakeholders throughout the

system to impact instruction at the classroom level.

The intervention programs that are in place to better meet the needs of all students include: Response to Intervention, a new delivery model for special education services, the Reading Apprenticeship Program, and Readers and Writers Workshops.

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

- The Quality Assurance Review Team noted the high level of pride for the district and its students in all stakeholder groups.
- There is a renewed focus on data analysis to increase student achievement.
- Interventions have been implemented to address student needs.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Complete the development and implementation of the five-year strategic plan for Brighton Area Schools.
- Develop a systemic approach to a district identify, as opposed to separate and independent school identities.
- Ensure that staff at all levels are involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring of the School Improvement Plan for their school so that everyone is knowledgeable and working to meet the plan's goals.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Emerging," indicating that the Brighton Area Schools has not met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

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

Description:

During challenging financial times, the conscientious leaders who compose Brighton's Board of Education have selected a new central office leadership team to "survey the damage and forge ahead," as one elementary teacher told the QAR Team. Through the Board's support of difficult decisions made by the Superintendent of Schools, they have reaffirmed their choice of a school leader and their faith in his decision-making ability. The Board has also openly acknowledged their need for continual improvement and, as a result, the Superintendent's plan for an upcoming Board retreat is a welcomed opportunity for the professional development of the Board.

The Superintendent's organizational skills are demonstrated by the district's organizational chart and his on-going efforts to re-organize and restructure the district to maximize resources in order to best serve the students. The district's leadership team also has clearly defined roles, expressed during their interviews with the QAR Team, that are essential to moving the vision for the district forward. The current leadership of Brighton Area Schools is also working to move the district toward systematic and systemic approaches to improving academic progress and ensuring future success.

The Superintendent's communication skills have proven to be valued in leading Brighton Area School through the current financial crisis and, at the same time, maintaining a strong focus on student learning. In a time when the situation could easily deteriorate to chaos and disrupt the teaching and learning environment, the Superintendent's leadership style has been crucial to moving the district forward by keeping his eye on the ball. Stakeholders explained that he has done this by being transparent with purposeful and informative communications regarding district issues. This transparency has led to building trust between the current administration and the stakeholders. This trust has become a promise of hope for the future of the Brighton Area Schools. A teacher reinforced this impression by saying: "He has shown us that there is light at the end of this dark tunnel. He has given us hope." Another teacher commented: "We are happy that the ship is going somewhere now!"

There is also evidence that teacher leaders are being cultivated and used as instructional coaches and school improvement chairs. These teacher leaders are instrumental for the future progress of developing the School Improvement Plans into living documents that are communicated to and understood by all stakeholders.

Additionally, the QAR Team saw evidence of "pockets of excellence" in areas involving the implementation of the federally mandated Response to Intervention (RtI) Plan. Currently, there is not a systematic and systemic approach to effectively addressing student needs at all levels of the organization.

The QAR Team found the same to be true in the area of professional development and the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) throughout the district. There are pockets of success but not a systemic approach, which has left the overall district efforts to flounder. Brighton Area Schools is clearly in need of a data-driven approach to the selection of professional development that is responsive to the evaluation of the programs based on results as measured by student achievement and success. Also, the implementation of programs or initiatives need to be monitored to help ensure a positive impact on student achievement.

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

- The Board recognizes and supports administrative authority to implement Board policy.
- The leadership team has strong organizational skills.
- The leadership capacity of the district is being cultivated through the use of teacher leaders in various leadership roles.
- The Superintendent of Schools communicates a commitment to improvement and optimistic attitude for the future of Brighton Area Schools.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Communicate and engage stakeholders in the achievement of the goals in the School Improvement Plan at each school.
- Implement and monitor a systemic approach for the RtI model, the evaluation of academic programs, and the professional development initiatives.
- Secure funding and commit available resources to technology to provide instruction to the 21st Century learners of today to fulfill the district's mission statement that acknowledges the "global community" they will be entering.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Brighton Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

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

Description:

Brighton Area Schools has responded to the challenge of a financial crisis by developing a state-approved Deficit Elimination Plan, which resulted in the closing of two schools, the reconfiguration of elementary, intermediate and middle schools, the privatization of custodial and transportation services, and the reduction of personnel. The central office has been restructured with a new, strong leadership team. In spite of this turmoil to the district caused by the financial crisis, the focus on students has been preserved and student achievement remains a source of pride.

The district has developed a curriculum and is in the process of aligning the curriculum to the Michigan standards and benchmarks. At the elementary level, curriculum pacing guides and both formative and summative assessments, Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP), Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), and quarterly math assessments define student expectations. At the secondary level, course syllabi are in the process of being aligned with state standards and accompanying assessments. The QAR Team interviewed stakeholder groups, made classroom visitations, and examined artifacts. As a result, the QAR Team noted that there was a lack of consistency between elementary buildings in the expectations, implementation, and evaluation of programs. For example, in some schools Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) were functioning. In other schools, collaboration, data analysis, and pedagogy discussions were minimal. At the secondary level, the newly configured intermediate and middle school have not yet had the opportunity for vertical articulation of curriculum or collaboration or to complete alignment with state standards and common assessments.

The district has initiated many programs designed to meet the needs of each student, although many are not yet systematically implemented and monitored. Readers and Writers Workshops, 6 Traits of Writing, and leveled books foster differentiated instruction for individual student needs. Support programs for struggling students include the recently revised delivery model for Special Education, Title I, Response to Intervention (RtI), Reading Apprenticeship, Focus and study skills classes, SOS committee, middle school teaming, volunteer tutoring, vocational classes, and alternative education. Gifted and talented students have the opportunity to participate in an elementary magnet program at Spencer Elementary School. Students are also able to earn high school credit in the middle school, high school Advanced Placement classes and dual enrollment for college credit. Additionally, there are multiple opportunities for students to participate in clubs, sports, and enrichment activities.

Support programs generally meet the needs of the highest and lowest achieving students, but there is evidence that some students are missing support interventions. Students in the middle, those who were proficient or partially proficient on the Michigan assessment tests, need additional support to improve achievement. It was reported that 90% of special education referrals do not meet the requirements for identification, indicating a lack of alternatives. The high school graduation rate was 84% in 2007, 86% in 2008 for the K-12 cohort group, and 92% in 2008 for the 9-12 cohort group. A more effective use of data that is available in the Data Director program provides assessment information to inform instruction with timely interventions. The QAR Team was unable to determine if the inconsistent use of data was a result

of building expectations or a lack of professional development for the staff.

School Improvement Plans (SIP's) have been developed at the district and school levels that include a comprehensive needs assessment, SMART goals, research-based strategies, professional development, and assessments. Building interviews with the staff, however, indicated that the plans were not living documents. Some teachers were not familiar with their school's plan. The turmoil of the financial crisis may have deferred attention from the school improvement process. However, maintaining focus on this area is critical to improvement in preparing students for the future.

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

- Staff is professional, dedicated, and caring with high expectations for all students, and students come to school prepared and motivated.
- Parents are involved and expect their children to go to college, with 95% of students actually going to college following graduation from Brighton High School.
- Brighton stakeholders share a collective pride in the focus on students and the schools' success.
- The district's culture creates a learning environment with active and engaged learners.
- Student achievement is in the top 10% of the state, as measured by MEAP and MME, and several elementary schools score in the 90-100 range for advanced and proficient categories.
- The elementary and middle schools received the letter grade of "A" and the high school received a "B" on the Michigan Report Card.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a clear district direction, implementation, and evaluation of programs for all schools.
- Support teachers with on-going and sustained professional development to maximize the use of PLC's and data.
- Identify teacher trainers from successful programs.
- Keep technology in the forefront to prepare students for the 21st Century and the global competition they will face.
- Maximize existing resources, such as Data Director and Data4SS, with additional professional development in data analysis and instructional interventions.
- Seek opportunities to address the insufficient infrastructure, outdated hardware, instructional software, and professional development to support teachers.
- Complete the process of curricular alignment with state standards and accompanying common assessments.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Emerging," indicating that the Brighton Area Schools has not met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

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

Description:

Brighton Area School has two data management systems in place to track assessment results. Data Director provides a tool for data entry for all state and local assessments, generating reports for review and analysis of student performance on tested standards. Individual student reports can also be printed and shared with parents. Data for Student Success (Data4SS) is another technology tool used for data mining of state assessments to determine areas of deficiency on standards and identify students who are struggling or their level of achievement on each standard.

The school district has made a commitment to provide professional development opportunities for staff training in the utilization of these comprehensive assessment tools to drive decision making in order to impact instruction at the classroom level. Training in the use of Data Director has been on an as-needed or as-interested basis with most School Improvement Chairs (SIC's) receiving training. Secondary and elementary data teams were trained in the use of Data4SS this year. An additional 48 staff members will be trained in the utilization of Data Director and Data4SS in June of 2010 during a 4-day Data Camp hosted by the district. This will begin a process of staff members training staff members in these two management systems during the 2010-2011 school year. Their goal is to create a system that aligns data analysis with the academic expectations and results in remediation strategies for interventions.

The Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) and the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) state assessments are taken at the state mandated grade levels. Other assessments used to collect data are the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), the Qualitative Reading inventory (QRI), the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP), and AIMS Web math assessments. Common quarterly assessments are also given in the area of mathematics in elementary through high school and in the upper grades in science. Staff utilizes a writing rubric to assess writing at all grade levels. Although data are collected through various assessments, the results are not reviewed and analyzed systemically to assess student learning on expectations, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, improve strategies and practices, and determine interventions to improve student performance. Data analysis and use by classroom teachers are done sporadically throughout the district.

Communication of student progress is evident in the distribution of MEAP and MME assessment results to parents. Data collected from other assessment pieces are incorporated in discussions with parents in regards to placement in special programs at some levels, although varying from school to school. Conferences are held to provide an opportunity for parents to discuss their children's progress, and report cards are provided quarterly. ParentConnect is available to parents of students in middle school and high school to readily access student achievement information online. Parents told the QAR Team that they wished they had the same access to their elementary students' information through ParentConnect.

Perception surveys were administered to staff, students, and parents in November of 2009 as an evaluation tool to gain insight to improve the schools, their educational programs, and services. Results were disseminated to each building for further analysis of the data collected. Survey data help to identify areas of strengths and concerns to facilitate change and promote ownership.

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

- On-going training for staff in the use of Data Director and Data4SS is being planned.
- A committee has been established to respond to the need to unify the report cards at the new intermediate school and collaborate on the implementation of common assessments.
- Surveys are being used to collect perception data of stakeholder groups to better inform and facilitate necessary improvements or changes for the district.
- ParentConnect is a valuable online tool to keep parents informed about their children's progress at the secondary grade levels.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Implement and monitor the utilization of Data Director and Data4SS by staff throughout the system.
- Provide on-going professional development to support the effective use of the data technology tools.
- Implement a systematic approach for analyzing data to make informed decisions in the evaluation of curriculum, instruction, programs, and other district initiatives.
- Implement a comprehensive plan to analyze student achievement data and provide support for students in their area of need through the systemic use of a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach.
- Verify the validity and reliability of district common assessments along with continued evaluation through data analysis.
- Provide collaboration time for staff to align district curriculum with district common assessments.
- Investigate the district's ability to offer ParentConnect or a similar online system to parents of students at all grade levels.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Emerging," indicating that the Brighton Area Schools has not met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

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

Description:

This standard focuses on four major areas: human resources, financial resources, physical resources, and support systems. In regards to human resources, the hiring procedures appear to be consistent and thorough. Expectations are very high in the Brighton Area Schools with only highly qualified personnel being hired.

The district is aggressively addressing its financial issues, which are having a severe impact on Brighton's financial resources as it faces a projected \$13,000,000 funding deficit. The Deficit Reduction Plan has been submitted and approved by the state to put the Brighton Area Schools back on solid financial ground in one year.

As the QAR Team analyzed the district's physical resources, it saw that although the buildings were older, they were well-maintained and utilized to their fullest extent. However, the technology that is available and being used in the classrooms to provide students at all grade levels with the important 21st

Century Learning Skills so they will be able to successfully compete in the global society and job market is woefully inadequate. Upgrades to the infrastructure, hardware, and software are critical needs if Brighton Area Schools expect to remain competitive with surrounding districts in preparing students for their lives beyond school. In fact, the district's mission statement recognizes the importance of preparing Brighton students to enter "global community" following graduation.

Regarding support systems for students, they vary from school to school in size and scope. The programs to help struggling students be successful at the various grade levels include: Reading Apprenticeship, S.O.S., RtI, and Failure is not an Option. Administrators and teachers are viewed as responsive to student needs, as evidenced by both parent and student comments to the QAR Team. Peer mediation and support is also present and viewed as effective.

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

- Staff members, both certified and classified, are dedicated to student success.
- Due to a conscientious effort by the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education, all stakeholder groups have been informed and understand the current financial crisis and the district's Deficit Reduction Plan to solve the crisis with the goal of minimizing the impact on classroom instruction.
- Numerous support and intervention programs are in place to meet student needs.
- Stakeholder support and pride in the Brighton Area Schools result in high expectations for students and staff.
- Students have excellent choices in the areas of classes, clubs, athletics, and other extra-curricular opportunities to meet their areas of interests.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Examine the fact that approximately 94% of the annual budget is allocated for salaries and benefits compared to the typical allocation of 85% to maintain a healthy budget.
- Evaluate the impact of combining the high school principal and assistant superintendent positions, even for one year, with the need to implement and monitor district initiatives and the long-term continuity of leadership and support.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive technology plan to upgrade the district's infrastructure, hardware, software, and staff development to ensure that Brighton's graduates will enter the workforce with the world-class skills needed to compete successfully.
- Ensure that special education services are delivered in the least restrictive environment.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Brighton Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

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

Description:

Brighton Area Schools has excellent rapport with its stakeholders. School personnel seek opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership with participants to help students learn and advance improvement efforts and demonstrate good participation by many stakeholder groups. Interviews with staff members, students, support personnel, parents, and school board members indicate that there is an intense, cultivated, and useful system of communication within the district.

The Superintendent of Schools, hired in July of 2009, has restored transparency in the district's culture by activating several channels of communication to inform stakeholders of district planning and invite their input for future initiatives. He holds quarterly "State of the Schools" addresses to update the public on the district's current plans, strengths, and challenges. On a monthly basis, he meets with representatives of the Parent-Teacher Organizations to monitor the pulse of each school from the parents' perspective. He has also initiated the "Brighton Blitz" as a weekly section in the local newspaper to highlight district-wide activities and achievements. The Superintendent believes "Communication is the key to everything, especially in bad times." Both staff and parents confirm that his actions validate this belief.

The district has several resources in place to promote active and fluent communication between parents and teachers. Examples of these resources include the district's website and calendar, the Parent E-mail Notification (PEN) system, teacher-maintained websites with classroom agendas, the ParentConnect website at the secondary level for academic progress monitoring, and the use of student agenda planners for communication between parents and students. In November of 2009, the district administered surveys to staff, parents, and students to gather feedback on current issues. The Board of Education has established connection to each school in the district, with each board member assigned to one school as its liaison.

Teachers affirm the frequency and quality of communications among building colleagues for collaborative instruction. Interviews with teachers demonstrated a high level of communication with each other as well as with support staff and building administrators to address student needs on an on-going basis. At the district level, efforts for cross-building collaboration between teachers to align the curriculum are in the working stages, and several upcoming meetings have been scheduled. Despite the recent reconfiguration into the 5/6 and 7/8 buildings, teachers report that they have a renewed level of communication and collaboration within their building teams to plan for instruction.

Students at all levels report that they feel appropriately challenged by their teachers and that expectations are made clear to them. During the interviews, an elementary student summarized his approach to school with the attitude that "I'm going to learn something new today." Of their teachers, students reported: "Their goals are to meet ours." In their dialogue, students use educational vocabulary fluently, indicative of the caliber of language consistent in their classrooms. When asked about performance expectations in grades 5 and 6, a student responded: "It's important not to wait until high school to get good grades because you won't know how to do that by then." These attitudes validate the clarity with which the teaching staff communicates their expectations to students.

Finally, parents demonstrate satisfaction with their level of communication between district personnel as

facilitated by multiple channels that include e-mail, phone calls, newsletters, teacher websites, and face-to-face communication. Parents and families invest a substantial amount of time and money in improving school environments, such as cultivating gardens and courtyards and facilitating school activities. Intense communication between parents and school personnel is necessary for this to take place. Interviews with parents indicated that most found teachers to be accessible and responsive through e-mail and phone; however, there were some lapses by teachers in the system that require attention. Teacher websites were generally informative and up-to-date, but these, too, were not consistent resources across the district.

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

- The Superintendent of Schools is firmly dedicated to clear communication with stakeholders regarding the state of the district across various levels, including its financial recovery process.
- Staff, parents, and community members readily use and appreciate the central office administration's "open door policy" and have been satisfied with its effectiveness.
- Teachers have a strong system of communication within their buildings, both between colleagues and with building administrators.
- Students affirm that their teachers set forth clear expectations for their learning and regularly provide meaningful feedback to promote academic growth.
- Parents and community are actively involved in the educational process and generally find district personnel to be accessible and responsive to their input or concerns.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Improve the frequency of teacher collaboration across buildings to align the curriculum, both horizontally and vertically.
- Ensure the consistency of e-mail communications and responsiveness between teachers and parents.
- Systemically implement and systematically monitor teacher-maintained websites so that parents can consistently rely on these sites for current course updates and classroom information.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Brighton Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description:

The district's vision, "Learning for Life," expresses a theme found by members of the QAR Team that threads throughout the district's concept of continuous improvement. Discussion and interviews with all stakeholders revealed an underlying understanding of the vision. Likewise, stakeholders understand the need for continuous improvement and the benefit to the goal of improved student achievement. The district's leadership and each school's improvement team have written plans that are reviewed by the administration and teaching staff to clarify an understanding of the plan's standards and indicators. The district is currently poised to establish a five-year strategic plan under the leadership of the recently hired Superintendent of Schools.

Brighton Area Schools use the NCA School Improvement Framework, the Michigan School Improvement Framework (MSIF), rubrics, a Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA), and the School Improvement Plan (SIP) template to provide the district and its schools with a way to look at and discuss internal systems and assess where they are in relationship to the elements of effective schools. Schools are also using specific goal setting methodologies, including the Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely (S.M.A.R.T.) approach. These planning frameworks guide the district's improvement efforts.

Evidence exists to support a gap analysis review of each school's student achievement. This analysis is based on state and local assessment instruments that are then studied through the lens of Data Director and Data4SS data software to adjust goals and realign to current conditions.

Research-based professional development for those stakeholders responsible for the Continuous Improvement Plans (CIP's) was seen by the QAR Team and evidenced by systematic reporting of professional development planning and meeting agendas. Likewise, reports of professional development outcomes were communicated through the MEAP reports to parents and school personnel. In addition, the time needed to develop, review, and revise the plans were noted in the district calendar.

Efforts were also evident to the team regarding the delivery of the Continuous Improvement Plan's components related to strategies, techniques, and best practice needed to sustain the established goals. Evidence to support this delivery was noted in the establishment of "Critical Friends" cohort groups and a "training of teacher trainers" model for instructional coaching. Efforts to initiate systemic development of the CIP's components were found in the Readers and Writers Workshop and the Reading Apprenticeship programs.

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

- There is an on-going review of reporting student performance to adjust the schools' and district's improvement goals.
- There is continuing professional development being planned toward goal setting and evaluation.
- Stakeholders are included and involved in the improvement process.
- Students consistently score high on Michigan's achievement tests.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Ensure that the School Improvement Plans are living documents for each school by continuously evaluating, updating, and monitoring the plans and informing stakeholders about the data, goals, strategies, professional development, research, and assessment involved.
- Align and revise the School Improvement Plans with the learning goals based on data analysis or the results of earlier efforts.
- Establish the expectation for the rigorous use of all available assessment data by certified staff at all levels in the five-year strategic planning initiative.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational," indicating that the Brighton Area Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

Quality Assurance Findings

The Quality Assurance Review Team examined the effectiveness of the district's methods for quality assurance. The team reviewed the district's practices and methods to monitor and document improvement, provide meaningful feedback and support across the district, ensure that AdvancED standards are met and strengthened, and regularly collect, use, and communicate results. The team provides the following findings in this area.

Description

The Quality Assurance Review Team reflected on the processes used by the Brighton Area Schools to provide a quality educational system. The team reviewed district practices designed to monitor and ensure quality, consistency, equity, and integrity at all levels of the school system. Specific attention was given to discovering the ways the district ensures that the AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems are being implemented at a level that will foster growth and increase student achievement.

The staff of the Brighton Area Schools has built a culture of improvement on a strong foundation established by the acceptance of a shared vision. Students, parents, support staff, classroom teachers, and administrators have all made it their collective mission to ensure that curriculum, instruction, fiscal resources, and the physical, emotional, and academic support services from both within the school and in the community transform the vision of "Learning for Life" into reality. The strong leadership demonstrated by administration, central office staff, teachers, and support staff stems from a highly personal acceptance of the role and responsibility every district employee plays in assuring a quality educational experience for Brighton students.

The delivery of a quality, articulated curriculum using research-based strategies is the expectation for instructional practice in the district. Data are beginning to be used in systematic and systemic ways to make informed decisions on programs and practices that can be applied in an effort to meet the needs of individual students, as well as the needs of the district as a whole. Resources are allocated to allow for the most productive use of financial and human capital, keeping the focus on the students. All levels of decision-making are deeply grounded in a need to create the best possible educational environment for students.

Strengths

- An exceptional culture that encourages continuous improvement is highly evident and is a source of pride for all stakeholders.
- Active, effective leadership is re-energizing the district at all levels.
- Survey data from all stakeholder groups are used to analyze feedback regarding district strengths, concerns, and ideas for improvement.
- The Superintendent of Schools believes that clear and frequent communication with stakeholders is key to ensuring the support and understanding of district issues, goals, initiatives, and achievements.
- The Train the Trainer Model is used for much of the staff development within the district.

Opportunities

- Develop and implement a comprehensive technology plan that addresses the immediate and future needs in the areas of infrastructure, hardware, software, and professional development for staff so that technology is used K-12 as an instructional tool with the goal of preparing students to successfully compete with world-class skills when they graduate from Brighton High School.

- Monitor strategies and interventions that support school improvement goals to ensure quality and consistency of implementation at all grade levels K-12.

Conclusion

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

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

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the district leadership, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the district and its students much success in the quest for excellence through NCA-CASI-MI accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Jacqueline Beery, Chair
- Dr. Martha O'Kray, Vice Chair
- Mrs. Erica Crawford, Team Member (Brandon Middle School)
- Mr. Roger Masten, Team Member (Mifflin High School)
- Mrs. Susan Vogl, Team Member (Vassar Central Elementary School)
- Mr. Jamey Vermaat, Team Member (Northview High School East Campus)
- Mr. Michael Bendicsen, Team Member (Knox High School)
- Mr. Glenn Barnes, Team Member (Knox Elementary School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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