



May 14, 2009

Dr. Randy D. McCoy, Superintendent  
Tupelo Public School District  
PO Box 557  
Tupelo, MS 38802

Dear Dr. McCoy:

Enclosed is the Review Team Report for the **Quality Assurance Review** of the Tupelo Public School District from April 19-22, 2009. The contents of the report reflect the observations and recommendations of the Quality Assurance Review Team charged with the responsibility of evaluating Tupelo Public School District's application for District Accreditation as a Quality School System through SACS CASI and AdvancED. SACS CASI is an accreditation division of AdvancED.

AdvancED District Accreditation provides a national protocol for school systems committed to systemic, systematic, and sustainable continuous improvement. The District Accreditation process invites school systems to collaborate in reviewing the quality of the district's systems and their contributions to teaching and learning. The process supports, enhances, and stimulates growth and improvement throughout the school system.

On behalf of the Quality Assurance Review Team, I am honored to report that the school system has satisfactorily met the expectations and responsibilities of the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study in pursuit of District Accreditation. Additionally, the Quality Assurance Review Team certified in the report that the Tupelo Public School District met all the standards for accreditation for District Accreditation. Consequently, the Quality Assurance Review Team recommends to the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, unanimously and without reservation, that the Tupelo Public School District be awarded District Accreditation.

As a result of successfully completing the Quality Assurance Review, the district is now charged with the responsibility of entering the implementation phase of the process. The implementation phase of the District Accreditation process requires that the school district will:

- Review and communicate the findings and observations contained in the report;
- Initiate steps to address the recommendations in the report;

*AdvancED is the parent company for:*

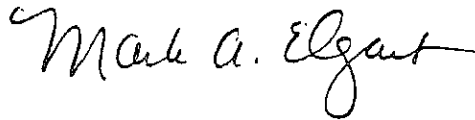
North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI)  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI)  
National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE)

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- Continue to monitor accreditation requirements for the system and its schools;
- Monitor the execution and impact of strategies for improvement; and
- Continue to engage methods that provide for quality assurance.

On behalf of the Quality Assurance Review Team, SACS CASI and AdvancED, I once again commend and congratulate you, the professional staff, the Board of Education, and stakeholders throughout the community on this achievement to be awarded District Accreditation as a Quality School System. SACS CASI and AdvancED look forward to our continued association with the Tupelo Public School District and our partnership to improve student learning through accreditation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark A. Elgart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'M'.

Mark A. Elgart, Ed.D., President/Chief Executive Officer  
AdvancED

cc. Dr. Patricia Golding, Chair – Quality Assurance Review Team  
Dr. Harold Fisher, Director – Mississippi SACS CASI  
Dr. Bud Ginn, Director – Mississippi SACS CASI



# **Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for Tupelo Public School District**

Dr. Randy McCoy, Superintendent  
Mr. Mike Claiborne, Chair, Tupelo Public School Board  
Dr. Patricia Golding, Chair, Quality Assurance Review Team

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**Review Dates:  
April 19-22, 2009**

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

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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 for Quality School Systems.** School districts demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards 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 recommendations 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 recommendations. The school district acts on the team's recommendations 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.
2. Assess the efficacy of the district's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and recommendations 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 and other stakeholders.

## **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.

## **Using the Report – Acting on the Recommendations**

The school district uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school district is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The AdvancED State Office is available to assist the school district in addressing the recommendations. Two years 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 recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school district is addressing the recommendations.

## **Accreditation Recommendation**

The Quality Assurance Review Team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed 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 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited Tupelo Public School District (TPSD) on April 19-22, 2009.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed: one superintendent, 21 central office and building administrators, 136 teachers, 45 support staff, 82 parents, community and business partners, 88 students and 6 Board of Trustees for a total of 379 stakeholder interviews. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited seven schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts.

Throughout the visit, the team 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:

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

The Quality Assurance Review Team used the 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 recommendations that are provided below. The commendations and recommendations 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 recommendations.

## Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Tupelo Public School District 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.

1. **The Tupelo Public School District, from the boardroom to the classroom embraces the district's vision, mission, and goals.** TPSD is a value-driven system committed to pursuing excellence in education for all students. The focus on student-centered decision-making through open, honest and transparent practices promotes respect between and among stakeholders. The operative principles provide the foundation for the TPSD to meet its pursuit of excellence in becoming one of the leading, successful school districts in the state and nation.
2. **The district is committed to the allocation of sufficient resources which support teaching and learning initiatives.** During interviews with staff, parents, and students, it was noted by each group that the district provides needed resources. This provides the opportunity for students to receive quality instruction when teachers have the resources to implement best practices in the classroom.
3. **The district utilizes multiple methods to ensure effective communications between and among all stakeholders.** The District Strategic Plan, along with the individual school plans, provides an outline of the direction the district is following. The district and school websites, the Key Communicator, the Communication Plan, electronic newsletters, One Clear Voice, Ambassador's Voice and surveys are examples of efforts to provide open, honest and transparent information to stakeholders.
4. **The superintendent, board, and administrators are committed to open, honest and transparent decision-making and communications.** The superintendent speaks at community functions to promote the school district and to share information regarding events and activities that are occurring in the district. In addition, the superintendent, with assistance of staff, writes a monthly article that addresses current issues in *The Daily Journal*.



## Recommendations

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

- 1. Develop a plan to ensure that all students in each location have equitable opportunities for educational experiences.** As the Tupelo Public School District moves forward with the implementation of the reorganization and restructuring plan, this will be an opportune time to address the concerns of inconsistency among the elementary schools that were stated during interviews and noted during observations. By ensuring that all students have equal access to educational content, experiences, and equipment, the transition to the middle school will be more successful for students, teachers, and parents. Consequently, ensuring that students have the skills needed prior to entering the middle school will assist in addressing the concern of the increase in dropouts.
- 2. Develop a plan in collaboration with community agencies to address the issues of dropout and graduation rates.** Data indicates that there was an increase in the dropout rate and a decrease in the graduation rate this past year. Interviews of stakeholders indicated that although the district has a commitment to excellence and provides many opportunities for students to achieve, there is still a need to implement strategies to ensure that the “at risk” population can reach their potential.
- 3. Increase the utilization of technology in the teaching and learning process.** Interviews with stakeholders revealed that the availability and use of technology is inconsistent with the vision and mission of the TPSD. There is disparity in the availability of computer labs among the elementary schools that allow students to gain skills to meet the objectives outlined for each grade level in the technology plan. There is a need to add additional technology resources to the classroom to maximize the effectiveness of instruction that will enhance student learning. The use of technology in the classroom ensures that students are prepared to function in a rapidly changing environment.

## 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 student performance and the effectiveness of the school district.
3. Develop action plans to address the recommendations made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the recommendations.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school 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 team's recommendations. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the recommendations. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

## Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school district as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides online resources, research, handbooks, and tools to assist school districts and their schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for assistance in accessing these resources.

## 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 recommendations 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.

## Standard Reports

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the district demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. 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 recommendations 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 recommendations.

## Vision and Purpose

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it commits to a purpose and direction that is shared system-wide. The leadership establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the system's vision that is supported by system and school personnel and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and district effectiveness. The system's vision guides allocations of time and human, material, and fiscal resources.*

### Description

A committee of internal and external stakeholders collaboratively developed vision, belief and mission statements for the Tupelo Public School District. Under the direction of the school board, the district then developed nine operating principles and five goals to direct the work of the district based on these guiding statements. Finally, the district formulated objectives, action plans and evaluations in completing the Tupelo Public School District Strategic Plan which now serves as the centerpiece for the district's school improvement efforts. The evaluation measures used by the system to advance its vision include the Mississippi Accountability Levels, Adequate Yearly Progress, ACT scores, high school graduation rate, Career Appraisal Instrument ratings and Positive Behavior Support data.

The district's systemic vision and purpose are continuously communicated to stakeholder groups through the district's website, periodic public relations campaigns, rotating on-site board meetings, postings in highly visible locations throughout the district, multiple publications and various gatherings of stakeholders. The system has identified five goals and multiple evaluations to measure the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives. A comprehensive profile of student achievement and demographic data is maintained and used to make data-based decisions regarding the success of school improvement plans and to make needed changes to these plans. District stakeholders from members of the board to classroom teachers, students and external stakeholders embrace the district's vision, mission and goals in a united effort to maintain excellence in educational opportunities for all students. Thus, the district's vision is constantly used to guide all school improvements efforts. Specifically, the district's operating principles, curriculum development and assessment, professional development, professional staff evaluations, student behavior assessments and school board policies and procedures are all guided by the system's established vision and purpose.

According to the district's QAR, the Tupelo Public School District conducts quarterly reviews of the progress of the system in implementing both district and individual school strategic plans. This procedure also serves as a review of the district's vision and enables the system to make needed revisions to keep this important guide updated and relevant. The vision and other guiding statements are also reviewed, reaffirmed and/or revised during the District Administrative Team's Annual Retreat.

### Strengths

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- **The district utilizes a collaborative process to develop and maintain its vision, belief and mission statements.** During interviews, the QAR Team heard multiple examples of stakeholder involvement in developing and maintaining the district's vision, mission and goal statements. This collaborative process promotes communication and increases ownership of these important tools for guiding improvement initiatives.
- **The QAR Team found strong evidence that the vision is effectively used to guide the teaching and learning processes throughout the system.** The vision, mission and goals of the system are constantly before district and school stakeholders during decision-making regarding school improvement initiatives. Thus, these statements guide and focus the work of the district and its schools for increased learning outcomes.

### Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- **The team found no opportunities for improvement in this area.** During deliberations the QAR team discussed and agreed that the Tupelo Public School District was a model for developing, implementing, and monitoring the process regarding Standard I: Vision and Purpose.

### Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **highly functional**, indicating that the Tupelo Public School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Vision and Purpose standard.

## Governance and Leadership

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has leaders who are advocates for the system'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 function with clearly defined authority and responsibility and encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for system and school improvement among stakeholders. The system's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.*

### Description

Tupelo Public School District is governed by a five member school board whose term is for five years. The members, appointed by the mayor and approved by the Tupelo City Council, can be reappointed for subsequent terms. The district maintains access to attorneys for legal advice.

School board members complete a formal training upon taking office. Board members frequently participate in additional training provided by the district. Some board members also take advantage of training provided by professional organizations at the local, regional and national level; however, the district would be better positioned to reach its goal of moving the district to national recognition by gaining additional input from national initiatives.

The board has developed written policies and procedures that are in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations. There is a preponderance of evidence that the policies clearly delineate lines of authority, governance and accountability, and those policies are implemented without board interference. The district's policies and procedures are continuously reviewed and revised by stakeholder groups and presented to the school board for approval. Upon being adopted, the new policies and procedures are immediately posted to the district's webpage. Policies and procedures are also communicated through student handbooks, TPSC employee handbooks, the district's career appraisal Manual, the district's policy and procedures manual, and One Clear Voice, an internal communication device used to communicate with teachers "So that we can stay on the same page". This system was put into place as a result of having a communication audit conducted by the National School Public Relations Association.

Stakeholders indicate that the superintendent fosters and embraces transparent communication. Consequently, they have a high degree of confidence and respect for his leadership. Stakeholders further reveal that their input is sought and welcomed to help the district reach its goals of being the best in the state and the nation.

The district uses a plethora of assessments to evaluate the system's effectiveness. The Mississippi Curriculum Test2 (MCT2), administered annually along with the subject area tests generates useful information about student performance. The Terra Nova is administered to elementary students, and a universal screening assessment was implemented recently to monitor student progress. This assessment provides for immediate feedback on strengths and weaknesses, thus allowing for immediate interventions.

Stakeholder interviews reveal that processes are in place to identify equity in learning opportunities; consequently, the district has been proactive in developing a comprehensive reorganization plan to equalize inequities in the delivery system. Response to Intervention (RTI) is used throughout the district to ensure that every student has an opportunity to be successful in the general education program; however, the issue of high mobility among some of the student population and other societal factors contribute to student apathy. Therefore, further measures could be researched to help this population of children feel successful resulting in a reduction of the dropout rate.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- **The board of education, superintendent and the district's entire leadership team is highly praised for being visible, accessible, and receptive to shared decision making.** Decisions in the district are student-centered. The leadership team uses various public forums to solicit the input from stakeholders. The Tupelo Board of Trustees has a community communication program "Common Ground: Coffee and Conversation About Our Schools" in which one or more school board members are available to listen to comments and concerns, share information, and answer questions in a community setting. This promotes the mutual trust between the school district and the community stakeholders. It also provides a more accessible means for stakeholders to meet with school personnel.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Encourage all board members to take advantage of training at the national level to keep abreast of national initiatives that would help the district in its quest for continued recognition at the national level. As the school district continues its pursuit for national recognition of excellence, it is important that the school board have knowledge of current issues in education and best practices at the national level. By keeping current regarding national initiatives, the school board can have more insight into practices that would enhance the district's goals and objectives.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **highly functional**, indicating that the Tupelo Public School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Governance and Leadership standard.

## Teaching and Learning

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The system ensures that teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process, provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations, and give students feedback to improve their performance.*

### Description

The Tupelo Public School District (TPSD) implements a curriculum that is aligned with the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks and national standards frameworks. The TPSD is a diverse school system that recognizes the need to emphasize equity and the need to deliver a quality education for every child. Advanced Placement courses and Pre-AP courses are offered at the secondary level. Gifted education in conjunction with intensified time provides an equal opportunity for all learners. The Challenge (Gifted) Curriculum and the TPSD Learning Continuum have been developed at the school and grade level and are provided electronically to each teacher in the district.

The TPSD maintains high expectations for student achievement as evidenced in the TPSD curriculum frameworks which contain skills, strategies, and assessments that clearly define expectations for student learning. During interviews, stakeholders from the community verified these high expectations are held throughout the district. This level of commitment has contributed to the district being one of the top districts in the state.

Curriculum pacing guides are in place at all levels of instruction. Support materials and benchmarks are used in making instructional decisions. Early Prevention of School Failure and Universal Screening are utilized to evaluate individual essential knowledge and skills. No Child Left Behind annual report cards, MCT2 reports, progress reports and report cards are used to monitor student achievement. Teacher Support Team and Response to Intervention strategies also aid in increasing student achievement for low functioning students.

There is a strong professional development program focused on best practices in the teaching profession. Interviews with administrators indicated the requirements that are looked for in the hiring process. The Tupelo staff is made up of highly qualified teachers. The district is known throughout the area for the high qualifications they expect in their teachers. There is a definition of the "Tupelo Teacher" that is embraced by those in the district. This definition is used in the evaluation process as well. Use of the GoSignMeUp website, an online career opportunity provider for teachers, aids teachers in progressing through a staff development curriculum based on their choice. Available staff development opportunities include classroom management, Depth of Knowledge, and Differentiated Instruction and other identified areas that support the vision and mission of the district. Four flex days are provided to teachers to assist them in gaining the district's mandated 60 hours of staff development per year. The TPSD has over 300 teachers who have achieved advanced degrees, 100+ teachers who are National Board Certified, and an instructional staff that has received both local and national recognition. Teachers are evaluated annually and feedback given to ensure that best-practices are used in each classroom.

As the TPSD continues the pursuit of excellence, the staff needs to seek out solutions to increase graduation rates. Based on a review of artifacts and stakeholder interviews, the team was able to validate that students who start in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade do not complete graduation requirements. Exploring strategies to reach apathetic students will increase school attendance and increase graduation rates. The district should partner with community agencies to develop a plan to address the issue of increased dropouts and graduation rates. Interviews of stakeholders indicated that although the district has a commitment to excellence and provides many opportunities for students to achieve, there is still a need to focus on alternative strategies for increasing opportunities for the “at risk” population to reach their potential.

There is also a need to increase the utilization of technology in the teaching and learning process. Interviews with all stakeholders reveal that technology is inconsistent with the vision and mission of the TPSD. The use of instructional technology in the classroom ensures that students are prepared to function in a rapidly changing environment. It is also necessary to ensure that the infrastructure within the buildings and the support staff for the advanced use of technology are in place. With the increased use of technology at the instructional level there will be an increased need for support.

As the TPSD moves forward with the restructuring process, a plan is needed to ensure that all students in each location have the equitable opportunities for educational experiences. This concern of consistency among all elementary schools was stated during interviews and noted during observations. By ensuring that all students have equal access to educational content experiences and equipment, the transition to middle school will be easier for students, teachers and parents. Ensuring that students have the skills needed prior to entering the middle school will assist in addressing the drop-out rate.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The commitment to student-teacher ratios of 15:1 in grades K-3 is beneficial in preparing students for a more challenging curriculum in upper elementary and middle school. This commitment to provide the best targeted instruction through small groups is evidenced through the reorganization and redistricting plan that assures more attention to each student. This student-centered effort will assist in the district providing a more prescriptive instructional program to assist in all students reaching their potential.
- The district provides quality professional development opportunities to teachers. The professional development opportunities are determined by all stakeholders and aligned with the vision and mission of the district. This promotes ownership and commitment to opportunities for improvement at the personal, school, and district levels.
- Data is used to drive the instruction for students. There is a variety of measures used by the district for monitoring progress. Test results are evaluated, interpreted, analyzed, and thoroughly reviewed with all teachers. In addition, students’ previous results are available to current teachers. This provides information to guide instructional initiatives that enhance student achievement.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Expand and market the offerings for career and technical programs. The Tupelo Public School District offers a variety of course offerings for those students who are on the college prep track;



however, an expansion and promotion of the career and technical programs would provide an opportunity for non-traditional students. Interviews indicated that there was a concern among some that the focus to excel at the national level sometimes over-shadowed the possibility of students being able to take part in higher level career and technical opportunities. Some stakeholders wanted to see the pride and emphasis on career and technical opportunities to increase. This would also provide an incentive for some students who previously would have dropped out to remain in school to learn a trade or certification.

- Provide more diversity training and support for teachers at the classroom level in schools within the TPSD. According to information gleaned during the interviews and observations conducted, there is a growth in the English Language Learner population of the district. As this growth continues, it is important for educators to have knowledge and understanding of other cultures in order to reach out and make an impact in the achievement of these students. These efforts could possibly assist in addressing the dropout and graduation concerns.

### Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **highly functional**, indicating that the Tupelo Public School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Teaching and Learning standard.

## Documenting and 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.**

*Impact Statement: A school system is successful in meeting this standard when it uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly-defined performance measures. The assessment system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, identify gaps between expectations for student learning and student performance, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine interventions to improve student performance. The assessment system yields timely and accurate information that is meaningful and useful to system and school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in understanding student performance, system and school effectiveness, and the results of improvement efforts.*

### Description

The Tupelo Public School District uses a comprehensive assessment system that is aligned with the district's expectations for student learning. The variety of tests for its annual assessment is comprised of state mandated tests, nationally normed tests, Universal Screening assessments, special population assessments, and formative tests. All schools within the district make decisions regarding continuous improvement for teaching and learning using the multiple assessment system. Administrative and staff interviews revealed these data are collected to make educational decisions. Teachers adjust their instruction to meet the needs of their students. The Student Assessment Database (SAD) provides teachers with longitudinal individual assessment data. This information and other data are used by the school to develop remedial and enrichment interventions plans. Results from the quarterly monitoring of the strategic plans are used to track progress and to identify areas for improvement.

Results from student assessments are used to make data driven decisions to select instructional material, identify students for enrichment, remediation, and special services. Student performance data also influence the purchase of new technological programs and tools. The team noted that administrators and teachers are provided computers and laptops to afford them opportunities to improve overall school effectiveness. These tools reinforce interventions to enhance student performance and increase academic technological instruction.

Tupelo Public School District collects and communicates to the stakeholders a summary assessment on the district website on a regular basis. The media in the community partners with the district and individual schools to provide information. Parents interviewed revealed stakeholders receive timely and accurate information that is useful in understanding student performance.

The district provides professional development for the faculty in using data to make instructional decisions. This process provides meaningful insight into student learning. The faculty reviews current data practices and discusses methods to analyze the usage of data at the classroom, school, and district levels. The faculty is required to participate in 60 hours of professional training annually.

In the Standards Assessment Report, the district personnel stated there is a concern that even though students are meeting annual yearly progress (AYP) on state assessments, the district is not satisfied with the current trend of lowered student performance.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Tupelo School District ensures that student assessment data is used to make decisions for instructional teaching and learning to improve student achievement. Assessments are used to guide instruction as evidenced by the observations, interviews, and documents reviewed by the team. Student performance data from the classroom level through the state and national test level is studied to diagnose and address issues that would help close the achievement gaps. This ensures prescriptive interventions to address the needs of students.
- The district provides quality professional development to the faculty in using data to make instructional decisions, to collect and use data that gives insight to student learning, and to review and analyze data. The central administration is committed to provide the necessary training and information to assist in making informed instructional decisions. This is done by visitations to the school by central personnel who share this information in a variety of ways including charts, diagrams, and projection estimations. This enables teachers to provide quality instruction based on data analysis to enhance student achievement.
- A comprehensive system of communication helps the district to report student performance in a variety of way to stakeholders. Student performance and system effectiveness data is communicated to stakeholders through individual student reports, NCLB Report Card, progress reports, newsletters, electronic newsletters, open meetings, and other various methods. This promotes the commitment to an open, honest and transparent operation of the school district.

## Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Expand the analysis of data regarding the Early Prevention of School Failure to include a focus on “Where Are They Now?” Tupelo School District does an excellent job in tracking these students regarding performance on assessments, but there has been no analyses of how many of these students still need intervention and/or special services. Tracking to see how many, if any, of these students eventually dropout of school would give additional information that would be helpful in addressing the dropout and graduation issues.

## Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **highly functional**, indicating that the Tupelo Public School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Documenting and Using Results standard.

## Resource and Support Systems

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it 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 system employs and allocates staff well-qualified for their assignments. The system provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The system ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations.*

## Description

The Tupelo Public School District has the human resources and support systems necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students. The interviews of the district administration, school board members and finance officer provided evidence that there is an adequate number of certified and classified staff to accommodate the needs of the students. The district’s student/teacher ratio is 15:1 ratio, which is below the state requirement and adheres to AdvancED recommended numbers. A review of documentation, including the District Standards Assessment Report, revealed that the district employs adequate number of guidance counselors, reading and math specialists, additional technology, arts, specialty teachers and media resources to raise student achievement to high levels. As evidenced by principals’ interviews, the district and school administration initiates a recruitment program that strives to employ the best qualified staff which reflects the ethnicity of the district. There is a continued effort to balance the number of minority staff to meet the needs of the district.

All staff participates in a professional development program aligned with the District and School Strategic plans and meets No Child Left Behind requirements. All teachers are highly qualified with over 100 teachers being nationally certified. In addition, Tupelo Public Schools employ a strong classified support staff. This is evident in the employment of directors in the areas of facilities management, buildings and grounds maintenance, transportation, and security. The health and food services personnel understand their role in meeting student needs of health, nutrition, and safety. The QAR team noted the “pride” in the school community and considers this a great strength for the betterment of a diverse

student population. The district is commended for their commitment to allocate sufficient resources that support the teaching and learning of the children. Funding formulas are used to insure equity among school budgets. Money is allocated per pupil. Additional at-risk funds are assigned by demographic area.

In 1998, the school board was successful in passing a tax referendum to provide adequate financial resources for district management operations and further employment of teachers in providing small class sizes for elementary education. This illustrates the commitment of the community for quality educations; however, this maximized the tax requirements set forth in Mississippi law and limits the production of revenue in the future. The district has adequate bonding potential for future construction projects. The district leadership is to be commended for being visionary in redesigning the existing pay schedules of past bonded projects. The district complies with all budgetary procedures and audited accounting practices as evidenced by the district financial records.

District facilities provide above average learning environments for the students. School buildings are well-maintained as a result of new construction, renovations and strong maintenance measures. The ages of the schools varies with the oldest being a 1920's elementary school and the newest being an elementary school constructed in 2003. Next year, the district will put in place a new configuration plan for students. This plan includes the consideration of future facilities construction and upkeep. A recommendation is that a process is needed to ensure that all students in each location have equitable opportunities for educational experiences. This concern of consistency among all elementary schools was stated during parent and teacher interviews and noted during observations. By ensuring that all students have equal access to educational content, experiences and equipment future transitions to middle and high schools are made easier. At the present, the present use of technology complies with state and local building codes; however future use of technology in the older facilities may cause further renovation needs.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- There is strong community pride and support for Tupelo Schools. The overwhelming evidence for the support of the schools was expressed in interviews by all stakeholders. The passing of a district tax referendum and the building of additional seating capacity at the high school for the fine arts building are specific examples of the support. The district in collaboration with community agencies is in a position to succeed in goals that would not be possible without the joint commitment to become one of the best school districts in the nation.
- A strong tradition of commitment to excellence exists among all staff in all schools. This partnership commitment that permeates between and among the staff of the district and the community is the driving force that allows the district to find possibilities when faced with challenges. This attitude and "can do" spirit makes it possible to reach levels that would not be possible otherwise.
- The daily operation of schools that exemplifies a safe environment conducive to learning. The TPSD provides a safe and inviting climate for students, faculty, staff, and parents. It was noted during school visits that all buildings are clean and provide environments that are conducive to learning. The parents all indicated that their children loved coming to school, eager to learn, and felt safe. This promotes and supports the learning of all students. It also promotes trust from the stakeholders that the school district is dedicated to providing the best for the students.

- There is a strong professional highly qualified teaching staff. Over 50% of the staff has advanced degrees. One hundred and seventeen teachers have earned National Board Certification. There have been five Milken Award winners and many other teachers and principals recognized at the state and national levels.

### Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Review the facilities planning process to ensure that the older facilities can support technology and that an adequate infrastructure is maintained throughout the district including the central office. As technology inventory increases, buildings may need to be retrofitted to accommodate new and expanded technology. This is necessary in order to move ahead with the district's vision and mission goals.

### Finding

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **highly functional**, indicating that the Tupelo Public School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Resource and Support Systems standard.

## Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has the understanding, commitment, and support of stakeholders. System and school personnel seek opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership among stakeholders to help students learn and advance improvement efforts.*

### Description

The superintendent, school board, administrators and teachers are committed to open, honest and transparent decision making and communications. The superintendent speaks at community functions to promote the school district and to share information regarding events, activities and other information for the district. In addition he writes a monthly newspaper article with the assistance of his staff that addresses current issues in education.

The communications between the school, home, and community are ongoing and strengthen the relationships and support for the district's educational programs. The district uses a wide variety of strategies to communicate with parents and other community members (i.e. websites, handbooks, newsletters, One Clear Voice, Key Communicator, surveys, Active Parent, report cards, progress reports, Family School Coordinators and Parent/Teacher forums). However, there is not a tool in place to communicate with students and parents during unforeseen events.

The superintendent and board members are visible in the schools, actively involved in the community, and provide information to district stakeholders. The school board conducts a community communication program "Common Ground: Coffee and Conversation About our Schools" in which one or two school board members are available to listen to comments and concerns, share information and answer questions in a community setting. Administrators' and teachers' communication with district

stakeholders reflect an appreciation for the support that parents and community members give the district. Parents feel they are partners in their children's education.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The city of Tupelo is extremely supportive of the Tupelo Public School District. The support was evident through the interviews with administrators, teachers and stakeholders. Group support is shown by the Association for Excellence in Education (AEE) that supports the school with teacher grants. The Hancock Foundation has donated land and real estate to the school district. The passing of a school tax referendum demonstrates strong evidence of community support. This support has provided additional resources that the district would not have been able to secure alone.
- Tupelo Public School District has a strong communication system in place. Administrators, teachers, students and stakeholders use a variety of vehicles that prevent misunderstanding and allow ideas and needs to be addressed. This promotes the mutual respect and cooperation between and among the stakeholders.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a vehicle for immediate communication with parents and students. A system would be useful for unexpected events that occur both during school day and after school hours. This communication tool could be used to inform students and parents about unexpected school closings, school groups returning later than expected from out of town events and general announcements. A program such as School Messenger allows schools to personalize calling lists that can be made remotely.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **highly functional**, indicating that the Tupelo Public School District has met the accreditation requirements for the Stakeholder Communications and Relationships standard.

## Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

*Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the system with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained and the system and its schools demonstrate progress in improving student performance. New improvement efforts are informed by the results of earlier efforts through analysis of student performance, system effectiveness, and assessment of the improvement process.*

### Description

The Tupelo Public School district has a commitment to excellence which is reflected in their vision “to be recognized as one of the best school districts in the nation.” The division places high priority on student performance and continuous improvement. As one stakeholder stated, “Self-evaluation is part of the culture in the Tupelo School District and excellence is a tradition”. The District Strategic Plan has been developed by district personnel in collaboration with community stakeholders using the nine operational principles as the foundation in formulating the five overall goals. Long range planning that clearly addresses the division’s vision and mission is evident in the comprehensive planning process. Documents and supporting data demonstrate a commitment to accountability for improvement. Interviews with school and community stakeholders attested to the commitment of ongoing efforts to reach excellence in educational practices. The documented planning for the reorganization and redistricting projects revealed an effort to align the services to students in the most effective and efficient manner.

Each school uses data-based decision making for planning and assessing programs and instructional initiatives. Division and school personnel use the District Strategic Plan and the individual school improvement plans as guides for the overall operation of the district. These documents are reviewed frequently and monitored for progress.

The Tupelo Community is extremely supportive of the Tupelo Public Schools. Community stakeholders are actively involved in the planning efforts of the district. Stakeholders have been involved from the beginning of the District Strategic Plan to the school level planning process. Communication between the school district and the community is open, honest, and transparent which promotes mutual trust and understanding. All stakeholders interviewed indicated an understanding of the vision and mission that drive the continuous improvement efforts and shared the belief that the schools offer programs and services that support the high expectations for improved student learning at all levels.

Collaborative planning and assessment among all the schools and the district administration is evident. The district leadership team and the school leadership teams demonstrate a high level of expertise and dedication to continuous improvement and quality. The school and district personnel work together as a team to foster the attainment of the vision and mission of the district.

Through various means of communication the district reaches out to the community to share the activities and operations of the school district. The Board of Trustees along with the superintendent welcomes community input and all members are responsive to suggestions of the community. The

superintendent is proactive and takes a leadership role in meeting with various community groups and parents to listen to concerns and suggestions for improvement.

### **Strengths**

The team noted several successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The development of the District Strategic Plan based upon the nine operational principles provides the foundation for the goals and implementation strategies that guide the operation of the school district. This document is used by all employees of the district as a guide for operations. The progress of the district to meet the goals and objectives of the plan is monitored regularly. This provides a process that is monitored frequently to keep “the finger on the pulse” of the operation of the school district; consequently, decisions can be made for interventions and proactive strategies in a timely manner.
- There is allocation of sufficient funds by the district which provide the needed materials, professional development, and facility maintenance. This is indicative of the commitment to provide the best education possible for the students as the district strives to continually improve to become one of the best school districts in the state and nation.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Increase efforts to identify strategies that will enhance the achievement of the “at-risk” population in order to consistently decrease the dropout rate and increase the graduation rate. Since the district has had a long history of strong public and private partnerships and citizen involvement in community problem solving, a joint effort of these partners to find reasons and the solutions to the dropout and graduation rates would be stronger than if any of the partners tried to do this alone. Combining the expertise that exists among these stakeholders would provide a strong force to address and resolve these issues.

### **Finding**

Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review team has assigned the overall assessment level of **highly functional**, indicating that the Tupelo Public School District 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 Tupelo Public School District has had and continues to have a strong tradition of commitment to excellence in carrying out the operations of the district. Collaboration between the school district and the community resulted in the development of the District Strategic Plan that outlines the direction of the school district. This document is monitored frequently to ensure that the expectations of all stakeholders are being met. The administrators send a quarterly report to the school board to ensure each school is meeting the goal of the plan.

The assessment system used by the district is comprehensive and provides guidance in providing instruction for all students. Each student's growth is tracked through longitudinal data analysis. The district uses data to monitor progress of the schools. Comparisons are made not only locally, but also with state and national results. Results are then used to provide instruction, intervention, and remediation for students. Results are also used to make decisions regarding overall operation of the school district. This contributed to the reorganization and redistricting efforts of the district.

The Tupelo Public School District takes pride in the fact that it operates in an open, honest and transparent manner. This was evidenced in many ways both at the district and school levels. Teachers and parents are kept current with up-to-date information regarding the district. All stakeholders have input in to decisions made from the smallest issue to those that have a larger impact on the district. The superintendent's support of this was exemplified by inviting all principals to sit in on the briefing of the oral exit report prior to the public presentation. The district not only shares this openness verbally, but evidence shows that they "walk the talk". This was confirmed during interviews of both school and community stakeholders.

To continue the pursuit of excellence the school district will also conduct a curriculum audit from an outside source in the fall of 2009. The curriculum standards are currently assessed against the Mississippi Department of Education standards as well as the national standards. The external audit will ensure that the curriculum is maintained and that it exceeds the state standards and goals. This is another opportunity for the district to reach its goal of becoming one of the best school districts in the nation.

The Tupelo Public School District is has a reputation of approaching any task with a "Can Do Spirit". The staff of the school district demonstrates a commitment to quality work and the expectation of reaching excellence. This theme ran through all interviews at both the district and school levels.

### Strengths

- **Tupelo Public School district has a commitment to recruiting and retaining high quality staff.** Out of the 650 certified staff, 332 have advanced degrees. TPSD has over 100 National Board Certified teachers, five Milken Award winners and several Presidential

Math and Science Award winners. By providing the best educators to deliver instruction, students have better opportunities to reach their potential.

- **The TPSD is committed to the concept of the “Tupelo Teacher”, a description of a quality teacher that uses research-based strategies to provide instruction for students.** The “Tupelo Teacher” has been trained in Observation Protocol (SIOP) for ELL students, the Orton-Gillingham multi-sensory strategies, and Response to Intervention strategies. The process of hiring the best teachers with the best attitude and then providing high quality professional development increases the possibility for the district to reach the high expectations outlined in the strategic plans.
- **The school district has a strong professional development program that focuses on the vision and goals of the district and is implemented to meet the needs outlined in the strategic plan.** Teachers and other staff are actively involved in the planning of professional development activities. The commitment to high quality professional development ensures that research-based strategies are used to provide the highest level of instruction.
- **The district has achieved much recognition at the state and national levels.** These include but are not limited to the following:
  - State administrator of the year-2006 and 2008
  - Tupelo High School recognized as 1 of 24 high schools with a Cum Laude Society Chapter
  - Sports Illustrated’s ranking of Tupelo High School #3 in the nation for 2008
  - Four National Blue Ribbon Schools
  - Wal-Mart National Teacher of the Year in 2004These recognitions are an indication of the district’s goal to become one of the best districts in the nation.

### **Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement**

- **Develop a plan in collaboration with community agencies to address the issues of dropout and graduation rates.** Data indicates that there was an increase in the dropout rate and a decrease in the graduation rate this past year. Interviews of stakeholders indicated that although the district has a commitment to excellence and provides many opportunities for students to achieve, there is still a need to implement strategies to ensure that the “at risk” population can reach their potential.

## Conclusion

The commendations and recommendations 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 recommendations 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 several recommendations for improvement that the school district will need to address. Two years following this review, the school district will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's recommendations.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to Dr. Randy McCoy, Superintendent and Mr. David Meadows, Administrative Assistant, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for hosting the review team. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS CASI accreditation with AdvancED.

## Appendix

### Quality Assurance Review Team Members

**Dr. Patricia S. Golding, Team Chair, (Virginia)** currently is the Associate State Director for AdvancED: SACSCASI. She previously served as a member of the Virginia State Council for SACS CASI and as a state specialist. She also serves as an educational consultant and academic coordinator for the Virginia Department of Education, and as adjunct faculty for Old Dominion University and Radford University. Dr. Golding holds thirteen Virginia certifications in teaching and all levels of administration including a superintendent license. Some of her prior experiences include elementary teacher, teacher for all grades in special education; English and verbal studies instructor for Wytheville Community College; Elementary Supervisor, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and most recently Assistant Superintendent for Carroll County Public Schools (VA).

**Dr. Hugh L. Dickens, Vice-Chair (Mississippi)** is a retired educator and currently serves as a certified AdvancED Field Consultant. During a forty-two year career in education, he served as a secondary teacher of science and mathematics, secondary school principal and district superintendent and as a college vice president and graduate dean. Also, Dr. Dickens is currently a member of the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and serves as a member of the Mississippi AdvancED SACS-CASI State Council. He has served as facilitator or chair on numerous school and district QAR teams.

**Sarah J. Beard, Ed.D (Mississippi)** is currently retired. Previously, she served as an English/Spanish teacher; Certification Analyst, Bureau Director, Special Assistant to the State Superintendent of Education (Mississippi Department of Education); Interim Dean of Humanities, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, Tougaloo College and Director of Student Services, Belhaven College. She has over 30 years of public and private education experience and has served in various capacities with SACS/CASI since 1984.

**Mr. Brian D. Harvey, (Mississippi)** is currently the Assistant Superintendent for the Oxford School District in Oxford, Mississippi. He has previously served as a high school assistant principal, elementary principal, middle school principal and teacher for 10 years in the areas of social studies and technology.

**Mr. Roger M. Loper, (Arkansas)** is the principal of Magnolia High School in Magnolia, Arkansas. Previously, he served as Principal of Eastside Elementary School (10 Years), Assistant Principal of Magnolia Jr. High School (6 years), Magnolia Central Elementary School (3 years), and Truman High School in Truman, Arkansas (2 years). He has also served as teacher at both the elementary and secondary levels.

**Audrey H. Sidney, Ed.D., (Mississippi)** currently serves as an Advanc-Ed Field Consultant after having retired with 39 years of experience as an educator. Dr. Sidney is a former chair of the Mississippi SACS/CASI Council and a former member of the Founding Board for Advanc-Ed. Her previous experience includes being Head of School, elementary principal, and classroom teacher. She has served four terms on the Mississippi SACS Council for School Improvement and has facilitated and chaired numerous Quality Assurance Teams Review visits and has worked with public, private, and parochial schools. Dr. Sidney is the recipient of the SACS Distinguished John Davis Educational Achievement Award.

Mr. Larry K. Woods, (Kentucky), is the superintendent for the Lincoln County Schools in Stanford, Kentucky. His previous experience includes high school biology teacher, elementary principal, middle school principal, instructional supervisor, and Superintendent of Butler County Schools in Kentucky.

# **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](http://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.