



**Report of the  
Special Review Team for  
Fairfield County School District  
1226 US Highway 321 By-Pass South  
Winnsboro, SC 29180**

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**Review Dates:  
May 9-10, 2011**

# About AdvancED® and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

## Background

Dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 27,000 institutions in 69 countries. AdvancED provides accreditation under the seals of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI).

## The Accreditation Process

To earn and maintain accreditation, an institution must:

- 1. Meet the AdvancED Standards and accreditation policies.**  
Institutions demonstrate adherence to the AdvancED Standards and accreditation policies, which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for educational institutions to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2. Engage in continuous improvement.**  
Institutions implement a process of continuous improvement focused on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 3. Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.**  
Institutions engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, institutions host an external Quality Assurance Review team at least once every five years. The team evaluates the institution's adherence to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies, assesses the efficacy of the institution's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and Required Actions to help the institution improve. The institution acts on the team's Required Actions and submits an Accreditation Progress Report at prescribed intervals following the Quality Assurance Review. Monitoring visits may be conducted during this time to ensure that the institution is making progress toward the Required Actions.

## Special Reviews

At any point, a Special Review may be conducted in response to complaints or information about the institution and/or its system (district, board, or corporation) to determine adherence to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies. The institution and/or its system must respond to the Required Actions of the Special Review Team. Monitoring Teams may be sent to the institution and/or its system at regular intervals to ensure that progress is being made toward the Special Review Team's Required Actions. Both Special Review Teams and Monitoring Teams are empowered to make accreditation recommendations based upon evidence obtained during said visit.

## A Process of Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED Accreditation Process engages institutions in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help institutions be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

# Special Review Visit Report

## Introduction

In October 2009, AdvancED began receiving verbal, written and/or electronic communications expressing concerns that the Fairfield County Schools and the actions and behaviors of one or more board members were in violation of numerous AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies, including but not limited to Standard 1: Vision and Purpose, Standard 2: Governance and Leadership, Standard 5: Resources and Support Systems, and Standard 6: Stakeholder Communications and Relationships. As required by AdvancED policies and procedures, AdvancED sent a letter to the Superintendent detailing the alleged Standards violations and requesting a response to the referenced complaints. Based on the information contained in the complaints and the Superintendent's response, a Special Review Team was appointed by AdvancED to make an onsite visit to the institution on October 26-27, 2009. The Team's purpose in visiting the institution was to gather information and evidence needed to determine if the Fairfield County Schools and alleged actions and behaviors of the board members were in violation of the AdvancED Standards for Accreditation.

Specifically, the institution appeared to be in violation of the following standards:

### **AdvancED Standard 1: Vision and Purpose**

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

### **AdvancED Standard 2: Governance and Leadership**

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

### **AdvancED Standard 5: Resources and Support Systems**

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

### **AdvancED Standard 6: Stakeholder Communications and Relationships**

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

### **Findings and Recommendations of the October 26-27, 2009 Special Review Team**

Because no interview evidence was permitted by the district to be obtained onsite, the Team was not presented evidence to refute the allegations. It was the recommendation of the Special Review Team that all of the Fairfield County Schools be placed in the accreditation status of "Probation". In addition, a Monitoring Review Team was to be appointed and visit the school district no later than March 1, 2010 to evaluate the district's actions in addressing the Required Actions of the October 2009 Team. After review of the Team's report, the AdvancED South Carolina State Council placed the Fairfield County Schools on Accredited Probation status.

### **Findings and Recommendations of the February 28- March 2, 2010 Monitoring Review Team**

In conducting the review, the Monitoring Review Team focused on identifying relevant and factual activities and documents that would serve as a basis for assessing the Board's progress in addressing each of the Required Actions included in the October 2009 Special Review Team Report. In the February 28-March 2, 2009 report, the Team cited findings for each of the five Required Actions.

With the exception of Required Action 1, the evidence clearly indicated that the Fairfield County Board of Trustees failed to completely address the required actions provided in the October 2009 report of the Special Review Team. The Monitoring Review Team listed a number of directives under each of the remaining four Required Actions that must be completed. The Team recommended that the Fairfield County Schools remain in "Probation" status and that a Monitoring Review Team make a return visit no later than October 1, 2010 to assess the progress made on the remaining four Required Actions and directives.

### **Findings and Recommendations of the October 4-5, 2010 Monitoring Review Team**

In conducting the review, the Monitoring Review Team focused on identifying relevant and factual activities and documents that would serve as a basis for assessing the Board's progress in addressing each of the Required Actions and directives in the February 28-March 2, 2010 Monitoring Review Team Report. In the October 4-5, 2010 report, the Team cited findings for four of the five Required Actions.

With the exception of Required Action 1, the evidence continued to indicate that the Fairfield County Board of Trustees failed to completely address the Required Actions provided in the February 28-March 2 Monitoring Review Team Report. The Monitoring Review Team again listed directives under each of the remaining four Required Actions that must be completed. The Team recommended that the Fairfield County Schools remain in "Probation" status and that another Monitoring Review Team make a return visit no later than May 2011 to assess the progress made on the remaining four Required Actions and directives.

### **Activities of the Monitoring Review Team**

In preparation for the onsite review, the Monitoring Review Team reviewed the district's policy manual, videos of board meetings, district's web site, and written responses to Required Actions. Once on-site, the team engaged in the following activities:

- Meetings with the institution head, governing Board and leadership team.
- Interviews with 41 stakeholders representing parents, community leaders, principals and central office staff.
- Artifact review including the District Strategic Plan, School Renewal Plans, budget reports, profile (assessment rubric) for use with new hires, and minutes of board meetings. Email correspondence, special reports presented by stakeholders, videos of board meetings and newspaper articles also were studied.
- Team deliberations and report preparation.

## Findings

Based upon the information collected and reviewed, the Monitoring Review Team found sufficient evidence that supports fulfillment of the Required Actions.

### REQUIRED ACTION 1:

**Host under the conditions prescribed by AdvancED/SACS CASI, a visit by a second Special Review Team appointed by AdvancED/SACS CASI. This visit must occur prior to March 1, 2010, and all costs will be the responsibility of the district. All persons to be interviewed, including but not limited to, the superintendent, members of the Board of Trustees, central office and school level staff, community members, parents, will be invited by the district and appropriate space within the district will be provided.**

**Fairfield County Schools will validate through a written report and attached documentary evidence will be submitted to the South Carolina SACS CASI office no later than two (2) weeks prior to the second Special Review Team visit.**

X	<b>Completed</b> – All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of the required action.
	<b>In Progress</b> – The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the required action.
	<b>Has Not Addressed</b> – The institution has not taken any action at this time.

The Monitoring Review Team visited the Fairfield County School District on February 28-March 2, 2010 and noted in their findings that the district had successfully completed all necessary and appropriate actions related to this Required Action.

### REQUIRED ACTION 2:

**Demonstrate that the actions and behavior of all Board members; the Superintendent; and administrative, support and teaching staff are aligned with Board policies; especially those related to ethics and code of conduct, and all AdvancED/SACS CASI Accreditation Standards and Policies.**

X	<b>Completed</b> – All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of the required action.
	<b>In Progress</b> – The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the required action.
	<b>Has Not Addressed</b> – The institution has not taken any action at this time.

The Monitoring Review Team identified evidence that this Required Action is being met by the Fairfield County School District Board of Trustees. Based on interviews with board members and stakeholder groups, as well as review of board minutes and documentation provided, it is apparent that the actions and behavior of board members are aligned with board policies.

Since the Fall of 2010, board members have participated in training on the Basics of Boardmanship and attended the Legislative Advocacy Conference. Additionally, some attended

the School Law Workshop, the Annual Convention, and the New Board Orientation offered by the SC School Boards Association. The Board of Trustees sought out additional training by Dr. Paul Khrone, Executive Director of the SC School Boards Association. Dr. Billy Floyd of the SC AdvancED office and Dr. Paul Khrone of the SC School Boards Association were invited to meet with the Fairfield County School District Board of Trustees in December 2010 to update newly elected board members on the accreditation process and the Governance and Leadership Standard.

Interviews by the Monitoring Review Team resulted in positive findings regarding actions and behavior of board members over the past six months. Staff, parents, and community members commended the board chair on his leadership skills and praised the board on their demonstration of an understanding of their role and the professional decorum exhibited during meetings. Board meetings are video taped, and all meeting agendas are posted on the website for public viewing.

With the support of the Board, the Human Resources Department created a profile (assessment rubric) for new hires. This profile/assessment rubric is being used to provide objectivity in the hiring process to ensure the most highly qualified individuals are employed for positions in Fairfield County School District. An online applicant tracking system also has been completed to insure that the data base for all applications is properly maintained and managed. The Monitoring Team found no evidence of Board members interfering in the selection of staff or micromanaging the hiring process.

In compliance with Board policy and state requirements, Fairfield County School District completed their Strategic Plan for the 2011-2016 school years by March 30, 2011. The plan was available for review by the Monitoring Review Team. Board members, the Superintendent, the district staff, nine principals, nine teachers, parents, community members, a paraprofessional, and one student served on the Strategic Planning Team. Needs assessments for student achievement, teacher/administrator quality, and school climate were included as a part of the planning process. Performance goals and action plans were formulated for district priorities in school readiness for PreK and kindergarten students, for first and second graders, and for graduates who are expected to be 100% ready for a skilled workforce, college, or the military. Performance goals and action plans for school climate included parent conference plans, a decrease in student discipline referrals, and an increase in student and staff attendance. Student achievement goals and action plans were developed to increase PASS scores in ELA and mathematics for students in grades 3-8. Goals and action plans for improvement on end of course tests in English, Algebra, Physical Science, and U.S. History and Constitution were a part of the Strategic Plan. The detailed plans included action steps, timelines, persons responsible, estimated costs, funding sources, and indicators of implementation. The budget documents included funds for professional development and the initiatives stated in the District Strategic Plan.

Not only the District Strategic Plan, the School Renewal Plans, budget documents, and board minutes were studied, but interviews with Board members, the Superintendent, district staff, principals, parents, and community members revealed that they had participated in the development of the Strategic Plan for 2011-2016. It was evident to the Monitoring Review Team that a collaborative process involving all stakeholder groups was used to guide the continuous improvement process, allocation and alignment of resources, and actions of all members of the school community.

Members of the Fairfield County Board of Trustees have aligned their actions and behaviors with the policies they have adopted and all applicable AdvancED Accreditation Standards. Based on the review of board minutes, the viewing of videotapes of board meetings, and interviews with stakeholders, the Monitoring Team determined that the board is demonstrating ethical behaviors as per their Board Policy BCA-Board Member Code of Ethics. The board chair continually demonstrated his commitment to leading the board in accordance with their Code of Conduct. Documentation established that the board grasps its responsibilities for meeting this Required Action as defined by policy and AdvancED Accreditation Standards and has demonstrated ownership of the governance issues.

The Monitoring Review Team feels that the appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. Fairfield County School District has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of this Required Action.

**REQUIRED ACTION 3:**

**Review the match of Central Office positions including job descriptions with those personnel actually employed. Align the positions/personnel to better deploy resources to support teaching and learning in the schools.**

X	<b>Completed</b> – All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of the required action.
	<b>In Progress</b> – The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the required action.
	<b>Has Not Addressed</b> – The institution has not taken any action at this time.

The Monitoring Review Team found that Fairfield County School District has the resources necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students. It is imperative that the district use these resources to recruit and retain highly qualified and effective personnel to improve and maintain academic gains at every school. The District Report Card released in the Fall of 2010 indicated that the numbers of teachers with Emergency or Provisional Contracts increased from the prior year; teacher vacancies for more than nine weeks increased; the prime instructional time across the district decreased; the percentage of expenditures for instruction decreased; and 7.1 percent of classes were not taught by highly qualified teachers. In 2010, the District Improvement Status was “Corrective Action” because of not having met AYP for four years. Therefore, it is important to utilize allocated resources to employ and staff the district in a manner that will contribute to academic success for all students. While a 2011 District Report Card has not yet been released, Fairfield County has initiated steps to address the above areas of concern.

The district was directed to review/study organizational charts, especially central office staffing, match positions with job descriptions, make comparisons to districts of similar size that have comparable demographics and academic needs, and use the results of these studies to make decisions that will strengthen the deployment of personnel to support teaching and learning in Fairfield County. New organizational charts have been developed by the superintendent and district staff. Some positions have been eliminated, thus reducing the number of certified and classified staff positions at the district office to approximately 60. Job descriptions have been

developed and matched to actual responsibilities and job titles. Some positions have been reallocated to the school level to enhance teaching and learning. The newly developed organizational chart and clear communication regarding chain of command have been shared with the school principals but not all stakeholders are aware of the new organizational chart and the job descriptions.

A professional salary study has been completed and is being refined for implementation. The official salary scale has not yet been approved by the Board, therefore, implementation has not yet begun. Plans are to place the salary scale on the board’s agenda for next month and possibly begin initial steps of implementation with certain classified positions in 2011-2012.

Although gains in achievement are needed, the Monitoring Review Team feels that numerous appropriate actions have been taken to match positions including job descriptions with those persons actually employed. A number of central office positions have been eliminated and personnel have been aligned to more effectively deploy resources to support teaching and learning at the school level. Therefore, there is sufficient evidence that Fairfield County School District meets this Required Action.

**REQUIRED ACTION 4:**

**Evaluate all income and expenditures in the current year’s budget that are available to support the process of improving learning and instruction for all students. Identify ways to increase use of funds for these efforts, demonstrating use of this information to inform Board members how priorities can be re-aligned for the next budgetary cycle.**

**Progress Status:** Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

X	<b>Completed</b> - All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of the recommendation.
	<b>In Progress</b> - The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the recommendation.
	<b>Have Not Addressed</b> - The institution has not taken any action at this time.

In order to complete the Required Action, there must be compelling evidence that a thorough evaluation of income and revenue has occurred. Through interviews, review of budget documents, board minutes, and a multitude of other artifacts and documentation, the Monitoring Review Team found evidence of the connection between appropriating or re-aligning the financial resources of the system and meeting the greatest needs of the system to improve learning and instruction for all students.

The Monitoring Review Team found sufficient evidence that evaluating income and expenditures for the current and approaching school year had occurred. Board members who were interviewed described the complexity of the budget building process, and the patience and earnest commitment of the administration to ensure Board members understood various budget components. The Monitoring Review Team examined evidence of the 2010-2011 budgetary cycle that included:

1. An itemized expenditure report by facility location

2. A report of revenue by funding source and title
3. A budget timeline with directions and a flow chart detailing the process for budget preparation
4. An approved budget for the 2010-2011 school year
5. A preliminary budget for the 2011-2012 school year

The District Strategic Plan, School Renewal Plans, and stakeholder interviews with central office staff and principals affirm a formal approach to assessing needs in the district and a commitment by the superintendent and leadership to give all expressed needs due consideration. The Board of Trustees has been directly involved in the budgetary process through a finance sub-committee of trustees and work sessions with the entire board. The budget summary report shows by category the prior year budgeted amount, the proposed amount for the approaching year, and the variance between the two, revealing shifts in appropriations or priorities.

Evidence indicates that the Fairfield County School District has shown full compliance with this Required Action demonstrating how priorities can be re-aligned for the next budgetary cycle. Therefore, the Monitoring Team finds that this Required Action has been met.

**REQUIRED ACTION 5:**

**Document for each school how funds are used to support implementation of specific strategies in their school improvement plans/goals. Demonstrate that the school leaders have used such information to update and refine their current school renewal (improvement) plans.**

**Progress Status:** Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this recommendation.

X	<b>Completed</b> - All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of the recommendation.
	<b>In Progress</b> - The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the recommendation.
	<b>Have Not Addressed</b> - The institution has not taken any action at this time.

In order to meet this Required Action, the Board, the district staff and the schools had to establish, implement and monitor a continuous process of improvement that focused on student performance. To demonstrate continuous improvement, the district and its schools had to develop and implement improvement plans, based on student performance and school/community data that include clear goals for raising the achievement of all students.

The process of planning for continuous improvement has progressed during this last probationary period. The Monitoring Review Team found that a District Strategic Plan and the School Renewal Plans for 2011-2016 school years have been developed. Two cycles of School Renewal Plans were examined in this review, including the plans that ended this 2010-2011 school year and the new five-year plans for 2011-2016 school years. Interview responses from the superintendent and principals indicate that assessed needs, as evident in the School Renewal Plans, are the driving principle for securing support for strategies and plans of action.

The plans are based on goals derived from student and school performance data that show the current level of performance and improvement targets over time. The S.M.A.R.T (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) goals framework is used consistently in the district and school-level plans. Actionable strategies, including cost projections and funding sources, are reflected in the plans. The Superintendent discussed meetings with the school principals in which she asked for their program and budget needs during spring 2010 and spring 2011.

Evidence indicates that the Fairfield County Schools are in compliance with this Required Action to validate how each school will use funds to support implementation of specific strategies in their school improvement plans/goals. Therefore, the Monitoring Review Team finds that the full requirements of this Required Action are met.

## **Conclusion**

The Monitoring Review Team recognizes the areas in which the Fairfield County Schools have made progress toward the Required Actions set forth by the Special and Monitoring Review Teams of October 2009, March 2010, and October 2010. The board chair is to be commended for his leadership skills, and the Board is to be praised for the great strides made in working together as a team to improve the Fairfield County Schools. Personal agendas have been set aside and positive actions have been taken to move Fairfield County forward. The Board of Trustees in concert with the system leadership has acted to bring the community and the school system together; ensure that there is a sustained commitment by the board for active, continuous improvement in the district; while meeting all AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies.

Based on the findings of this Monitoring Review Team of May 9-10, 2011, **Accreditation** status is recommended. This recommendation has been affirmed by the South Carolina Council.