

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Rapid City Catholic School System**

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United States

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North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

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About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

Background. Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (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 April 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form one strong unified organization dedicated to education quality. That unified organization, known as AdvancED, creates the world's largest education community, representing 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 65 countries worldwide and educating 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 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 Schools.** 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 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.

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

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

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

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. 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 at the state level and by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school district following action from the commission.

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited Rapid City Catholic School System on 11/15/2009 - 11/18/2009.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 7 administrators, 82 teachers, 20 support staff, 37 parents and business partners, 78 students, and 9 Board of Education members for a total of 233 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 2 schools within the school district. During the school visits, team members interviewed school stakeholders, observed classrooms, and reviewed relevant school artifacts. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the district. Specifically, the team examined the district's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

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

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

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

The team used the standard reports and quality assurance findings to identify common themes, significant accomplishments, and pressing needs facing the district. These became the basis for the overall commendations and 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 Rapid City Catholic School System 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. The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Rapid City Catholic School System for:

- **Stakeholders are committed to the successful fulfillment of the system's mission to develop personal and academic excellence in the catholic tradition.**

In 2002, over 100 stakeholders developed the current mission statement of the system. This statement was affirmed in 2008 when the system's strategic plan was reviewed. Stakeholders interviewed indicated that in addition to their knowledge of the mission statement, it was their belief the mission was part of the daily life of the system.

The mission statement sets the stage for all that the system attempts to achieve.

- **Strong leadership from the governing body and system administrators provide direction and support for the achievement of the system's strategic design plan.**

Through stakeholders interviews, it was evident that Bishop Cupich, the system's governing committee, and the school board along with the administration work in harmony with students and staff to achieve the goals of the strategic plan.

Consistent, visionary and faithful leadership is important to the Rapid City Catholic School System to grow and maintain quality in its instructional program.

- **A family-like culture supports the mission of the system and promotes collaboration among and between students, staff, parents, and community stakeholders to build a community of learners.**

Stakeholders expressed their appreciation for the sense of family that is evident in the school. Because the school is small, parents, students, and staff members know each other. This sense of family comes from a deliberate decision to become a community rather than just result of size.

The sense of family brings a commitment to the school system that makes RCCSS a special place.

- **Open and effective communication enhances the relationship between the system and its stakeholders.**

Interviews with stakeholders indicated the system has an open door policy for parents and students. In addition, the system's website contains pertinent information including instructional goals, curriculum maps, strategic plans, school board minutes, and the NCA QAR report. The school uses School Reach for immediate communication with stakeholders.

The communication processes used by the system contribute to the trust necessary for successful student performance and sustaining community support for education.

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- **The students live the mission of the school.**

Interviews with parents, board members, and staff indicate the willingness of RCCSS students to be involved in both the school and church as well as to service in the Rapid City community. Students both in and out of the classroom setting demonstrated a faithfulness to the system's mission while achieving individual academic success.

The students of RCCSS are an example of fulfillment of the system's mission.

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 Rapid City Catholic School System will be held accountable for making progress on each of the recommendations noted in this section. 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.

- **Gather, analyze, and use data designed to measure the effectiveness of system programs, departments, and processes.**

A review of the artifacts indicated little evidence of perceptual data from staff and students regarding system effectiveness. Goals and plans for department, committees, and system wide goals do not include specific intervention strategies. There is no evidence of system goals interventions. While there is a gathering of data regarding professional development, the system needs data on the impact of professional development efforts.

Systematic gathering and analysis of data regarding system programs, departments, and processes will enhance system effectiveness.

- **Expand the disaggregation and analysis of student achievement data to monitor and guide decisions related to curriculum and instruction.**

The system uses the Dakota Step assessment in its data retreat, but there is little evidence of disaggregation and detailed analysis of other student achievement data.

Multiple measures are needed to impact teaching and learning.

- **Monitor the implementation of the technology plan and prioritize goals to most effectively meet the technology needs of students and staff.**

There is a technology plan but limited resources hinder upgrades. The system has multiple servers and while the donation of equipment to the system increases access for students to computer stations, there is a need to modernize equipment. Some peripherals have been added through grants including projectors, SmartBoards, and white boards.

Students need access to current technology in order to obtain 21st Century learning skills.

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

Next Steps

The school district should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school district.
3. Develop action plans to address the 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. 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 Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork, provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help school districts and their schools with continuous improvement.

Celebrating Accreditation

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

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school district, its schools, and community in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the commendations and address the 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.

Standards for Accreditation

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

The Quality Assurance Review Team divided into standard teams to review each standard and prepare a standards report summarizing the team's findings. These standard reports, along with the quality assurance findings that follow these reports, provided the basis for the team's identification of over-arching commendations and 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.

Standard 1. Vision & Purpose

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

Description:

The Rapid City Catholic School System (RCCSS) mission statement provides focus and direction for stakeholders throughout the system. In 2002, over 100 stakeholders of the system through discussion and collaboration developed the vision statement for the system. At the same time the system developed a strategic plan which was reassessed in 2008. The strategic plan gave the system individual vision statements in the areas of campus ministry, curriculum, instruction, assessment, technology, stakeholders, personnel, leadership, and finance. The strategic plan also set the values and purpose of the system by addressing Catholic core values. Interviews with system and school personnel, students, parents, and other stakeholders indicated a strong knowledge and commitment to the mission and values. Posters, plaques, and posters throughout the system and schools reinforce the mission and values of the system. Stakeholders indicated the mission and values of the school drive the decision-making process both in and out of the classroom.

Profile and survey data provides evidence that the RCCSS provides a quality education to the students in the system in accordance with the system's vision of developing personal and academic excellence. Students and parents articulated examples of how RCCSS develops and encourages personal and academic excellence. A commitment to service at all grade levels is considered an integral part of forming the whole person in students enrolled in the RCCSS. Students understand their role in contributing to the larger society by taking part in a wide range of service projects geared toward family, school, and community. In addition Catholic traditions are evident throughout the system and supported by the stakeholders. Daily prayer and weekly liturgies involve all students. An active campus ministry program allows students opportunities for retreat experiences. Older students articulated the belief that they are expected to be role models for younger students in the system. Academic excellence is evident at all levels as shown by excellent results on a wide range of standardized test scores. Students, parents, and staff share high expectations for behavior and academics. In accordance with this expectation, the system has used test data and survey results to establish continuous improvement goals for each of the three schools in the

system. These goals should further drive the mission and vision of the school as it strives to continue academic excellence for all students.

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

- The evidence gathered from stakeholders indicated the system's mission is the focal point for decision making.
- Stakeholders emphasize and test results verify that a strong focus on student performance exists throughout the system.
- The RCCSS exists for the purpose of molding individuals in mind, body, and spirit as evidenced by the focus on spiritual formation throughout the grade levels.
- A commitment to service and an excellent campus ministry program assist with the development of personal excellence.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop a systematic process for reviewing and analyzing the mission statement and accompanying vision statements to ensure consistent commitment to and exploration of trends and issues that can impact the RCCSS.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Rapid City Catholic School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

Standard 2. Governance & Leadership

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

Description:

The RCCSS operates under the jurisdiction of a two-tiered governing body within the Diocese of Rapid City: a governing committee and a school board. The governing committee consists of Bishop Cupich, Chancellor, and Vicar General. The twelve (12) member school board consists of two diocesan priests and ten (10) community members, where each parish community is represented on the board. The governing body of the RCCSS has established policies and procedures for the effective operation of the system that provide for compliance with local, state, and federal laws and regulations. The governing body of the RCCSS is unique in its design and structure. School board members are required to attend a retreat conducted by the Bishop of the Diocese where they receive training and guidance pertaining to their roles in school leadership. School board members and administrators reported that the Bishop is a strong supporter of the RCCSS, as evidenced by his frequent visits to classrooms and presiding over school liturgies.

The QAR team reviewed the following essential artifacts: organizational staffing chart, school policy manuals, personnel manual, student and parent handbooks, and teacher evaluation plan. Interviews with school leaders, and pertinent artifacts revealed a delineated school improvement structure that includes a district NCA leadership team and building committee structure that includes goal, data, and publicity committees.

Interviews with teachers revealed the school provides leadership opportunities, as well as opportunities to give input in the decision-making process. The school system provides stakeholders opportunities for meaningful roles in the leadership and decision-making process. Interviews revealed that there were shared leadership opportunities, such as the Superintendent Advisory Committee, comprised of teachers from all three schools in the system. Teachers reported they appreciate the support they receive from administrators and the school board. An example of this is their request for a middle school principal was budgeted for and implemented two years ago. Interviews with stakeholders revealed a strong level of confidence in the school administration, including principals, superintendent, and governing body. Stakeholders expressed confidence in and respect for their authority, vision, leadership, and the direction the school is taking. In addition, the administrative structure of the school system revealed that the re-establishment of the superintendent position in 2006 was not only needed but was appreciated and supported by stakeholders and allowed the school system to function more effectively. Finally, interviews with students indicated a genuine respect for teachers and administrators, and that the school community is a family.

The system employs a variety of assessments, both formative and summative, to evaluate student achievement and teaching effectiveness. It is evident that students in this school system are performing well above state and national levels in academic subjects. Teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors utilize testing data to guide the educational process. Data retreats are conducted annually to guide instructional goals. Teachers reported that initially these had been done at the building level, then evolved into a system-wide event. Stakeholders indicated they were aware of policies and procedures.

Processes for communicating policies and procedures to parents and stakeholders were effective. Modes of communication include but are not limited to: letters, e-mail, website, EdLine, Parent/Teacher conferences, orientation, liturgies, and stakeholder meetings.

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

- The school improvement process is teacher-driven.
- Family atmosphere of the school community.
- Shared leadership opportunities for teachers and staff.
- Confidence of stakeholders in the school's leadership in the vision and direction of the school for the future needs of Catholic education.
- Support of Bishop Cupich for the RCCSS.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Develop and implement a system evaluation process for programs and processes such as data management, school lunch program, allocation of resources, professional development, and fund-raising activities.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Rapid City Catholic School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

Standard 3. Teaching & Learning

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

Description:

Using the TechPaths curriculum mapping program, the school system has developed core maps for all of the high school and most of the K-8 subject areas based on South Dakota State Standards. Staff members at the various grade levels have been involved in discussions pertaining to vertical and horizontal alignment which they feel has been beneficial in eliminating redundancies and recognizing gaps in curricular areas. An administrator acts as a part-time curriculum coordinator, and a separate staff member serves as a resource for curriculum mapping. A cycle for reviewing the curriculum exists, and staff members feel comfortable mapping and accessing curricular standards for courses.

An annual system-wide data retreat attended by all teachers and administrators analyzes assessment data and uses the results to drive instruction. A variety of standardized assessments, both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced, include data related to both achievement and ability. These assessments provide instructors with data to assist them in differentiating instruction to best meet the needs of all learners. Placement tests are used at the middle school level in mathematics to help with appropriate placement of students.

Professional development related to research-based instructional practices, including in-service on Marzano's Instructional Strategies, helps teachers widen their repertoire of teaching strategies. Professional development has also included training related to integrating technology into instruction. The office of Technology in Education (TIE) has provided technology training for staff members who have utilized the "train the trainer" model to share this information with other staff members. This training has accompanied a push to improve access to and use of technology in the classroom. Promethean SMART boards, projectors, and the addition of more computer labs demonstrate the system's commitment to improving the integration of technology in the classroom.

Programs exist to support instruction that challenge and meet the needs of all students. Examples include Reading Recovery, Project Excel, and peer tutoring. Students with learning disabilities find assistance from a full-time literacy aide along with a special education teacher. These people work in conjunction with the classroom teacher and experts from the Rapid City Public Schools to develop an accommodation plan for students in need of extra assistance. At the same time, opportunities exist for advanced students including Advanced Placement classes as well as a variety of enrichment activities available at all grade levels. Students are encouraged to enter competitions related to academic areas and have found success at the local, state, and national level.

A strong Catholic identity is apparent throughout the school system from the religion curriculum taught at the various levels to the commitment shown to establishing a strong campus ministry program and the special programs such as the cross-age mentoring program called Teen Life Choices (TLC), Living and Integrating Faith and Education In Chastity, Healthy Relationships, Intimacy, Sexuality and Theology (Life in Christ) , Society of Savio (Middle School), Apostles of Life, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and required service to family, school, and community.

Staff members feel instructional time is valued and protected by administrators. High expectations for

learning exist throughout the system, and strong test scores provide testimony to the dedication to academics that exists across grade levels. Academic success is celebrated in the Rapid City Catholic Schools. Strong ACT scores and high numbers of students attending post secondary institutions speak to the academic rigor that is systemic throughout the schools.

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

- The district effectively uses data to inform instructional decisions to increase student achievement.
- Stakeholders speak to the dedication, professionalism, and highly qualified status of their faculty and administrators.
- Teachers concur that administrators support them in their efforts to seek professional development opportunities.
- High expectations and respect for time on task, both indicators of effective schools based on research, are apparent throughout the system.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Continue to work on updating the quality and quantity of technology available for teaching.
- Broaden the annual data retreat to include data from other sources including the State Writing Assessment, parent and stakeholder feedback, and SAT 10 scores.
- Train teachers to utilize Emetric and Achievement Series independently as a tool to tailor instruction to individual needs of learners.
- Complete the process of mapping all subject areas at every grade level using TechPaths.
- Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of research-based instructional practices.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Rapid City Catholic School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Teaching & Learning" standard.

Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results

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

Description:

The RCCSS has a comprehensive assessment system that uses multiple standardized assessments that are aligned to student expectations. These standardized assessments include the Dakota Step Tests (the South Dakota State Assessment) in grades 3-8 and grade 11; the PLAN in grade 10; the Stanford Writing Assessment in grades 5, 7 and 10, the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test in grades 3, 6 and 11, the South Dakota Technology Literacy Assessment in grade 8; Stanford Achievement Tests (10th Edition) in grades 5, 8 and 11; and the PSAT in grades 10 and 11. In addition, nearly all students take the ACT at the high school level. These assessments are used to monitor student academic achievement and student ability. The data is used to improve curriculum and programs and to impact student learning throughout the system.

The system has engaged in data retreats for the past three years and during the past year engaged all teachers in a data retreat to analyze the results of the Dakota Step Tests in both reading and math. The

results from this data retreat were used by staff to improve their instruction and to incorporate reading and math content standards and applications into all content areas. Teachers interviewed indicated they were excited to have an opportunity to further analyze and understand this data and to use it to enhance instruction. Currently, the data retreat has focused primarily on the results of the Dakota Step Tests and has not integrated other assessments into that analysis. In addition, interviews with teachers and administrators indicated a need for additional formative assessment tools to support instruction.

An internal assessment has been developed at the middle school level to address appropriate student placement in the math curriculum. This assessment is used for students entering the RCCSS system at the high school level to ensure appropriate placement and support of those students. Elementary teachers indicated they had sufficient formative assessment tools in the area of literacy, but were seeking additional support in the area of math.

The system has conducted parent and stakeholder perceptual surveys in addition to the student achievement data. There was no evidence of faculty or student perceptions surveys or follow-up surveys with graduates. Administrators indicated that exit surveys are completed for families leaving RCCSS to determine the reasons for their departure from the system. Several of the NCA leadership team members indicated that sub-committees had completed surveys of staff regarding use of instructional strategies and had used that data for planning.

Student achievement data is shared with parents and families through testing reports, EdLine, parent teacher conferences, and informal contacts with parents and families. In addition, meetings regarding individual student progress are available for parents as well as the use of a teacher assistance team (TAT) to address special learning needs of students. Parents interviewed indicated they would like to receive the standardized testing results in a more timely manner. The explanations of the standardized testing program and the standardized test results are posted on the district website for access by stakeholders.

RCCSS has done comparison of data to state and national scores. They have done limited comparison of data to comparable schools systems and could benefit from examining their performance in relation to comparable systems. A review of system standardized assessment data indicates that students perform at high levels on most assessments. Further analysis of results should be done to determine verifiable student growth.

The system provides for the appropriate and secure retention of student records. In addition, students and families have access to student grades and progress through the EdLine program.

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

- The system uses multiple criterion and norm referenced standardized assessments to assess student performance.
- Ability assessments are used in conjunction with both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments to determine if students are performing to their ability levels.
- Data retreats have been expanded to include all staff in the review and analysis of the Dakota Step reading and math data.
- The system uses multiple means to communicate both individual student achievement to parents and families and system level achievement data to appropriate stakeholders.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Explore additional formative assessment tools that will support the teacher use of data to make

instructional decisions.

- Expand the data used in the data retreat to include other standardized assessment data.
- Identify comparable systems and benchmark RCCSS results with results from those systems.
- Develop systematic processes to gather and use perceptual feedback from students, staff, graduates, parents, and other stakeholders to evaluate system effectiveness.
- Explore methods to assess the effectiveness of the religious education program and the development of Catholic identity throughout the system.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Rapid City Catholic School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Documenting & Using Results" standard.

Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems

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

Description:

The RCCSS recruits teachers through a variety of means including the website, local newspapers, church bulletins, selected universities and the South Dakota State Department of Education teacher placement service. The school board set policies for hiring of staff which include the screening of applications, interviews, references, and background checks. Currently 96% of the staff members meet the state highly qualified standards, and the remaining three staff members are working toward appropriate certification. New staff members are assigned a mentor and participate in a full-day induction program that provides training and information on system curriculum and programs. In interviews, staff members hired in the past several years indicated they feel supported by their colleagues and administrators and there is a great deal of informal mentoring and sharing that occurs between staff members.

The system has a professional development plan that is aligned to the system and building goals. In addition, surveys are used to identify staff development needs. The system makes extensive use of the "train the trainer" model for the delivery of professional development and uses services of Technology in Education (TIE) to support several professional development initiatives. In addition, staff indicated they had participated in book study groups and were offered opportunities to take courses for credit with the system providing partial financial support for the credit. Staff members complete surveys following professional development activities to assess their satisfaction with the professional development activities and to identify future needs. Teachers expressed that they are provided opportunities for professional development within the system and through workshops and conferences. In interviews, teachers indicated that when they request support for attendance at a conference or workshop, it is almost always granted and funding support is provided by the system or through parent groups.

The system provides sufficient numbers of staff members to meet the needs of students. Class sizes are relatively small at all levels, allowing teachers to work more closely with students and parents. The system has a special education teacher who works closely with RCCSS staff in assisting students with special needs and works collaboratively with Rapid City Public Schools Special Education Services personnel to develop and implement service plans for students with special needs. The middle school and high school have implemented study skills programs for students with special needs. In addition, there is a

program (Excel) to provide enrichment services to gifted students.

The system uses a zero-based budgeting process and has a balanced budget annually. Approximately 74% of the budget is from tuition, and there is parish support for the elementary level. The budget includes Diocesan support for religious education. The system has been proactive in seeking grant funding as evidenced by a Homeland Security grant for a keycard system; the Toyota Tapestry Grant, Best Buy and Midcontinent grants; as well as the Adams-Mastrovich Family Foundation funding for the fine arts.

The system has an endowment of approximately four million dollars. In the past, this endowment has been used to support increases in teacher salaries. Due to the economic issues related to investments, the yield from the endowment has not been available to support these initiatives. Interviews with school board members and administrative staff indicated they are cognizant of the need to review and increase teacher salaries in order to recruit and retain quality staff members while still balancing the budget.

Administrators have calculated costs per students and are studying cost-based tuition in their ongoing financial planning. Tuition assistance is available, and administrators indicated there had been a decrease in available funds for tuition assistance this past year compared to previous years due to the economy. The system uses an outside agency, TADS (Tuition Aid Data Services) to gather and rank needs for tuition assistance. Families apply through TADS, and the system receives information that ranks the financial needs of students and families.

The system has several committees that involve the board members and other representatives. These committees include a finance committee, development committee, and a facilities committee. Each of these committees establish goals, and the finance committee is responsible for developing a five-year financial plan. The system and Diocese recently purchased land and facilities from St. Martin's Monastery for future expansion of the school at the site that will be named Terra Sancta. The finance and facilities committees will be actively engaged along with administrative staff in the planning for the development and renovation of the facilities at Terra Sancta.

The system ensures that financial transactions are safeguarded through proper budgeting procedures and an annual audit. Purchasing processes are in place and the business office maintains appropriate records of finances.

The team observed that the facilities provide a safe, orderly, and healthy environment for students and staff. Sufficient space was indicated as an issue by staff at the middle school and elementary levels. Many large classrooms have been divided into two rooms with classroom dividers. While these classrooms are meeting the educational needs of the students, teachers indicated issues with limited outlets and shared lighting. These facility issues will be resolved through the renovation of the facilities at Terra Sancta and the move of the elementary school to that facility. The elementary and middle schools participate in the Federal School Lunch program; however, the high school does not have a kitchen facility to support their participation in that program. An a la carte lunch program is provided at the high school level. The system has a facilities committee which monitors and plans for ongoing facility improvements and an annual review and update of the master facilities plan.

The system has developed crisis plans and has implemented a key card entrance system through the use of grant funds. Teachers are provided a crisis bag for their classrooms which contains items including emergency contact lists, maps, and a flashlight. Staff indicated they were aware of the crisis and security plans and that the lock-down plan had been used on a couple of occasions due to community

issues.

System personnel indicated that technology infrastructure has been a challenging area due to financial needs. Over the past several years, the system has made several commitments to improve access to technology and the infrastructure to support the technology. There is a long-range technology plan for the system that is reviewed and revised annually. The system employs a network administrator who also provides training for staff. In addition, they contract with other technology support personnel to provide additional network support. There are computer labs in the buildings, mobile carts at the high school, and a desk-top or laptop computer in each classroom for teacher use. The system recently purchased four Promethean boards with three to be placed at the elementary and middle school and one at the high school. In addition, the high school has two SmartBoards. Technology staff members indicated there is a challenge in maintaining up-to-date equipment as the system relies heavily on donated and used computers. Overall, interviews with staff and parents indicated that the system has made great progress in the area of technology in the past several years, particularly with limited financial resources.

RCCSS adopted EdLine to use as a communication tool with families and students. This web-based program allows teachers to post grades, assignments, and other classroom information that parents and students can access. Parents and staff members indicated they were pleased with the access to the information on EdLine. The school uses School Reach, a telephone messaging system, to communicate with parents and families. The network administrator provides support for EdLine and for assisting parents and families in connecting to EdLine. In addition, she provides training for staff on EdLine and grading programs.

The system provides support services to meet the needs of students and families. There are two guidance counselors in addition to other support staff. RCCSS also has a chaplain who serves students at all levels in the system. Stakeholders interviewed spoke of the “family-like” community within the system that meets the needs of students and supports their vision of “Developing personal and academic excellence in the Catholic tradition.” Support staff indicated their role was to provide the support necessary for students to achieve their personal and academic best and that related areas such as food service and maintenance provide the support for students to grow and learn. The religious identity and Catholic tradition was apparent throughout the system in the interactions between and among staff, parents, and students. Interviews with parents and staff members revealed there were strong connections between home and school to support students in all aspects of their personal and academic growth.

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

- The system has a professional development plan that is aligned to system and building goals and is based upon identified needs.
- The system has been proactive in seeking grant funds to support programs and initiatives within the system.
- The school board committees in the areas of finance, facilities and development establish long-range plans and annual goals to support the vision and direction of the system.
- The adoption of EdLine has been well-received as a communications tool by parents, students, and staff.
- The system has purchased Terra Sancta and has a long range plan to address the facility needs of the system, particularly the space needs for the elementary and middle school and eventually the entire system.
- Students and families are supported through a network of programs and activities that support the vision of the system and build an extended community that supports and addresses the needs of students, staff and families.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Evaluate the mentoring program to ensure that new teachers receive sufficient staff development to implement curriculum and programs used within the system.
- Expand the evaluation of staff development activities to assess the level of implementation and the impact on student performance.
- Explore ways to better address the food service issue at the high school level and explore the possibilities of expanding the Federal School Lunch program to that level.
- Continue to assess the technology needs within the system and revise and update plans to meet these needs.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Rapid City Catholic School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

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

Description:

The Rapid City Catholic School System (RCCSS) offers a wide variety of opportunities to ensure that adequate and effective communication exists among the stakeholders. Technology has improved system communication in the past two years. EdLine provides the opportunity for students and families to monitor online students' daily progress, teacher lessons and assignments, lunch account balances, scholarship information, and a calendar of events. In addition, the RCCSS website is well-designed and has information regarding mission and vision, faith development, system announcements, academics, activities, student test results, school board minutes, and development and alumni.

The school development officer communicates with families, alumni, donors, and staff. School Reach is used to transmit common messages to families regarding school issues and activities. For the first time this year, the school newsletter is provided to families online and a high school newspaper has been produced. In addition, school news is posted in the church bulletins each week. Within the school system, e-mail is used to communicate among teachers, staff, and administration.

Two parent teacher conferences are held each year to discuss academic progress, behavioral concerns, and personal growth. The Boosters and Parent Teacher Organization support the RCCSS and provide opportunities for parents to be involved and network with each other. Planners are required for all students beginning in third grade, and these serve as a communication tool between school and home. At the beginning of the school year, an orientation is held at each grade level. All parish communities in Rapid City are represented on the school board.

Stakeholders in the community provide time, talent, and treasure to RCCSS. A support system is in place for the school that includes parents and families, grandparents, and community members. The Junior Achievement program helps to provide students with life experiences. Stakeholders volunteer to serve in the classrooms and with extra-curricular activities. The Adopt a Priest program invites priests into the classroom. There has been a positive response in the community to the fundraising efforts of the RCCSS.

As they seek to grow in the RCSSS, stakeholders are involved in the vision for the future.

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

- The system demonstrates a strong commitment to community building and effective communication with and among its stakeholders.
- The use of technology has become a valuable method to enhance and promote effective school communication.
- The RCCSS makes an effort to provide information to all stakeholders.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Continue to work with parents and families on the transition to online communication.
- Examine the type of information and the level of use for the School Reach phone system.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional", indicating that the Rapid City Catholic School System has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

Description:

Over 100 stakeholders took part in the development of the RCCSS Strategic Design Plan in 2002. In 2008, this plan was reviewed and updated with outside assistance in an effort to revitalize this document as a tool for guiding the direction of the school system. The administration, staff, students, and parents are committed to the vision of personal and academic excellence. With this intent, faculty members used assessment information mined from a data retreat to identify school improvement goals at the building levels focusing on reading and math. With increased proficiency on the Dakota STEP test the desired result, interventions were established at each of the three building levels to target reading and math instruction and to improve student performance. Faculty and administration will use current Dakota STEP results as baseline data as they attempt to monitor the effectiveness of the chosen interventions.

Faculty were knowledgeable about the school improvement goals. Each played a role in forming the goals and the strategies by attending the annual data retreat held for faculty members and serving on committees related to the establishment of school improvement goals. When asked, faculty members believe the interventions are taking place at the various grade levels. However, the system must establish specific methods to document whether or not the interventions are actually happening on a regular and systemic level. Additionally, professional development for staff members has been specifically directed at developing instructional strategies to better meet the needs of all learners (Marzano's Strategies for Instructional Effectiveness). The system must develop a method of monitoring whether or not this research-based professional development is being integrated into classroom instruction.

Implementation of system goals at the building level has focused on student achievement for students. An Academic Service department is designed to meet the needs of gifted and academically challenged

students. TAT (Teacher Assistance Teams) are utilized for students in need of interventions. The Excel program is in place to enhance gifted students' curriculum. Some of the initiatives included Guided Reading at the elementary level, Extended Learning Time at the middle school, and peer tutoring at the high school level. Differentiated Instruction as well as the development of flexible reading groups is integrated at all levels. Grade level meetings are held formally once a month and informally once a week to establish a cohesive core curriculum.

Essential personnel including the superintendent, principals and lead teachers review the system's vision to ensure coordination and resource allocation as needed. The school board is divided into four committees, facility, executive, finance, and development. The committee's members consist of stakeholders, parents, administrators, teachers, and students to review and provide input on the progress of the vision and goals.

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

- Building improvement plans are aligned to vision and strategic plans.
- A leadership team of administrators and teachers guides continuous improvement plans.
- Success obtained through the initiatives associated with the vision is evident through the family-like atmosphere, student achievement, and charitable acts exhibited by the school community.
- Strong supportive leadership from the superintendent fosters a team leadership approach to decision making.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement - The team offers the following suggestions and opportunities for improvement in this standard area:

- Include stronger measures of informal data collection such as student-designed tests or teacher-designed tests to further align standards to curriculum.
- Develop a method of monitoring the implementation of the interventions suggested for each goal of the school improvement plan.
- Develop a method of monitoring the effectiveness of professional development.
- Research available religious education assessments to evaluate religious education curriculum.

Finding: Based on the evidence reviewed, the Quality Assurance Review Team has assigned the overall assessment level of "Operational", indicating that the Rapid City Catholic School System 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 Rapid City Catholic Schools System developed a mission statement in 2002. Since that time, the system has revisited the mission statement, developed a strategic design plan for the system and continuous improvement goals for the elementary, junior high, and high school. In addition the process of curriculum mapping for the entire system has begun. It was evident that expectations have been provided to individual schools and the resulting school improvement plans are systemic and transparent.

RCCSS leaders have taken a proactive role in identifying areas of need and areas of strength. Data leaders are working with individual teachers in schools to address, understand, and use assessment data for instructional growth. The data retreats have been instrumental in the professional growth of the staff and the initial development of instructional strategies in their individual classrooms. All of the plans and goals are available on the school's website for the stakeholders of the system for review and collaboration.

Strengths

- The system recognized a need for a systemic and systematic process of continuous improvement across the system.
- System processes are in place to evaluate student data and monitor systems for improvement.
- A collaborative and trusting relationship exists between system leadership and school-based personnel, and resources for professional development are available.

Suggestions and Opportunities for Improvement

- Develop an evidence-based system for ensuring that the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools are monitored on an ongoing basis with targeted response, assistance, and feedback provided by system administration.
- Train teachers in effective use of formative assessment as an additional way to ensure that differentiated instruction is delivered to meet the needs of all students.

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. 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 Barb Honeycutt and Robert Aberle, 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 NCA CASI accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- John Jankowski, Chair (St Marys Central High School)
- Dr. Angie Koppang, Vice Chair (NCA CASI State Director)
- Gwyn Marback, Team Member (North Dakota DPI)
- Joan Mahoney, Team Member (O'Gorman High School)
- Mark Stone, Team Member (Roncalli Junior/Senior High School)
- Mr. Robert Brave Heart, Team Member (Red Cloud Indian School)

AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems

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

Vision and Purpose

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

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

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

Documenting and Using Results

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

Resource and Support Systems

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

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

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

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

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

performance.