

**NORTHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**Northville, Michigan**

**Report of the NCA/AdvancEd Quality Assurance Review Team**  
**Executive Summary\***  
**January, 2010**

## **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 Northville Public Schools on 12/06/2009 - 12/09/2009.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 27 administrators, 89 teachers, 25 support staff, 54 parents and business partners, 71 students, and 6 Board of Education members for a total of 272 stakeholders. In addition to meeting with district personnel and stakeholders, the team visited 7 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

## **Commendations**

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

**1. Honoring the purpose of District Accreditation by aligning the work of the district and its schools through a continuous focus on student achievement and improvement.**

Throughout the Quality Assurance Review team's visit, there was evidence that Northville Public Schools' stakeholders understand the importance of a systematic and systemic approach to improvement as well as the importance of addressing the seven AdvancED standards on a continuing basis. Each year, district-wide goals are established to support Northville's overarching goal of student learning. Annually, principals and their staffs develop school improvement plans that are aligned with district expectations and goals. The establishment and implementation of the District School Improvement Team (DSIT) process provides a vehicle for demonstrating continuous improvement progress throughout the system. This creative option focuses on system-wide communications and fosters a climate of collaboration and trust among stakeholders. School staffs share their progress with pride and request ideas and suggestions for furthering and expanding their improvement efforts. A climate of trust and respect has been clearly established in the Northville Public Schools.

\*The full NCA/AdvancEd Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for Northville Public Schools is available for review upon request and will be posted on the District website at [www.northville.k12.mi.us](http://www.northville.k12.mi.us).

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Bringing staff members together with other stakeholders to focus on system-wide goals and strategies for improving student achievement is an important and significant approach for ensuring student success on a system-wide basis. When individual stakeholders feel valued and understood in their roles, it expands the opportunities and potential for them to make a difference and impact the district's vision, mission and goals.

#### **2. Demonstrating strong shared leadership.**

From the superintendent to cabinet members, principals, teacher leaders, students, parents, and community stakeholders, there is a collaborative approach to continuously achieving the district's vision, mission, and goals. The superintendent provides the school and community with exemplary leadership and a sense of confidence that the Northville Public Schools is managed effectively and expertly. Cabinet members provide knowledge and expertise in their areas of specialty along with support and assistance to the school settings. Principals are perceived as extremely competent and skillful in focusing improvement priorities in their settings. Teachers are valued for their instructional expertise and for their personal attributes of encouragement, compassion, and hopefulness for the young people they influence each day. Students are clear regarding their expectations for learning and believe their schools are good places in which to learn. Parents and community members are proud of the accomplishments of the school system and feel there are opportunities for them to be involved and for their suggestions and concerns to be heard.

A high degree of dedication and involvement by stakeholders provides system cohesiveness and creates a unified culture. Northville's positive culture results in high expectations for all learners as well as exceptional achievement by all stakeholders.

#### **3. An extraordinary culture of respect and pride among all its stakeholders.**

Through interviews and observations, QAR team members concluded that there is wide-spread stakeholder support for the work of the superintendent, central office staff, and school principals and their staffs. Not only is there stakeholder appreciation for the work these persons do, but also for their commitment to student achievement and over-all excellence. Parents and community members continually express pride in the Northville Public Schools, and recognize the value of the well-rounded education students are receiving. Pride and support is evident through the authentic involvement of stakeholders in a variety of activities (e.g., school PTA committees, District Curriculum Council, Education Partnerships Program, Northville Public School Foundation).

When stakeholders support their schools and are engaged in the district's work, both learners and the community benefit. A positive culture in the schools can be directly connected to a positive quality of life in the community.

### **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 Northville Public Schools 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.

- 1. Expand the current assessment system by incorporating additional formative and alternative methods for measuring student progress. The team recommends an initiative be put in place that promotes the value and credibility of formative methods, establishes a common language, and deepens understanding of how data can be used at all levels (e.g., district, department, school, teacher, student) to inform instructional practice and improve learning.**

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**Recommendations, continued**

2. **Strengthen the alignment between the Northville Public Schools vision and its Graduate Profile/Adult Role expectations (e.g., Analytical Thinker, Effective Communicator, Quality Contributor) by clearly defining student measurements or assessments to determine if students are meeting these high expectations.**

**Standards for Accreditation**

**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.

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

- The district places a clear emphasis on civic responsibility and community outreach. Teachers and staff demonstrate a commitment to this principle through their involvement in outreach programs such as Kids Against Hunger, Kids4Afghan, Rotary Interact and a multitude of other civic outreach programs.
- The district reinforces adherence to the overarching goal of “Student Learning” and all stakeholder groups recognize and articulate this goal.
- The district has written documents that define the mission, vision, beliefs, parameters and Graduate Profile. In addition, the creation of most of these documents date back to 1988 and many of the concepts contained within these documents are now significantly infused into the culture of the district and the community.
- The mission and vision of the district guides the allocation of resources as illustrated by the primary focus on school resources rather than increasing resources at the district level.
- Parents consistently comment on the strength of the district’s communications with the community regarding all aspects of the functioning of the schools.

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

- The Graduate Profile and Adult Roles reflect excellent desired outcomes of graduates from the Northville Public Schools. However, stakeholders were not always clear regarding how to measure student success in these areas. Consider identifying and developing assessments that would help the district to determine the success of graduates in attaining these standards.
- Consider posting key district documents (mission, vision, beliefs, parameters, and Graduate Profile) in highly visible areas of the schools to promote awareness of these important concepts to all stakeholder groups.

**Finding:** "**Highly Functional**", indicating that the Northville Public Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Vision & Purpose" standard.

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## **Standard 2. Governance & Leadership**

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

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

- The superintendent is seen as a highly trusted individual who embodies strong leadership skills and works well with community organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club), local elected officials, and parent groups (e.g., PTA/PTSA District committee). One parent described the superintendent as a “model of leadership.”
- The superintendent’s leadership has been instrumental in establishing pride in Northville’s values and focus on student learning and student responsibility.
- The School Board subcommittee structure, embedded in the district organizational chart, demonstrates an innovative approach to soliciting input from internal stakeholders in order to consider district level changes in curriculum, programs, strategies, and policies.
- The District Continuous Improvement process and the District School Improvement Team (DSIT) model provide direction for building level school improvement teams and contribute to a systematic approach for improvement and accountability throughout the system.
- Parent and community leaders are recognized as viable contributors to the district’s success and serve as valuable volunteer resources in all aspects of the district’s work.
- The district’s policies and procedures are clear and comprehensive and are deeply embedded in the way the system and its schools function – thus contributing to a high level of confidence among Northville stakeholders regarding the district’s governance.

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

- While the District Continuous Improvement process is a strength for Northville, there is a need to consider a common template for all schools to follow as they develop their school improvement plans. It is suggested that principals and teachers include measurable objectives in their plans along with evaluation benchmarks that can be used to monitor progress on a formative basis.

**Finding:** "Highly Functional", indicating that the Northville Public Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Governance & Leadership" standard.

## **Standard 3. Teaching & Learning**

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

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

- Reading assistance is provided at the elementary level to support students before they fail or are referred for special education services.
- Instructional coaches offer a variety of valuable services to classroom teachers. They are available to model effective teaching strategies in the classroom, provide suggestions for instructional best practices, or provide support in the use of data (e.g., data interpretation and analysis) and research.
- Leadership at the school and district level provides consistent support with professional development, collaboration time, and curriculum focus.

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**Standard 3. Teaching & Learning**  
**Strengths, continued**

- High achieving students are supported by the Alternative Learning Program for Students (ALPS), honors courses, and Advanced Placement courses.
- The “Graduate Profile/Adult Roles” focus ensures that district stakeholders begin with the end in mind as they develop curriculum and programs for K-12 students.
- The district has a commitment to continuous curriculum review and alignment, and to continuing to incorporate a wide range of research-based best practices in its schools.

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

- While the district is committed to differentiated instruction, there is a need for more comprehensive implementation throughout the schools with a focus on ensuring the equity of learning opportunities for all students, including non-college bound students.
- Although the district has initiated the development and implementation of common formative and summative assessments, there is a need to focus on both vertical and horizontal alignment in each school.
- Continue to ensure that curriculum is aligned in all content areas and throughout the district.
- Continue to fit and integrate technology within the district wherever and whenever possible (e.g., examine and implement the International Society for Technology in Education /ISTE standards or the State of Michigan technology standards into the curriculum), and continue to explore additional instructional uses of technology to support skills needed to be a life-long learner.
- Although the district has developed “Graduate Profile/Adult Roles” for its students, it is not clear that all stakeholders can define the attributes associated with the core knowledge and skills related to these roles (e.g., what does it mean to be an *analytical thinker* or a *quality contributor*?). To fully embrace Northville’s vision for its students, develop a comprehensive description of the attributes and expectations associated with each aspect of the Graduate Profile/Adult Roles and subsequently, connect the expectations to curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- Along with the graduate profile, explore the impact of how these expectations may impact students’ senior year of high school. For example, it may be appropriate to establish a plan for a senior ‘thesis’ or project whereby students demonstrate the five adult roles referenced in the graduate profile.

**Finding:** "Operational", indicating that the Northville Public Schools 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.

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

- An assessment and data analysis system, CLASS A, is currently being implemented across the district to provide stakeholders with tools to assess and monitor student achievement.
- While it is not evident that all schools are using the “T Drive” for data collection and analysis, it is clear that some schools are storing a significant amount of student achievement data on the “T Drive” and using this data to inform instructional practices.

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**Standard 4. Documenting & Using Results**

**Strengths, continued**

- Multiple and varied assessment measures are used to provide a complete picture of student needs and performance.
- Parents and students have access to teacher grade books through Web Connect (Parent and Student Connect) and are able to monitor student progress on an on-going basis.
- The District School Improvement Team (DSIT) process provides a system-wide focus on the district's overarching goal (i.e., student learning) and allows all schools to respond to the district's four critical questions through a collaborative approach (i.e., *What is it we want students to learn/be able to do? How will we know if they've learned it? How will we respond if they haven't? How will we respond if they've already learned it?*).
- Curriculum committees and content advisory teams use data to evaluate the effectiveness of curricular programs and processes.

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

- Consider ongoing and repeated professional development across the district to institutionalize the use of CLASS A as a means of using data to inform instruction.
- Review how data are communicated to stakeholders and consider adding narrative or other means of interpretation to data charts or tables in an effort to more clearly articulate student results and progress.
- Explore how to examine state assessment data in detail in order to provide schools with information beyond low cut score levels (e.g., use MME math standard analysis to identify students needing additional help).
- Continue to expand professional development opportunities on a systematic basis in order to support the next levels of data analysis and use at all grade levels and by all teachers.
- Continue to identify system-wide goals for focusing improvement efforts and explore the identification of additional common and formative assessments throughout the system for documenting results in student improvement.
- Prepare for the new requirements of the state's electronic school improvement plan template (implementation scheduled for 2010-11 school year) by exploring the use of SMART objectives (Specific Measurable Attainable Results-driven Timebound) along with an increased focus on gap analysis among groups of students.
- Consider examining the root cause(s) of the discrepancy of achievement between demographic groups, and create interventions to improve the achievement level of the "Students with Disabilities" demographic group.
- Explore options for assessing students on the five elements of the Graduate Profile/Adult Roles in an effort to more clearly connect student expectations with the district's vision for student learning and performance.

**Finding:** "Operational", indicating that the Northville Public Schools 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.

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

- Due to the superintendent's tenure in the school district, and the stability he provides, there is consistent and sound fiscal management of Northville Public Schools.

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**Standard 5. Resource & Support Systems**

**Strengths, continued**

- The use of stakeholder involvement through community forums enhances the process for ensuring district-wide accountability in determining potential resource allocations.
- The district's energy initiative represents a creative approach to cutting costs and involving stakeholders at all levels.
- The reputation of the district and the professional development opportunities it offers assists in attracting and maintaining high quality staff.

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

- Continue to explore innovative technology to support instruction in the classroom.
- Continue to engage a variety of stakeholders in the challenges linked to potential revenue cutbacks.

**Finding: "Operational"**, indicating that the Northville Public Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Resource & Support Systems" standard.

**Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications & Relationships**

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

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

- Communication is open and effective between a variety of stakeholders and the superintendent, and is considered a two-way approach (i.e., both from the superintendent and to the superintendent).
- The Northville Public School Foundation is an asset in both fundraising and channeling community support.
- The district's Education Partnership Program provides relevant enriching opportunities for students.
- Stakeholders are highly involved through district-wide committee membership opportunities and through volunteering at individual schools.
- School and district information is shared consistently in both monthly building and quarterly district newsletters.
- Technology is used effectively to communicate with stakeholders (e.g., district website and listserv, Parent Connect, Student Connect).
- Input from stakeholders is effectively sought through community forum opportunities.

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

- Continue to involve community members in assisting the district with developing and coordinating existing and new methods of communication.

**Finding: "Highly Functional"**, indicating that the Northville Public Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Stakeholder Communications & Relationships" standard.

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## **Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

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

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

- There is a collective focus at all levels of the district on maintaining high levels of achievement as measured by state tests. Additionally, there is a focus on providing interventions for students at risk who may not be able to achieve grade level/high school content expectations.
- There is outstanding leadership at all levels and in all departments in the district with a high level of commitment to the goal of high achievement for all students.
- The District School Improvement Team is an invaluable process to support Northville's continuous improvement process. This structure allows schools to come together to share their approach to school improvement, and is a venue where staffs engage in professional learning and sharing of resources related to the district's overarching goal of improving student achievement.
- One of the two monthly administrative leadership team meetings functions as a PLC for principals. Most recent discussions at these meetings focused on increasing data driven decision making and providing tiers of interventions to support at-risk learners. These two focus topics from the principal PLC were evident in the most recent DSIT school presentations, and reinforce the importance of principals engaging in instructional leadership activities.
- The district values and uses input from all stakeholders to develop and carry out its continuous improvement process.
- There is a collaborative culture in the district and in the schools that provides the basis for effective professional learning and planning for continuous improvement.

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

- Investigate the use of Michigan's new school improvement plan template available on the Advanc-ED website for district and school improvement plans. Use of this format will achieve the following: fulfill the state's requirement to post school improvement plans by September 1, 2010; fulfill Public Act 25, Title I and accreditation requirements; and, provide a template for schools that defines and addresses all the critical components of an effective school improvement plan/process. Those components include: long range goals; SMART objectives; strategies and activities to achieve the goals and objectives; timelines; persons responsible for implementation; assessment for progress monitoring; and evaluation components for quality assurance purposes. Use of a unified planning tool will increase the likelihood that all students will maintain gains and that Northville will close the achievement gap for at-risk learners.
- Continue to work towards full implementation/use of CLASS A to support data-driven decision making for continuous improvement.
- Explore the creation of formative assessments for K – 12 core content areas in order to help administrators and staff more closely monitor and adjust instruction for all students. Work with staff to ensure quality of common assessments, and establish proficiency levels for common assessments so that teachers can determine more clearly how they will respond to the data.
- Consider developing a comprehensive evaluation plan to determine effectiveness of strategies, interventions, activities and programs.

**Finding: "Operational"**, indicating that the Northville Public Schools has met the accreditation requirements for the "Commitment to Continuous Improvement" standard.

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## **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.

### **Strengths**

- The superintendent provides outstanding leadership to the district and is well respected for the culture he has helped to create. As a result, excellence is the mantra of the Northville Public Schools and stakeholders are assured of excellent educational opportunities in the community of Northville.
- The superintendent and his staff have provided clear direction regarding expectations for continuous improvement and excellence. By clearly articulating these expectations, there is a focus on student learning and accountability throughout the system.
- The school board and the district leadership have established clear policies, procedures, protocols, and processes for the Northville Public Schools. These expectations have been clearly communicated and shared, thus ensuring quality assurance throughout the system in terms of management and organizational effectiveness.
- In the Northville Public Schools, community/stakeholder involvement is synonymous with quality assurance. Stakeholders expect excellence – thus ensuring a continuing focus on excellence.

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

- There is a high level of respect and appreciation for the superintendent and his central office staff. The Quality Assurance Review team suggests that these persons take the initiative in bringing together a variety of stakeholders to discuss the commendations and recommendations in the Quality Assurance Review report. This approach will support the culture of stakeholder involvement in the Northville Public Schools and will provide opportunities for stakeholders to suggest or support strategies designed to promote continuous improvement and excellence in the community of Northville.
- As QAR team members reviewed school improvement plans, a variety of templates was noted. While school based staffs may appreciate the flexibility of designing their own school improvement formats, the QAR team suggests that school staffs write goals that are measurable and actionable, and that staff identify a variety of measurements for determining progress and results. These expectations will support systemwide clarity and direction for Northville's continuous improvement efforts.

## **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.