Educational Practices Reference Guide
For Alabama Accredited Schools

Aligned to the
Advance ED Standards for Quality Schools

February 2010

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- **Introduction**

This *Educational Practices Reference Guide* describes the educational practices that AdvancED has found, through our experience base, to assist in providing a quality learning environment. The guide is designed to serve as a resource to schools that want a reference point or example of practices that are aligned with the *AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality Schools.* This guide is used by all schools seeking the accreditation seals of North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI)

AdvancED is focused on quality. Quality is about the dynamic combination of inputs, processes, and results working in harmony to achieve the school's vision for student learning. The *AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools* provide this comprehensive view of quality. Schools should use the standards to focus on the end goal of quality. The educational practices referenced in this guide can be used to support the standards when schools are looking for a guidepost; however, they should do so always recognizing that there are many paths to quality.

The practices highlighted address those areas where AdvancED is most often asked for examples or benchmarks of good practice and pertain to specific indicators within Standard 1 - Vision and Purpose, Standard 2 - Governance and Leadership, Standard 3 - Teaching and Learning, and Standard 5 - Resources and Support Systems.

This reference guide should not be interpreted as requirements, nor should it limit thinking to common practice. The practices serve as reference points of what is generally accepted as good practice. The practices provide schools with a starting point for comparison. They do not represent the end point, nor should they limit creative and innovative practices that best meet the needs of students.

The ultimate goal of the accreditation process is to help schools maximize student success and school effectiveness. Schools may use the educational practices referenced in this guide only so far as they find them useful in achieving this goal.

Standard 1 – Vision and Purpose

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

Indicator 1.6: The school reviews its vision and purpose systematically and revises them when appropriate.

AdvancED offers the following practices as a reference to schools seeking to meet this standard and indicator. The school:

- Has a process in place for regularly reviewing the vision and purpose of the school and for involving all stakeholders in that review;
- Has policies and procedures in place and implemented to ensure that no form of bias or prejudice is allowed or practiced within the vision and purpose of the school and the school's corresponding activities; and
- Provides evidence that the vision and purpose of the school promote an equitable, just, and inclusive community that inspire students to respect and value diversity.

Standard 2 – Governance and Leadership

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

Duties of the Governing Authority

Indicator 2: The school operates under the jurisdiction of a governing board that establishes polices and procedures that provide for the effective operation of the school.

General Duties

In support of this standard and indicator, the governing authority engages in the following practices:

- Oversees the business and affairs of the school;
- Establishes and monitors implementation of the strategic plan for the school;
- Ensures accountability for student performance and school effectiveness;
- Monitors the school's improvement efforts and helps build a culture of improvement;
- Establishes and monitors operating policies and procedures to ensure effective operation of the school;
- Establishes financial policies, provides ongoing financial oversight, and ensures financial stability;
- Ensures that there are well-defined, published admission policies and procedures, including criteria upon which decisions are made, and that professional ethics are strictly observed in the admissions process;
- Ensures that there are established and published financial aid and/or scholarship policies and procedures and that professional ethics are strictly observed in the granting of financial awards;

- Ensures that there are written procedures for the termination and/or suspension of any student and that professional ethics are strictly observed should such procedures need to be activated;
- Establishes policies to ensure no conflict of interest between business, professional or parental roles and duties to the school;
- Assures that guidelines for student conduct, attendance, and dress are written and communicated to all students, parents, and staff members;
- Ensures that personnel policies are in place and provide for the ethical treatment of all staff with respect to hiring practices, compensation, evaluation, and working conditions
- Supports and models inclusive decision making methods;
- Maintains access to legal counsel who can advise or obtain necessary information about the legal requirements and obligations that exist in the state, federal, or other jurisdictions in which it operates;
- Maintains adequate risk management policies for the protection of the school, including governance policies in the event of an emergency;
- Hires and oversees the administrative head of the school; and
- Implements a remuneration plan for all members of the staff that recognizes the administrative head as the highest paid employee.

Financial Oversight

As referenced above, the governing authority plays a critical role in financial oversight. The following practices provide more detail on this role. The governing authority:

- Assures that the accounts of the school are kept in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and are audited annually by an independent, licensed accountant;
- Assures that debt service or lines of credit are managed in such ways as to ensure that fiscal responsibility remains under the control of the governing authority;
- Maintains adequate insurance or equivalent resources to protect its financial stability and administrative operations from protracted proceedings and claims for damage
- Maintains a policy for funds in reserve;
- Ensures the financial stability of the school, and assures that the school is not in, nor in prospect of moving into, financial reorganization under the protection of bankruptcy; and
- Maintains policies for fund raising and adheres to accepted standards for reporting and recognizing gift revenues and fund raising expenditures.

Role of the Governing Authority and Administrative Head

Indicator 2.2: Recognizes and preserves the executive, administrative, and leadership prerogatives of the administrative head of the school.

In support of this indicator, the governing authority and administrative head engage in the following practices:

- Maintains and adheres to clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- Provides and implements orientation and evaluation procedures for members of the governing authority;
- Maintains a strategic and policy-level focus;
- Enables the administrative head to the focus on the day-to-day operations of the school;
- Preserves the administrative head's ability to hire and evaluate personnel in accordance with established policies and procedures;
- Assures that the administrative head of the school allocates and aligns the human instructional, financial, and physical resources in support of the vision and purpose of the school; and
- Provides for stability in transitions of leadership.

Compliance with Applicable Laws, Standards, and Regulations

Indicator 2.3: Ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws, standards, and regulations.

In support of this indicator, the governing authority engages in the following practices:

- Maintains all charters, licenses, or permits necessary for legal operation;
- Maintains evidence of compliance with all required laws, standards, and regulations, including copyright law, intellectual property rights, and any international restrictions such as export of sensitive information or technologies.
- Has a process in place to ensure systematic review of the school's compliance with all applicable governmental laws, standards, and regulations;

Schools seeking additional practices and resources with regard to effective governing authority practices and school management may wish to visit the National School Board Association's website at www.nsba.org, which has published *The Key Work of School Boards* which outlines eight key action areas to guide school boards in their efforts to improve student achievement. The National Association of Independent Schools at www.nais.org offers *Principles of Good Practice* which defines standards and ethical behavior in key areas of school operations for independent schools.

Standard 3 – Teaching and Learning

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

Curriculum

Indicator 3.1: The school develops and implements curriculum based on clearly-defined expectations for student learning.

Indicator 3.5: The school offers a curriculum that challenges each student to excel, reflects a commitment to equity, and demonstrates an appreciation of diversity.

AdvancED offers the following information and practices to support schools as they review and evaluate their curricula. In highlighting these practices, AdvancED recognizes that the school's chosen curriculum and its implementation of that curriculum define the school (e.g., college preparatory school, career technical school.) **The school's curriculum should be aligned with its vision for student learning and structured to meet the unique needs of the students served by the school.** As a result, schools should review/use the practices identified below in conjunction with their stated vision, mission, and student population to best evaluate the quality of their curricula.

Early Childhood Level

The curriculum is broad in scope and provides for meeting the individual intellectual, emotional, and social needs of the students. The curriculum also:

- Provides for different levels of ability, development, and learning styles;
- Includes activities designed to develop the children's self-esteem and positive attitudes for learning;
- Provides opportunities for students to actively explore and interact with the environment, other students, and adults in a positive manner;
- Incorporates learning about literacy, math, science, social studies, health, and other content areas;
- Reflects differences in cultures, growth, and interests; and
- Integrates opportunities to develop small and large muscle skills, artistic expression, and aesthetic appreciation.

Primary and Elementary Level

The curriculum is broad in scope and provides for a wide range in student readiness and potential for learning. The curriculum:

- Places an emphasis upon the development of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective skills;
- Develops the knowledge and competencies necessary for student success at the next level of education;
- Includes learning experiences in language arts (including technical writing, technical reading, and speech communications at the appropriate levels), mathematics, science (including experimental activities), social studies, foreign language exploration, health and

safety, physical education, the arts, and the application of technology as a tool for learning; and

- Ensures that the students have the requisite skills to be successful at the next educational level.

Middle Level, Junior High Level, Lower Secondary Level

The curriculum has sufficient breadth to serve both general and special needs of early adolescents through a variety of exploratory experiences and courses that ensure that the student is prepared to be successful at the next educational level. The curriculum includes:

- Language Arts (including English, reading, writing, technical reading, technical writing, and speech communications);
- Social Studies;
- Mathematics (including preparation for Algebra at the appropriate levels);
- Science (including experimental activities);
- Fine Arts;
- Practical and technical arts;
- Foreign language;
- The application of technology as a learning tool; and
- Physical education, health, and safety.

Secondary Level, Upper Secondary Level

The curriculum includes a core set of offerings to enhance academic skills, career preparation, the application of knowledge, the application of technology, and ensure successful transitions to the world-of-work or higher education. For diploma granting high schools, including distance education schools, the curriculum includes a minimum of the following course offerings:

- Four Language Arts courses including content focusing on literature, grammar, writing, reading, technical reading, technical writing, and speech communications;
- Four Mathematics courses (three at or above the Algebra I level);
- Four Science courses (at least two which are laboratory based);
- Four Social Studies;
- Four courses in the Practical and Technical Arts;
- Two courses in the same Foreign Language;
- Three courses in Fine and Performing Arts;
- One course in Physical Education and Health; and
- Twelve elective courses.

Supplementary

Supplementary schools provide educational services to PreK-12 level and adult students. They offer programs of instruction that are a portion of a comprehensive educational program leading to a diploma or degree. The programs of instruction are based on clearly defined learning objectives.

Distance Education

Distance Education Schools provide a curricular and instructional program where comprehensive or supplementary learning takes place when the teacher and the student may be at separate locations or the teaching and learning processes may take place at different times. Delivery of instruction can be synchronous with simultaneous interaction between the teacher and student or asynchronous where the teacher and student interaction is delayed over time. Instructional methodologies, materials, and resources may be facilitated by internet, video, audio, print, online, computer, travel-study, and/or mail. The curricular program is based on clearly defined course objectives. The distance education school provides the program or course offerings described above in the early childhood, elementary, middle, and secondary sections commensurate with the mission and purpose of the school.

The student must be enrolled in the distance education school issuing the high school diploma for at least 25% of the courses required for graduation.

The school has a written policy for granting credit for each course.

Non-Degree Granting Postsecondary Schools Participating in Title IV Funding

The program offerings should be consistent with the needs of business and industry. Students completing programs offered at postsecondary schools should be prepared to enter the work force with the certificate and/or licensure obtained through program completion.

Full Time Program Requirements

A program must be 600 or more hours in length to meet the federal requirements for consideration as a full time program and eligible for Title IV funding.

Industry Credential Requirements

The length of programs offered at the postsecondary level that terminate in the completion of an industry recognized should be consistent with industry expectations.

International

International schools are guided by board-approved vision and mission statements that demonstrate a commitment to providing either an American or an International curriculum. The curriculum provides instruction in and promotes the benefits of tolerance and respect for all cultures and nations. Instruction is offered in either English and/or an English language focused, bilingual program delivered by a faculty qualified to represent and deliver an American and/or International modeled curriculum.

In addition to assessing a school's adherence to AdvancED's accreditation standards and indicators, quality assurance review teams will validate the school's use of the terms "American" and/or "International" in regard to mission, school name, and school publications.

Instructional and Planning Time

Indicator 3.6: The school allocates and protects instructional time to support student learning.

AdvancED recognizes the importance of providing teachers and students with uninterrupted instructional time. To make the most of this instructional time, teachers need adequate planning time. AdvancED shares the following practices for instructional time and planning time.

Instructional Time

The school meets the state requirements for the number of instructional days in the year, or provides a school year that consists of at least 180 instructional days and the following minimum total hours:

*   Early childhood and pre-kindergarten: A planned program
*   Kindergarten: 900 hours
*   Elementary: 900 hours
*   Middle level: 990 hours
*   High school   1080 hours
*   Distance education   (See distance education requirements below)

Distance Education Requirements for Instructional Time

The school has a written policy or procedure for instructional time that includes the requirements for student engagement within each course, student progress within each course, completion of each course, eligibility for accessing the next or additional courses upon previous course completions, and that documents the student's instructional work for each course.

Postsecondary Education Requirements for Instructional Time

Programs that terminate in a credential or license should have consistent time requirements as those determined by the agency establishing the credential requirements.

Planning Time

The school meets state requirements for planning time, or provides a master schedule that includes a minimum of 200 minutes a week of planning time for all full-time instructors that is unencumbered by teaching or supervisory responsibilities. Part-time professional instructional staff has appropriate planning time within their designated workday.

Comprehensive Information and Media Services

Indicator 3.10: Provides comprehensive information and media services that support the curricular and instructional programs.

AdvancED offers the following practices as a reference to schools seeking to meet this standard and indicator. The school:

*   Maintains a comprehensive and balanced information and media collection consisting of current media, books, reference sources, and periodicals in print and electronic formats that support student learning, the curriculum, and the instructional program;

- Provides resources to support information and media services that are commensurate with and/or comparable to maintaining a collection of a minimum of 10 books per student;
  - Middle and High Schools with enrollment in excess of 1,500 students provide at least 15,000 usable volumes. Elementary Schools with enrollment in excess of 1,000 students provide at least 10,000 usable volumes. New schools have at least four volumes per student upon opening and meet the collection practices within three years.
  - Schools maintaining a balance of electronic and print books use a reference point of 25% electronic books to total books offered, thereby ensuring that students have adequate access to print books.
- Ensures that all students and staff members have regular, ready access to information and media services, materials, and equipment;
- Employs a currently accepted circulation system for materials;
- Provides training on effective use of information and media resources for students and members of the professional staff;
- Ensures that the information and media staff collaborates with other professional staff members to attain maximum benefit from the resources;
- Possesses a policy and procedure for responding to challenged materials;
- Budgets sufficient funds for information and media services, including equipment, to support the curricular and instructional programs; and
- Possesses and communicates a policy on use of the Internet.

Standard 5- Resources and Support Systems

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

Certification and Education Qualification

Indicator 5.1: The school recruits, employs, and mentors qualified professional staff that is capable of fulfilling assigned roles and responsibilities.

AdvancED recognizes that the definition of "qualified" in relation to hiring qualified professional staff encompasses more than a person's education. The definition also includes the person's experience base, unique talents, professional attitude, and general aptitudes. Hiring qualified professional staff requires a thorough examination of all the attributes of the individual; and in the end, the hiring decision is based on good professional judgment. The key test is in being able to state with confidence that every hire is in the best interest of serving students.

At the same time, AdvancED recognizes that school and district leaders find it useful to know what is generally accepted by the profession as necessary in regard to a person's professional credentials and education background. As a result, we have provided the following practices.

Instructional Personnel Qualifications

The instructional personnel meet the certification requirements of the state, hold an endorsement for the grade level(s) at which they are teaching, and hold an endorsement for the subject area being taught. For personnel who are not required to meet state certification requirements, instructional personnel have an earned bachelor's degree that includes:
- Eighteen semester hours of professional education (as part of, or in addition to the degree, and including at least six semester hours of student teaching) from a regionally accredited institution; and
- A major or at least 24 semester hours in their assigned field.

Superintendent Qualifications

The superintendent meets state certification requirements or has an earned graduate degree from a regionally accredited institution with 30 semester hours in administration or supervision.

School and District Administrator Qualifications

The school principal or administrative head, school assistant administrators, and district-level administrators meet state certification requirements or have an earned graduate degree from a regionally accredited institution with 18 semester hours in administration, curriculum, supervision, or related subjects.

Counselors and Media Specialists Qualifications

Counselors and media specialists meet state certification requirements or have an earned graduate degree in their assigned field from a regionally accredited institution.

Non-teaching Professional Staff Qualifications

Other non-teaching professional staff (nurses, nutritionists, physical therapists, athletic trainers, etc) meets the certification/licensure requirements established by the state or their relevant professional association.

Paraprofessional Staff

Paraprofessional staff meets the requirements of the state, have appropriate training to complete their assignment, and serve under the direct supervision of professional personnel.

Note: U.S. Regional Accrediting Agencies include: Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools, New England Association of Colleges and Schools, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest Association of Colleges and Schools, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Professional Development

Indicator 5.3: Ensures that all staff members participate in a continuous program of professional development.

AdvancED shares the following practices regarding professional development activities.

School's Program of Professional Development

Quality schools implement a program of professional development that is aligned with the school's improvement goals. The program addresses those areas where staff development is most needed in order to support identified interventions. Professional development activities are research-based, include follow-up activities as appropriate, encourage innovation and risk taking, and include evaluation for their effect on instructional practice and student performance.

Time Spent in Professional Development Activities

All professional personnel meet state requirements for participation in professional development activities necessary to maintain certification, or earn at least six semester hours of credit or the equivalent during each five years of employment. Six semester hours of credit is equivalent to 120 clock hours of participation in professional development activities (e.g., workshops, seminars, conferences, and quality assurance review teams).

Staff Assignment

Indicator 5.4: Provides and assigns staff that is sufficient to meet the vision, mission and goals of the school.

Staffing Levels - Administrative, Counseling, and Library/Media Staff

Quality schools provide sufficient staff to meet the needs of the whole child and ensure effective operations. At the same time, they recognize that providing staff does not automatically translate to quality programs. As a result, they examine staffing decisions in light of the school's vision and mission, learning goals, student needs, and staff qualifications; and they make staffing decisions based on what will best advance their work with students. As schools make decisions about appropriate staffing levels, they should meet applicable state laws.

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In the absence of such laws, AdvancED shares the following practices for staffing levels for administrative, counseling, and library/media staff.

Attendance	1-249	250-499	500-749	750-999	1000-1249	1250-1499	Over 1500
Administrative Head							
Elementary							
Middle/High school	Every school must have an administrative head who serves As the instructional leader of the school.						
Assistant Administrators							
Elementary	0.0	0.0	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	*
Middle/High school	0.0	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	*
Counselors**							
Elementary	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	*
Middle/High school	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0	*
Library/media specialists**							
Elementary	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Middle/High school	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0+	1.0+	1.0+

* One FTE staff member is added where needed for each additional 250.

**The school provides staffing or services commensurate with this function.

+After employing one librarian/media specialist, the school may employ a qualified technology/information specialist to work in collaboration with the library/media specialist.

Class Size

Instructional quality and student achievement are enhanced when the learning conditions are supported by smaller class sizes. Small class sizes alone, however, may not impact student learning if instructional methods are not aligned with the needs and learning styles of students. Differentiated instruction and effective classroom practices are critical to taking advantage of the more individualized learning environment that smaller classroom sizes afford. Context also plays a role in class size – a science lab and a swimming class, for example, require different class sizes to maximize the success of students and accomplish class objectives. While it may be tempting to focus discussion and resources on class size, the primary focus for schools should be on improving classroom instruction and providing an environment that best meets the objectives of the class. Quality is about what happens in the classroom and less about how small/big the classroom is.

Emphasizing the importance of what happens in the classroom and the overall context for the class, AdvancED also recognizes that many schools find it helpful to have a reference point for what is generally accepted as good practice with regard to class size. At a minimum, schools should meet state class size requirements. In the absence of such requirements, AdvancED shares the following practices with regard to maintaining class sizes conducive to student learning:

1. Infants and Toddlers (birth through age 2)   Meets state requirements
2. Pre-Kindergarten(3 and 4 year olds)   Maximum of 12 students per class
3. Kindergarten – Grade 1   Maximum of 18 students per class
4. Grades 2 and 3   Maximum of 20 students per class
5. Grades 4 and 5   Maximum of 22 students per class
6. Grades 6 and 12   Maximum of 25 students per class

These practices assume a minimum of one full-time equivalent teacher in each of the class sizes noted above.

Class Size for Distance Education Schools

The nature of distance education schools requires transparent and quality communications between the school and the student regarding instructional support for each course. The school should consider the course objectives and student needs in determining appropriate instructional support. AdvancED shares the following practices with regard to maintaining student-to-teacher ratios conducive to student learning:

Optimal: 25 student FTE or below to 1 full-time teacher
Maximum: 75 student FTE to 1 full-time teacher

Class Size for Postsecondary Schools

Programs should have consistent class size requirements as those determined by the agency establishing the credential requirements. Where no credentialing agency is involved, class size should be in accordance with state safety requirements provided through the appropriate governing body.