

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Limestone Community High School**

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US

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*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) 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, schools must:

- 1) Meet the AdvancED Standards and Policies for Quality Schools.** Schools demonstrate adherence to the AdvancED standards and policies which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement.** Schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose the school is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school 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.** Schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, schools host an external Quality Assurance Review Team once every five years. The team evaluates the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the school improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school and a written report detailing the team's required actions. The school acts on the team's required actions and submits a progress report following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help schools be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

# Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

**Purpose.** The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

1. Evaluate the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and policies.
2. Assess the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and required actions to improve the school.
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 is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

**School Preparation.** To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school community engages in an in-depth self assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that it is meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school 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. The team reviews the findings of the school's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school'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 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 school. The report contains commendations and required actions for improvement.

**Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions.** The school uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The NCA CASI/SACS CASI State Office is available to assist schools in addressing the required actions. At prescribed intervals, the school must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress the school has made on the team's required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school is addressing the required actions.

**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 following action from the commission.

## Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the NCA CASI Illinois State Office (NCA-CASI-IL), a division of AdvancED, visited the Limestone Community High School in Bartonville, US-IL, US on 01/22/2010 - 01/22/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 8 members of the administrative team, 29 students, 6 parents, and 21 teachers. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documenting and Using Results
5. Resource and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems within a school 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, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics of a quality school.

Through its examination of the school's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following commendations and required actions.

### Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the school 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 administration has established an effective system of recruitment and mentoring of new teachers.**

Limestone High School administrators stated that they try to hire teachers from the community surrounding the high school. They believe that this hiring practice has the potential to have teachers stay in the community once they start teaching and also raise families. The school has positive communication with Bradley University relative to the recruitment of new teachers.

Once teachers are recruited, the administration makes a number of efforts to ensure their first year of teaching goes smoothly. A mentoring system is in place so that the new teachers feel supported. In addition, the administration hosts two after-school less formal dinners for the families of the new teachers as a way of trying to make the teachers feel like welcomed, valued members of the high school community.

New teachers as well as veteran teachers were also encouraged by the fact that the district provides partial reimbursement for graduate courses they may want to take once they begin their careers in the school district.

When new teachers feel that there is support during their first year of teaching they are more likely to have any problems or concerns addressed in a timely fashion and can be proactive in meeting any classroom challenges that may begin to arise.

- **The teachers have created a warm, caring environment that is conducive to positive student-teacher relationships.**

The district's commitment to the well-being of the whole child is evident by the fact that resources have been allocated for a full-time nurse, social worker, and special education psychologist, two part-time special education social workers, three guidance counselors including staff for the Partnership for College and Career Success Program.

Although they expressed some concerns about the level of motivation in classes, students stated that they felt welcome to discuss issues with their teachers. Having student representation on the discipline committee made students feel like their perspectives and insights could make a valuable contribution to solving disciplinary concerns. Students also felt that they made a contribution by participating in the Junior Pep Talk for test prep activities when student leaders were asked to have a monthly dialog about getting ready for the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE).

Students stated that they were grateful that the school tried to resolve scheduling conflicts by offering independent study classes. Students in the Focus Group stated that they felt the welcoming they received by teachers extended the idea of having a tolerant and caring community among students. Orientation to various careers and career prep programs was something that students also valued.

Research on school motivation in adolescents states that when students feel their teachers value them, they are more likely to make efforts to achieve. The efforts teachers are making in creating a caring environment can lead to greater student commitment to learning.

- **The school effectively maintains various methods of communication to engage multiple stakeholder groups.**

There are a number of avenues to keep parents and other stakeholders informed about school activities. Parents who have access to computers can use the Skyward parent information site. The school uses Alert Now, an automated telephone service that provides parents with advance notification of important test dates and events. Parents also receive a quarterly newsletter about upcoming events at the school. The school's website is kept current and identifies learning resources for parents and students. Test prep information, including the PSAE practice questions are on the web as well as all handbooks, grading schedules, and course descriptions.

The school maintains an active partnership with its feeder schools. There is an annual all schools meeting and efforts are being made to create more vertical and horizontal alignment among the schools. Feeder schools will be participating in the EXPLORE (ACT's College Readiness Test for 8th and 9th grades) assessment program so that teachers of 9th graders can start the year with some assessment data that can help them tailor their instruction to meet the incoming group.

The school continues to try to engage more businesses in after-school learning programs and job partnerships for students. In addition, the school is seeking ways to expand the opportunities for students to enroll in dual credit courses.

By engaging multiple stakeholders, the school has expanded the awareness and support for extending success in student learning.

## Required Actions

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall school effectiveness. The school will be held accountable for addressing each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions.

- **Develop a system to monitor the implementation of the school improvement plan and use the data collected and analyzed to refine the goals and interventions that will drive student achievement and other aspects of school success.**

The school has started a number of initiatives aimed at improving student learning including the development of mathematics and a reading lab through the use of Title I funds. There was little evidence that the school had a system in place to collect and analyze data that would inform them of the effectiveness of the initiatives as a part of the cycle of continuous improvement. A system for monitoring the implementation of the curriculum maps, formative assessments, and other indicators identified in the School Improvement Plan was not evident.

Without a system to monitor the various aspects of the school improvement plan and the analysis of the results of the data review on program effectiveness, it will be difficult to prioritize future adjustments to the plan and future professional development opportunities. Having solid evidence of why programs should be maintained, modified, or discarded allows administrators to make more informed decisions about what is working and also have more information used to celebrate the success of various school initiatives. It also allows all stakeholders to have a better understanding of the performance outcomes that are important to the school and the community. Finally, monitoring data is useful in determining future budget priorities and possible grant submissions which require a district to show that they have the capacity to successfully implement new programs.

- **Complete the curriculum mapping process. Develop a system of monitoring and analyzing the use of formative and summative assessments to select research-based instructional practices that meet the needs of each student.**

The school has committed to the use of common classroom assessments in mathematics, science, and English, but these have not been fully developed or implemented. Samples of some common assessments were available for mathematics but not for English classes, nor were assessments and their criteria evident in the English department curriculum maps available for the QAR team.

Focus Groups interviewed provided evidence of emerging practices of collaborative teacher work around development of common assessments, alignment of curriculum, and adoption of school-wide PSAE preparation. However, no evidence exists to show a monitoring system has been developed to confirm the consistent use of research-based activities or best practices.

Teachers in the Focus Group stated that the greatest needs for professional development were relative to the implementation of RtI (Response to Intervention), curriculum alignment, and formulating common assessments.

Since the curriculum maps are new products, it is important to monitor not only their implementation but also whether or not the maps result in better instruction and greater student progress. Time needs to be set aside for an ongoing dialog about the extent that the maps are working and whether or not adjustments need to be made to them in light of the changing needs of the students, as well as the changing state and federal mandates and definitions of learning standards.

If teachers complete and implement curriculum maps that clearly indicate not only the type of assessment but the cut score that determines student success, they have a better opportunity of maintaining consistency in grading and scoring across classes. The review of the use of comprehensive curriculum maps will also encourage a more productive dialog about how students are learning and what interventions should be made available when students need additional help in making academic progress.

- **Establish a climate for high expectations for each and every student.**

Teachers identified the increase in low income population as the reason for a lack of progress in meeting AYP, but they did not articulate any ways in which student interaction and classroom instruction are adjusted to meet the changing student body, or to consider factors beyond poverty that might account for low performance. The Limestone H.S. School Improvement Plan stated that there was no correlation between academic success in the school and the lack of success on the PSAE by academically successful students. It did not appear that any data analysis was completed at the sub-score level for reading and mathematics relative to the school or the subgroups that would lead to specific instructional planning for differentiated instruction or for a system of activities relative to the RtI requirements.

The school is beginning to develop a more extensive Excel data base of assessment information, but there is a clear opportunity for the school to collect multiple measures of data and consider a range of factors that might affect student academic progress. Multiple measures of data can also expand the definition of school success to extend beyond passing the PSAE. Issues related to student motivation, parent involvement, and ways in which instruction can be differentiated can also be a source of information about factors that influence student success.



The review of assessment content area sub-score data, as well as the individual student progress on aligned classroom assessments, MAP assessments, state assessments, how students learn best, and parent input about their child's learning can lead to more specific instruction to meet the needs of each student.

**Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools:** The team reviewed the school'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 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.
3. Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school's efforts to improve student performance and school effectiveness.
5. Following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. 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 as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at [www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork](http://www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork), provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help schools with their improvement efforts. Available any where, any time, the network can be queried for information on a variety of school improvement subjects. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides research, handbooks, and tools to assist schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for more information on the range of resources available to you.

## Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for state review and for action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school should celebrate its achievement with the school community. The NCA-CASI-IL accreditation seals are available at [www.advanc-ed.org/communicationskit](http://www.advanc-ed.org/communicationskit) for accredited schools and districts to post on their website and to use in school communications. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and lapel pins are also available and can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

**Summary**

The accreditation process engages the school in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the strengths and address the required actions noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

# Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the Limestone Community High School 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.

## Standard 1. Vision and Purpose

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

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

The school community has created an environment of caring educators who work to support the school's mission to provide educational opportunities for students and to help them become life-long learners. The mentoring program for new teachers continues to support and sustain this nurturing and stable environment. Additionally, it is clear that the school's leadership intentionally provides diverse curricula and a variety of extra-curricular activities for students. The establishment of a curriculum council and a curriculum cabinet sends a message to all stakeholders that having a clear actionable curriculum is a priority for the district.

The vision is publicized throughout the electronic venues, classrooms, and the school. Teachers related their purpose for teaching using similar language and a shared purpose focused on preparing today's students for tomorrow's challenges. These shared perceptions and values have not been broadly discussed throughout the school's internal and external communities as they relate to defining them as the school's vision. Interviews with stakeholders revealed that limited input is provided from other groups such as students, parents, and community during the vision and mission process, but the QAR team found evidence that the vision is guiding the school.

Parents, students, and staff have internet-based access to Skyward which provides updated attendance and grade information on individual students. In addition, members of the community focus group referenced automated telephone calls to notify them of school events and other relevant announcements.

Stakeholders state that they were not clear about how the goals for advancing the school's vision were developed and monitored. They expressed a need to understand the progress towards the implementation of the school improvement plan.

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

- The school continually maintains a profile of the school and events through the variety of up-to-date information that is available on the school web page.
- A curriculum council and a curriculum cabinet have been identified as parts of the effort to advance the school's mission.
- Each teacher is required to make at least two parent contacts a week as a part of advancing the school's vision and mission. Parents in the focus group said they were pleased that the teachers

made the effort not only to discuss ways in which parents could support learning, but also to notify parents of successes the students have made beyond report card grades.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:**

- Consider ways to provide parents and other stakeholders with a clearer understanding about how the vision and mission of the school are enacted on a daily basis and through the selection of specific learning initiatives.
- Identify a process to embrace, review, and revise the vision and purpose with school personnel and external stakeholders.

**Finding:** Limestone Community High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

## Standard 2. Governance and Leadership

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

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

Student, parent, and staff handbooks provide evidence that policies and procedures are established and shared with the community. The handbooks clearly articulate the school's plan for academic and behavior expectations and ensures compliance with local, state, and federal regulations. Faculty, staff, and students provide input for decision-making. Students and parents feel teachers are committed to helping them succeed.

Teachers and students reported that they have a voice in school governance. Teachers are also asked to make presentations to other staff once they have attended professional development sessions. Teachers are also members of the school's curriculum council which meets regularly to discuss curriculum issues.

The leadership also maintains positive contact with the eight feeder schools and community members in the focus group reported that information on the school's website and through Skyward is informative and helps parents know what is going on with students. School Improvement Day meeting agendas document efforts to provide alignment between the eight feeder districts' 8th grade teachers and the high school teaching staff. Teacher focus group participants and leadership focus group participants both referenced the alignment meeting this school year as well as the difficulties involved in aligning the work of so many different feeder schools to one high school population. Additionally, leadership group members spoke of committees such as school improvement, discipline, and calendar as opportunities for multiple stakeholders to come together and work toward common purposes and goals.

The system that provides for analysis and review of student performance is focused mainly on improving student performance on the PSAE. The role and process for leadership to evaluate the effectiveness of the various school initiatives such as the adoption of the modified schedule for PSAE practice, but the use of

research-based instructional practices and implementation of RtI was not clear. It was also not clear if walkthroughs are being conducted that would monitor classroom instruction on a more formative basis.

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

- The administrative staff maintains an “open door” policy. Teachers reported they feel free to talk about concerns on a regular basis.
- The superintendent is supported by the associate superintendent and curriculum coordinator who are leading the adoption of curriculum mapping.
- A mentoring program is in place to support new teachers. A system of recruitment and retention for faculty is evident. The extra effort to have contact with the mentor/mentee during November and March was noted as a success.
- Students are included as members of the discipline committee and the regular meetings of the discipline committee have provided valuable feedback to the school.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:**

- Provide stakeholders meaningful roles in the decision-making process that promotes a culture of participation, responsibility, and ultimately ownership.
- Employ a system that provides analysis and review of student performance and school effectiveness.

**Finding:** Limestone Community High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

### **Standard 3. Teaching and Learning**

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

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

The school is focusing on implementing plans and new initiatives to align the curriculum to the Illinois Learning Standards and the College Readiness Standards, to create common assessments that measure student progress towards standards mastery, to implement benchmarking computerized assessments, and to provide interventions for students struggling with mastery of the curriculum.

Artifacts made available for the QAR team indicate that school staff is in the early stages of using Curriculum Mapper software to develop curriculum linked to both Illinois Learning Standards and College Readiness Standards. Sample curriculum maps available during the review process were incomplete and limited in number. In addition, no learning standards or lesson objectives were visible during classroom visits to provide evidence that classroom instruction was standards-based. Comments made by both

teacher focus group and leadership group participants focused on PSAE review strategies and sample test item drill as the primary vehicle for defining student learning expectations.

Classroom visits revealed lecture as the predominant instructional strategy in place. Students are expected to take notes of teacher lectures. Student engagement in observed classrooms was low. Assignments in evidence in classrooms are supplemental worksheets available with the publishers' textbook series. Few classrooms had posted student work samples, rubrics in use, or other grading criteria. Available student work samples were not clearly identified as representing particular learning standards or curriculum topics.

Dialogue during the teacher and leadership focus group sessions indicated no monitoring system is in place to determine levels of student engagement or the quality of daily classroom instruction. Comments from student focus group participants support that teachers "talk to or at" students during the day. Math teachers were specifically mentioned as taking time to explain things and social studies teachers were cited as ones who would use discussion as an instructional strategy the most.

A Title I Learning Lab staffed by a math teacher and a reading specialist has been implemented for the 2009-2010 year. The lab holds 30 computer stations and two small-group work areas. The school has selected the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) program for its assessment system. The lab staff has developed standard procedures for pulling students for testing, documenting testing results, and scheduling low-performing students into the lab for small-group interventions in math and literacy.

Comments provided by each focus group during the QAR team visit focused on the apparent lack of student motivation. The focus group evidence suggests a pervasive attitude among parents, staff, and students that poor school outcomes on the PSAE are a result of student motivation, and those results are not a reliable measure of the curriculum and instruction offered to all students. Activities and strategies outlined in the school improvement plan are supported by School Improvement Day agendas and division meeting agendas. These show an emerging awareness of the need to offer a challenging curriculum to each student and provide appropriate supports to students failing to make adequate progress. Monitoring protocols and procedures are not in evidence to support a successful implementation of a continuous, data-driven school improvement cycle.

A large commitment of time during the school year has been made to support test preparation activities for the 2010 PSAE administration. Students in all grade levels and courses participate in PSAE test question practice alternating between math and literacy skills. In addition, juniors are scheduled for class meetings monthly to discuss the PSAE and its importance. Later this spring, juniors will spend 50 minutes for eleven consecutive days learning test-taking strategies for the PSAE.

Artifacts supporting emerging work to provide articulation and alignment both within school and the eight feeder districts include sample curriculum maps and the school improvement plan. The eight elementary districts are concurrently beginning work to map and align their curriculum. Two Rivers Professional Development consultants and staff were frequently mentioned by the leadership focus group as a resource for alignment work.

A plan of scheduled formative assessment and student interventions has begun to be implemented to assist students struggling to master the Illinois Learning Standards through its MAP assessment program and Learning Lab. The School Improvement Plan documents the creation of the lab and the use of the MAP assessments.

Regular and ready access to interactive and updated instructional technology is limited for students. Classroom visits reveal that students are not actively engaged with interactive technology. Technology

use, in non-lab classrooms, was limited to teacher LCD projector use. The school has created computer labs for classroom and student use. However, computer and other interactive technologies availability is limited in most classrooms. The QAR team found no evidence of long-range planning to support increased use of interactive technologies. The Technology Integration Plan provided with the artifacts was not completed.

Each classroom has an LCD projector and desktop computer for teacher use. In addition, most classrooms had three to five older model computers in a central location. The school has invested in a 30-unit computerized learning lab to conduct formative assessments and for individual and small group interventions. The school has a library and media center which is available to support all curricular areas.

School clubs and programs such as the Partnership for College and Career Success are available and offer a wide range of opportunities for students to learn more about their own aptitudes and abilities and actively participate in school life beyond basic classroom instruction. Students referenced participation in the Madrigal Dinner, the leadership council, developing programs for the school TV channel, publication of the Limelight newspaper, and the culinary arts program among the highlights at the school this year.

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

- English and mathematics departments have agreed to create and use common assessments. This process is guided by meetings of the curriculum council.
- MAP testing in a reading and math lab model has been implemented to support increased use of data in decision-making.
- Teachers have the opportunity to use EPAS (ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System) data to make curricular and instructional adjustments at the beginning of the school year.
- Staff and administration are committed to increasing dual credit opportunities for students.
- The Partnership for College and Career Success program offers a wide range of opportunities to learn about and participate in a particular area of possible future careers. Courses such as welding, automotive technology, data processing, child development, machine tool technology, and culinary arts allow students hands-on experiences that can motivate them to stay in school and prepare for study after high school.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:**

- Develop and implement a system of frequent classroom walkthroughs (e.g. Instructional Practices Inventory, 4-Minute Walkthroughs, etc.) to monitor and provide feedback of standards-based curriculum and research-based instructional practices. Collect data on these walkthroughs that can support teachers and encourage them when they are using new instructional practices.
- Develop opportunities for professional conversations tailored to identify and facilitate understanding of student success measures. (i.e. - When curriculum maps are being designed, make sure that the assessments are well understood by the teachers and have an identified measure of what constitutes student success.)
- Provide professional development time and/or time for common planning periods where teachers can have a dialog about the implementation of the new curriculum maps and possible adjustments that may need to be made after the first year.
- Expand learning expectations for students at all grade levels.
- Incorporate a wider number of research-based instructional strategies and formats.
- Design and implement on-going and cohesive professional development for all staff focused on best

instructional practices to engage all students.

**Finding:** Limestone Community High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Emerging" and has not met this standard for accreditation.

## Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results

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

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

The current school-wide assessment system consists mainly of the review of data from the PLAN (ACT's College Readiness test for 10th grade), EXPLORE (ACT's Assessment for 8th and 9th grades), MAP, and KEY TRAIN (Interactive training system for career readiness skills) assessments. Targets have been developed for 2011 and 2012 relative to the EXPLORE data and a calendar has been developed for KEY TRAIN activities. This year the district developed an Excel data base to review the summative results of the PSAE, PLAN and EXPLORE data. These data are available to all teachers and allow them to consider some trend data for grades other than grade 11. The English department is expected to use the EPAS test assessment scores as a part of their universal screening at the beginning of the school year.

It was not clear how the classroom-level assessments were aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards, assessment frameworks, school-level curriculum, or with the MAP, EXPLORE, or PLAN assessments. It appeared that the computer generated assessments were the main instruments that were driving school improvement efforts.

Although teachers can use the MAP assessments throughout the year, curriculum-based learning expectations do not appear to be aligned to specific classroom-based formative assessments. Therefore, the formative data cannot, at this point, be a part of information used to analyze and improve student performance. Classroom-level data do not seem to be monitored, collected, or used to make curriculum decisions or to provide for a range of instructional activities within the classroom. It was not clear that teachers knew how to use classroom-level student performance data for the purpose of selecting specific instructional strategies to meet current student needs.

Parents and teachers have access to the Skyward Family Access data on the school's website. In addition parents are sent assessment results on the state assessments. EPAS results are mailed to the parents. However, parents in the stakeholder focus group said they were not really sure of what the data sent to them meant and this limited their opportunity to help their child at home in specific academic areas.

Training is beginning that would assist all teachers in understanding how to develop and analyze data. Several teachers have attended professional development relative to RtI, Key Train data review, and independent teacher selected graduate course work. There are no common planning periods where data analysis can take place. The time for data analysis takes place on SIP days.



The number of students who met and exceeded on the PSAE has remained relatively stagnant for the school while the state's AYP benchmark has moved higher each year. As a result, the school has been identified as no longer making AYP relative to the PSAE assessment since 2008. The School Improvement Plan reported that scores for economically disadvantaged students have shown a significant drop in mathematics, but some gain in reading on the PSAE over the last five years while the school's low income population has increased by over 10% in the last five years.

The school uses PLAN, EXPLORE, MAP, and EPAS data which are developed by outside assessment companies. Common school-level assessments which are valid, reliable, and bias free are a goal but adequate time has not been set aside for teachers to develop these or to work towards inter-rater reliability once the common assessments are developed.

There was no evidence of a schedule for monitoring programs and gauging their effectiveness. New initiatives are in place but the QAR team did not see a list of indicators that the district will use to evaluate the successful implementation of programs and curricula.

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

- Student performance data are available to all stakeholders through a number of channels including Skyward and mailings to parents.
- The school has begun to develop an extensive Excel spreadsheet of PLAN and EXPLORE data that would allow teachers to track grade-level trends and students across multiple years in high school.
- The school is beginning to develop a test data results bank that is available to all teachers across all content areas. Review of this data would allow all teachers to have an understanding of student strengths relative to reading and writing sub skills. This information can be used to assist teachers in designing small flexible work grouping in their classes.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:**

- Include clearly defined classroom-level assessments in the development of all curriculum maps. Collect and analyze data about classroom assessment results and use these data as well as the data from the PLAN, EXPLORE, and MAP to prioritize instruction and professional development needs.
- Provide time for teachers to analyze whether or not their classroom-level assessments are aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards and the other assessment instruments being used.
- Develop grading criteria and cut scores for local assessments that can be used in all classes relative to a specific discipline. Use the information for the development of flexible grouping in the class and for differentiated instruction and other interventions relative to RtI. This information will assist teachers in developing and actually using SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) goals for instructional planning.
- Develop a systematic process to use both formative and summative data to select research-based instructional practices that meet the needs of each student.
- Implement and monitor the school improvement plan and use the data collected to refine the goals and interventions that will address the learning needs of all students.
- Develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation process to determine effectiveness of activities identified in the School Improvement Plan.

**Finding:** Limestone Community High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Emerging" and has not

met this standard for accreditation.

## Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems

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

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

There are sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement the curriculum and provide a safe environment for their students. The evidence provided in the artifacts and observations demonstrate the assignments of staff are sufficient in number to meet the vision of the school. The staff is extremely caring and dedicated. The current state of fiscal resources appeared to be allocated effectively towards educational programs and supports necessary to implement improvement plans.

The team found the utilization of time as a resource needs to be considered with regard to professional development. There was not a strong demonstration of a well-defined, comprehensive professional development plan to promote continuous improvement efforts.

The site and facilities were safe. The security and crisis management plans were documented. The environment in some areas observed during classroom visits seemed dark. The team noted the wonderful displays of art in the various areas, but little displays of student work.

The accessibility to a variety of services was evident and the willingness to offer additional support services to students was apparent. The team noted during interviews the mention of a simple referral system that had once been in place for staff to identify potential personal or academic challenges of individual students. However, it was not confirmed whether or not it was currently in place.

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

- The new teacher mentoring program implemented provides an excellent support to incoming teachers.
- The school has made a decision to hire support personnel such as psychologists and full-time social workers to address a variety of social and emotional issues that may face students.
- The commitment of funds and resources to develop the various hands-on learning careers in the Partnership for College and Career Success Program allow students at all levels to explore their own particular skills and abilities across a wide range of career possibilities that may not be available at many other high schools in the area.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:**

- Expand the visual elements throughout the school to include displays of student work.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive professional development process to ensure continuous improvement.
- Consider ways in which teachers can have a dialogue or common planning period in which to discuss the implementation of the new curriculum maps and common assessments.

**Finding:** Limestone Community High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

## **Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships**

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

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

The school effectively maintains various methods of communication among stakeholder groups as evidenced by information gathered through interviews. Newsletters, automated phone calls, updates on the school website and parent/teacher conferences are examples that provide parents and community members with information about the school. Various writing and research handbooks have been posted, and the library has its own link with up-to-date reading information and additional resources. The daily practice questions for PSAE preparation are also posted on the website to provide parents with an opportunity to understand the nature of the test and to give them ideas of how they might help their child prepare for the state assessment.

Local businesses have established partnerships with the school to provide opportunities for student enrichment beyond the high school walls.

Staff reported administration of a parent survey during the fall parent/teacher conferences. Response rates for the survey were low, so staff completed a follow-up mailing to solicit more responses. No evidence of the results of the fall survey was provided to the QAR team. Additionally, no focus group participant referenced what the results of the survey were or how those results would be used to guide school decision-making.

Parent involvement is strongly encouraged as demonstrated by the number of opportunities available. Band boosters, athletic boosters, discipline committee, and the school improvement team are a few of the ways that stakeholders engage in school improvement. The administration has an "open door" policy that invites dialogue among faculty, students, and parents.

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

- There are multiple ways for stakeholders to collaborate and communicate with faculty and staff.
- The school posts the Limestone Community H.S. School Improvement Plan and the Illinois School Report Card on its website allowing the analysis of school academic efforts to be transparent. There is a wealth of information that parents and students can use to expand learning beyond the classroom as teachers and librarians post links to other libraries and specific web sites relative to course content.
- The stakeholders interviewed indicated they believe their voices are recognized and heard and that suggestions are acted upon when possible.
- Including students on the discipline committee allows for student perspectives to be a part of the disciplinary process.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:**

- Look at alternative methods of communication for families that do not have access to the internet or telephone.
- Consider hosting test interpretation evenings with parents to allow a clearer understanding of what the scores mean.

**Finding:** Limestone Community High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

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

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

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

The school follows an improvement plan aligned with state and district improvement goals. The plan includes strategies identified through the deliberation of the administration and school improvement team members using performance data and feedback from stakeholders. Interviews indicated that the strategies are revisited at the end of each school year. Strategic adjustments are made if a need is determined. The plan lacked an assessment process and tools to determine the effectiveness of the current strategies.

The continuous improvement process is loosely aligned with the current school mission, indicating what the school will do to prepare students. Stakeholders interviewed revealed a lack of understanding about the focus for improvement efforts. Planning based on data analysis strategies is broad and vague, lacking specifics necessary for clear implementation, monitoring, and evaluating.

The staff is presented with professional development opportunities made available to them through a variety of district measures. Staff members have opportunities to select development according to individual professional needs as well as district-driven development. While the district is generous with opportunities for staff, a site plan with a clear focus and purpose for professional development is not evident.

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

- The school' leadership recognizes the need for improvement and a willingness to pursue worthwhile improvement strategies.
- The school improvement team seeks input from stakeholders, including students and teachers.

**Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:**

- Develop a system for the timely monitoring of the effectiveness of school initiatives and elements of the school improvement plan. Use these data as part of the review cycle for continuous improvement. Areas of data collection might include participation in the Learning Lab, analysis of the needs of student subgroups and ways in which instructional modifications have impacted student achievement, the benefits of the Wednesday test prep focus, and the use of common assessments. Whether ideas and topics presented in professional development sessions have been successfully implemented and have significantly changed student learning might also be included.
- Revise the school improvement planning process to include goals that are specific, measurable, and time-bound (SMART).
- Conduct and sustain staff training on data analysis and current school improvement strategies.
- Develop a site-based professional development plan aligned with identified needs contained within the school improvement plan.
- Contact the NCA CASI state office for technical assistance and/or consult the ROE for listings of professional development opportunities.

**Finding:** Limestone Community High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Emerging" and has not met this standard for accreditation.

## Conclusion

The commendations and required actions in this report are designed to focus the school on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and school effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and required actions only have meaning when acted upon by the school. The strength of this report lies in the school's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school 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 required actions for improvement that the school will need to address. Following this review, the school will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's required actions.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the School Administration, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality throughout the visit. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through NCA-CASI-IL accreditation with AdvancED.

# Appendix

## Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Anne Sustik, Chair
- Ms. Becky Densmore-Stoll, Team Member (Illinois NCA)
- Kim Blickem, Team Member (Sullivan High School)
- Ms. Linda Reabe, Team Member (Center for Educational Initiatives)
- Ms. Marica Cullen, Team Member (Illinois State Board of Education)
- Dr. Sharon Kherat, Team Member (Manual High School)
- Ms. Susie Conway, Team Member (MacArthur High School)
- Ms. Tamra Hutmacher, Team Member (Quincy Notre Dame High School)
- Dr. Tom Kerins, Team Member (Center on Innovation and Improvement)

## AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

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

### **Vision and Purpose**

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

### **Governance and Leadership**

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

### **Teaching and Learning**

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

### **Documenting and Using Results**

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

### **Resource and Support Systems**

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

### **Stakeholder Communications and Relationships**

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

**Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

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