

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca High School  
PO Box P  
1500 Education Drive  
Syracuse, Nebraska, United States 68446-520**

**Dr. Joy Stilmock**

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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

### Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI .....	3
Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review .....	4
Summary of Findings .....	5
Commendations .....	5
Required Actions .....	7
Next Steps .....	8
Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools .....	10
Standard 1: Vision and Purpose .....	10
Standard 2: Governance and Leadership .....	11
Standard 3: Teaching and Learning .....	12
Standard 4: Documenting and Using Results .....	13
Standard 5: Resource and Support Systems .....	14
Standard 6: Stakeholder Communications and Relationships .....	15
Standard 7: Commitment to Continuous Improvement .....	17
Conclusion .....	18
Appendix .....	19
Quality Assurance Review Team Members .....	19
AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools .....	19

## 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 by the 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 Nebraska State Office (NCA-CASI-NE), a division of AdvancED, visited the Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca High School in Syracuse, Nebraska, United States on 03/04/2008 - 03/05/2008.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 5 members of the administrative team, 6 students, 10 parents, and 17 teachers. In addition, Business/Community Members, School Board Members and Steering Committee were interviewed. 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 staff is dedicated to improve student achievement. A cohesive bond has formed around the target area goals for improving vocabulary and reading strategies across curriculum areas.

As evidenced by interviews with teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, and community members, the stakeholders are involved and interested in performances, success, and future opportunities of all students. It was easy to witness how each teacher embraced the vocabulary goal as a means to improving student achievement in reading. Teachers are at varying levels during this first year of implementation, but the literacy team is in the process of strengthening a sustainable plan for reading instruction by bringing in experts, analyzing and interpreting data, and committing to continuous improvement in reading across the curriculum. Staff members

have been an active participant in district level analysis of data and discussions targeting student performance needs and goals. The use of this data by individuals and groups to plan instruction and intervention was apparent from the interviews, report of results document, and action plans.

Quality, explicit vocabulary instruction is essential for students to increase their understanding of new concepts as well as comprehending and understanding core knowledge from multiple reading selections and varying disciplines of thought. This is critical for independent thinking and future learning.

The district's vision and mission provide direction for all stakeholders throughout the school community. The leadership and staff maintain a clear and powerful focus on student performance that permeates all levels of the organization K-12 (current focus on Secondary NCA Accreditation). The target area goal team members have projected future action planning that will lead the district into the continuous model of improvement which has been embraced by the entire SDA staff and administration. Community stakeholders and school board members are regularly informed regarding performance data and learner expectations.

The school improvement process has been reorganized and centered on student performance and achievement. As evidenced by statements during classroom observations; interviews of the target area goal team; support staff/teachers; steering team; stakeholders; school board members and administrators, all stakeholders know the school's student performance objectives of improving reading comprehension and vocabulary development. All stakeholders are aware of current performance levels and can articulate what strategies are being implemented to improve vocabulary performance. This focus has contributed to increases in student performance from baseline data gathered in 2006-2007. The district will continue to gather data in Spring of 2008 to begin trend data collection and analysis.

The target area goal team members have projected future action planning that will lead the district into the continuous model of improvement which has been embraced by the entire SDA staff and administration.

The district includes the communities of Syracuse, Dunbar, Avoca, Otoe, and Unadilla. District patrons have supported the high school through their interest in student performance and high expectations, attendance at school sponsored activities, passing a bond to expand existing facilities, Team Mates program, community tutors, and support for students from each community.

The stakeholders interviewed were extremely supportive of administration, staff, and students with a vested interest for improving instruction and ensuring that all students are competent to meet current expectations for future opportunities at the local, state, national, or global communities after completing their education at SDA.

Community support and involvement is essential to meet the mission of Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca: "We provide a safe, secure environment in which every student will acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to become accomplished, productive members of the ever-changing, global community."

## **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.

Implement research-based instructional strategies for improving comprehension of multiple text structures for different content area concepts as outlined by the district curriculum.

The trend data from the past five years of Terra Nova vocabulary scores indicate that approximately 60% of students are at the NCE 50 percentile or above proficiency level. The high school teachers are currently gathering baseline data from 2007-08 from the pre- and post-tests developed around the selected vocabulary. Although the teachers are at varying stages of implementing instruction as it pertains to vocabulary in all disciplines, they have embraced the vocabulary goal and are proactive in setting goals and focusing on improving vocabulary and reading strategies.

If data gathered from vocabulary pre-tests and post-tests, the district's Terra Nova vocabulary and comprehension sections, and an instrument such as Gates MacGinitie or other determined progress monitoring measure were collected and analyzed, the interpreted data could provide guidance in adjusting instruction to accommodate student needs. Such an expanded focus could support improvement for the 40% of students not meeting proficiency, while strengthening the existing skills of all students.

Facilitate discussions regarding district-level accreditation.

The S-D-A school improvement team includes representatives from primary, intermediate, junior high, and high school teachers; an elementary principal; a K-12 special education teacher director; junior high special education teacher; and a guidance counselor. Through teacher interviews and review of the school's assessment system, the team found that teachers have focused on student performance data to make instructional decisions and then created action plans to accomplish the goal of improving reading at all grade levels and all content areas (with

40% of students not meeting proficiency levels at the high school level).

If S-D-A were to take a district approach to improving reading, the district could, for example, integrate the continuous improvement plans with the Response to Intervention planning (an ESU 4 pilot project with NE Rtl model). These two processes align teachers of grades K-12 with research-based practices and instructional techniques that can improve learning for all students. These processes could be used to set criteria for core reading program adoption (K-8) and supplemental and intensive intervention (K-12) for improving instruction and catching up individual student performance to grade level.

The research is clear that when scientific, research-based reading programs and instructional techniques are implemented with fidelity, the core program accommodates the instructional needs of 80% to 85% of students, with approximately 10% of students needing supplemental interventions to catch up, and about 2% to 5% needing additional intensive intervention. Thus, a collaborative professional process of this type might help move the district into an in-depth level of meeting specific needs of all students below grade level, at grade level, or above grade level performance and expectation.

Develop a formal system of communication to ensure that all Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca stakeholders (including communities incorporated into the district through legislative decisions) are informed about, and become a voice in, planning and supporting school improvement efforts for the district.

This district's proximity to Lincoln, Omaha, and Nebraska City has promoted steady growth for the community of Syracuse. The changes in diversity and demographics that have accompanied this growth generate a higher need to keep all stakeholders informed about improvement endeavors. The school is already undergoing plans to add additional classrooms to accommodate the growth in student population. The district has also incorporated on-line access to students' progress information, contacts with teachers, and information about lesson plans/assignments that students and parents can access from home or work.

The on-line system is an excellent step in beginning to develop a formal system of communication. Articulation of such topics as district facility plans, student performance expectations, and plans for curriculum and staff development would also provide a means to keep constituents informed and involved.

**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-NE 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 Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca 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's vision and mission provide focus and direction for all stakeholders throughout the school community. School stakeholders were involved in the development of their mission and belief statements. It is clear that the expectations for student learning are aligned with this vision. All teachers are involved in the goal of improving reading, specifically vocabulary. In-service opportunities relating to this goal have occurred, and the administrative leadership ensures that teachers have the vision when implementing lessons by frequent observations. The SDA School Board has also shown commitment to the vision by floating and successfully passing a bond issue. In part, this will allow space for the addition of 7th and 8th grade reading classes. The next step will be to involve parents and patrons more directly in the vision and mission of the school. The school profile is changing with the merger of two small schools, Otoe and Unadilla, into the district. Free and reduced lunch statistics have increased from 11% to 22%. These demographic changes will require attention in planning and decision making for continuous school improvement.

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

The assessment team facilitated a mini data-retreat to assure that all instructors understand student performance data and are involved in the entire process of analyzing and interpreting data to support further improvement efforts and planning. The school improvement team leaders report to the school board every other month to keep them informed and involved in the continuous improvement process.

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

The external team encourages more involvement of community stakeholders in the continuous school improvement process. With the addition of two new smaller schools and their patrons, stakeholder involvement will facilitate the merger. The team would like to validate and support the discussions shared during the interviews regarding the feasibility of adding a reading curriculum at the 7th and 8th grade levels.

**Finding:** Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca 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:**

Leadership, at all levels in this district, is supportive of the improvement of instruction. The board of education floated and passed a bond issue to provide more facilities and the addition of reading classes at the 7th and 8th grade levels. Administrative leadership provides release time and stipends for educators to attend professional development opportunities that relate to the goal of improving instruction. Teachers are the leaders of the school improvement process team. The leadership has established teacher leaders at the various levels and identified those teachers who are instructional experts to be a resource for others. The appraisal process for educators requires teachers set goals aligned with increasing student performance, and the leadership checks to see that this is being accomplished.

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

The leadership has initiated programs that regularly bring parents and patrons into the school. Some examples are Team Mates, volunteers, senior citizens, and parent groups. These individuals assist in enabling students to achieve their learning expectations. The programs also allow individuals who would not normally come into the school buildings to gain valuable insights into the educational goals of the school system. Teacher leaders are involved in the RTI training as Syracuse is one of the pilot districts in ESU #4. Steering team leaders as well as the staff are dedicated to the process of school improvement.

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

The team would like to suggest that the secondary principal also be part of the steering team if the district continues support for only the Secondary NCA Accreditation. All buildings and levels are involved in goal setting, action planning, professional development and performance data. It is logical that the accreditation process be district wide.

**Finding:** Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca 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:**

At the secondary level, the school chose to work with student improvement in reading across the curriculum. To do this, the school focused on two important areas of reading instruction. One area is for students to become strategic readers through the use of reading strategies; the second area is for students to increase usable general academic vocabulary and to also use vocabulary skills. As of today, the district is in the process of implementing vocabulary across all curriculums. Each subject area and each teacher has developed “drop dead vocabulary lists.” These lists include the subject matter vocabulary and the general academic vocabulary needed by all students to be successful in each individual class or curricular area. The district intends to make the vocabulary element data driven. Teachers will be able to accumulate data via pre and post testing within the classroom; they will also be able to review data from designated standardized tests. The district is in the process of including all staff in data retreats which will help teachers to understand how to acquire and interpret data in an effort to enhance instruction. Similarly, the district has employed a reading expert to train staff in the areas of vocabulary development, vocabulary strategies, and overall reading strategies. The vocabulary goal is clearly moving forward in a systematic and organized manner. Every classroom is attending to the vocabulary initiative; each teacher is a stakeholder in the process. The overall effectiveness of the vocabulary instruction plan is unknown at this time. The school district is in the infancy stages of the overall goal implementation. Teachers are at varying stages of staff development and at varying stages of implementing effective vocabulary instruction. The second goal is to increase student learning through reading strategies across all curriculums. Teachers are beginning to focus on reading strategies in the classroom, but may not have an overall understanding of how to measure the success of the strategy instruction; furthermore, this is an area where teachers have had the least amount of staff development. Administration is working on an overall plan to attack the strategies goal. This goal might be fully functional once the vocabulary goal is solidly in place.

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

The school district is to be commended for its dedication to student achievement. Not only does this district attend to the present needs of the students through clearly defined goals, but is proactive in predicting future needs through the goal-setting process. The external team commends the district/community for the cohesive bond formed around the goals and student achievement. It is very evident that all stakeholders (support staff, teachers, administrators, community members) are involved in the future of these students. It was easy to witness in the classroom how each teacher had embraced the vocabulary goal as a means to improving student achievement in reading. The school is in the process of developing a sustainable and enduring plan for reading instruction. Assembling a literacy team, bringing in experts for guidance, and looking closely at data will be three ways that the district will move forward in the next three to five years.

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

This district has launched the reading instruction plan. The vocabulary goal is clearly ahead of the reading strategies goal at this time. Revisit the “drop dead” vocabulary list and identify additional word knowledge critical for comprehending content area concepts. The external team encourages the district to

look at a staff development model which reaches all instructors in a meaningful and systematic way. Each instructor will need staff development in the area of vocabulary instruction (which is underway) and each will need staff development in the area of reading strategy instruction across the curriculum. The district is starting to look at data to guide quality instruction. Leadership has already worked through a data retreat. Hopefully, this process will continue until all staff understand how to interpret and use data to make instructional decisions. Review reading probes to be included as another data option for regular progress monitoring. Probes such as MAZE and AIMSweb are examples of progress monitoring tools to provide administration and staff much needed data in order to fine tune instruction.

**Finding:** Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has 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 school has developed a comprehensive system for documenting assessment results. This system provides data which is used to determine which students need re-teaching and intervention as well as program effectiveness. Interviews with administrators and teachers revealed strong understanding of the use of results to inform instructional decision making at the classroom level and to make decisions regarding interventions at the building level. Staff reported that data training and data retreats were essential to the commitment to improve and were the reason that stakeholders took ownership of the data and planning processes. There was not evidence that data was used to inform parents and community members or to assist students in setting personal goals for improvement. The school's implementation of fluency instruction in grades K-6 and vocabulary instruction in grades K-12 was well documented. There were no comments collected in the interviews in regard to data collection and analysis for the comprehension goal except for standardized achievement scores (Terra Nova and Gates MacGinitie).

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

The team noticed several successful practices deserving of recognition. The use of data by individuals and groups to plan instruction and intervention was evident. Training for staff members on the importance of data and its use to plan intervention was an essential element of the school's improvement efforts.

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

The team offers the following suggestions for improvement and growth in documenting and using results. Create grade level goals for areas targeted for improvement. Analyze data gathered from the vocabulary pre- and posttests each year and make correlations with the Gates MacGinitie and Terra Nova. Adjust the curriculum based measurement tool for reliability and validity. Involve parents and students in using data to set personal goals and to evaluate programs. Commit to the development of professional learning communities and specific training for selected programs and instructional techniques to support and extend research based best practices.

**Finding:** Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has

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:**

The school's uses of resources and support systems were well documented in comments from all stakeholder groups. Interviews indicate that training for teacher teams and systems for sharing this training were essential to the growth shown by the school. Trained interventionists provide support for at-risk students during the school day or by teacher associates during study halls and after school. Administrators, teachers, and parents are discussing the feasibility of establishing a district-supported preschool instead of a private preschool associated with the district. Families of preschool students currently pay tuition to attend the preschool with accommodations provided for FRL students. Comments from community members and staff noted how passage of the bond issue would help with documented problems in terms of facilities and space.

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

The team noticed several successful practices deserving of recognition. Team planning and coordination for intervention support is essential to providing extra support for low performing students. The school has done much to gain community support and knowledge of resources and support systems.

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

The team offers the following suggestions for improvement and growth in resources and support systems. Develop a system for additional support for at risk students in grades 7-12 that will be provided by trained teachers. Review, select, and implement a coordinated K-12 system of student support for supplemental and intensive interventions. Use established criteria to study the design of the program and also gather the results of effectiveness for students with identified needs. Schedule meeting times for supervisors/administration, general education, supplemental support (mentors and tutors, and special education staff to articulate progress monitoring data (bi-weekly or bi-monthly pending on intensity of need) to ensure meeting the specific needs of students who are below grade level expectations to those students performing above grade level.

Review the feasibility of providing a district-supported preschool for all children to provide quality oral language and phonological awareness instruction to provide equitable acquisition of pre-reading skills. Early prevention begins before students come to kindergarten. As evidence from interviews from administration, teachers, and parents, a district preschool would provide services for more of the community. If the K-12 reading improvement efforts were to be extended to a district supported preschool, the opportunity to prevent reading failures is improved (Hart and Risley).

**Finding:** Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca 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:**

Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca District, including Unadilla and Otoe, is located near Lincoln, Omaha, and Nebraska City; thus, there is continued growth for the Syracuse community and surrounding area. The patrons of this district support the high school through their interest in student performance, attendance at school-sponsored activities, and express high expectations for all students. Moreover, patrons passed a bond to accommodate the growing junior high and secondary population. Community members participate in the Team Mates program and as community tutors. The SDA staff members make multiple efforts to formally and informally involve participation from the communities and also share with stakeholders information regarding academic improvements and extra-curricular activities. The interviewed groups provided evidence of the aforementioned processes. The stakeholders interviewed were aware of the continuous improvement efforts and the target area goals for improving vocabulary and reading comprehension in all content areas and at all levels.

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

The district has communicated performance data to stakeholders on a regular basis. The data at the high school level shows that approximately 70% of students are meeting proficiency levels (11th grade Terra Nova) or above and that the majority of students are graduating (95%) and attending post secondary institutes of higher education (83%). Stakeholders were aware of this data and are committed to support educational opportunities for secondary students. Teachers and administrators use electronic means to communicate with parents and community through the SDA website and PowerSchool. Teachers are able to post weekly grades, assignments, and lesson plans online. This communication is used for teacher communication with volunteer tutors and support staff for students needing extra assistance in completing assignments during the scheduled “make-up” sessions during lunch, after school, and/or designated study halls for at-risk students. Administration and teachers have connected with community volunteers to ensure that all students are completing assignments and receive the needed support above and beyond the classroom instruction. Teachers and parents are able to access the data base which provides contact information for immediate communication. The superintendent stated that in his 12 years at SDA, stakeholders are more informed in 2008 than ever before. Parents, community members, tutors, board members and teachers strongly supported this statement during the interviews. The vested interest in students was evidenced by patrons, mentors, tutors, parents, teachers and administration interviews.

- The stakeholder interviews overlapped and validated these comments regarding communication between school, home and community regarding the positive connections through the student performance updates, mentoring program Team Mates, volunteer tutors, and community involvement.
- The school board and community are aware of the target area goals of improving vocabulary and comprehension through the local newspaper and regular reports (quarterly) to the school board by the co-chairs and steering committee members.
- Parent/Teacher conferences are well attended and provide another means of sharing student progress at the high school level.
- Administration and teachers are committed to identify specific needs at all levels of student performance to ensure that significant progress is evident for all demographic groups.
- Community members have high expectations for the district to “stay current” by providing quality instruction and maintaining technological updates for students. In return, high school students have shared

their expertise by teaching computer courses/programs for senior citizens. This was viewed as a positive intergenerational connection between school and community.

In addition, SDA K-6 teachers are also planning an evening curriculum session to inform parents regarding the upcoming selection of a core reading program, allocated time for a reading block, systematic instructional techniques, flexible grouping based on data results, progress monitoring, and placement of students at the correct level of difficulty. This aligns with training through involvement as a pilot school with Educational Service Units 3 and 4 together with the statewide Response to Intervention (RTI) initiative.

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

Develop a formal system of communication to ensure that all SDA community stakeholders, due to additional communities incorporated into the district through legislative decisions, are informed and become a viable voice in planning and supporting the district's improvement efforts. The facilities will be expanded to accommodate grades four through six and expand classroom space for grades seven and eight. During this transition, it will be imperative to include stakeholders from participating communities to bring consolidated efforts in support for the entire district. Growth and diversity change the dynamics and demographics of a school district, and SDA has constructed proactive plans to accommodate the changing needs of students attending SDA.

- Engage all content area teachers in the implementation of research based practices to meet the learning needs of 80%-85% of students and then use the established homework sessions and tutorial study hall sessions for research based supplemental interventions and/or intensive interventions through the special education program at the high school level for moving students to grade level expectations. Articulate the instructional plans with students, parents and involved teachers to accelerate the performance at all levels.
- Identify students with high abilities and provide instruction and course work to challenge students' progress with accelerated opportunities. Meeting the needs of all levels was an expressed concern of patrons, parents, teachers and administration.
- Schedule meeting times among supervisors/administration, general education, supplemental support (mentors and tutors) and special education staff to articulate progress monitoring data (bi-weekly or bi-monthly pending on intensity of need) to ensure meeting the specific needs of students who are below grade level expectations.
- Assess the current load of the guidance counselor in meeting the intensive needs of at-risk students.

**Finding:** Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca 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 improvement process at Syracuse has been reorganized so it is now student centered and based on student achievement. Current data is used to establish the school improvement goals. Opportunities for future training of the staff in the school improvement process are supported and encouraged by the leadership. School improvement sessions are scheduled once a month for the next school year. The administrative leadership supports this plan, and staff attendance is mandatory.

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

The 2008 School Improvement Action Plan included Future Vision plans. SDA district's Target Area Goal Team includes the elementary principal; representation from primary, intermediate, junior high and secondary general education; K-12 special education; junior high special education; and, guidance counselor. This school system knows where they are now, and where they want to be in the future!!

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

The team suggests that the school "keep up the good work" as it is making a positive difference for students. Review the recommendations provided by the external team and begin the continuous improvement process by prioritizing actions and professional development into a logical and systematic approach to accomplish the instructional responsibilities and skills needed by all staff members for the purpose of improving learning for all students. This is a rewarding and worthy professional journey.

**Finding:** Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca High School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has 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-NE accreditation with AdvancED.

# Appendix

## Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Ms. Lynette Block, Chair/Lead Evaluator (Nebraska Department of Education)
- Doug Denson, Team Member (Millard South High School)
- Martha Schaffer, Team Member (Hayward Elementary School)
- Randi Van Dyne, Team Member (Plattsmouth Elementary School)

## 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.