



# School Accreditation

## *A Handbook for Schools*

*July 2012*



*AdvancED® is dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide. The North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.*

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## Welcome

This brief handbook is designed to help you with the steps and logistics of the AdvancED® School Accreditation Process – from beginning the process to preparing for and hosting the External Review to continuing the journey after the review.

The AdvancED Accreditation Process represents the unified accreditation process for the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI). Schools seeking to earn and maintain NCA CASI, NWAC or SACS CASI accreditation follow the AdvancED Accreditation Process.

If you have questions or need assistance during the process, please contact your AdvancED State Office. A directory of state offices can be found at [www.advanc-ed.org](http://www.advanc-ed.org) in the “Locations” tab.

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## Resources

AdvancED provides a range of support and resources to assist schools in their pursuit and maintenance of accreditation.

### Standards

*AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality Schools*

The Standards are the foundation of the accreditation process and can be downloaded at [www.advanc-ed.org](http://www.advanc-ed.org) under the “ACCREDITATION” tab.

### Processes, Steps, and Procedures

Visit [www.advanc-ed.org](http://www.advanc-ed.org) under the “ACCREDITATION” tab for an overview of the School Accreditation Process. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click on “School Accreditation” where you will find:

- [Review the AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Schools](#)
- [View the AdvancED Policies and Procedures](#)
- [Readiness Assessment](#) (to be completed before the readiness review)
- [Complete the Application for Accreditation](#)

### Reports, Resources, and Tools

A wide range of useful resources and tools for schools can be accessed online at [www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources](http://www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources).

### Products and Services

AdvancED offers a range of products and services to schools. Visit [www.advanc-ed.org](http://www.advanc-ed.org) under the “Online Store” tab for a current listing of publications, resources and tools.

### State Office Support

State offices provide hands-on support and technical assistance to schools as they engage in the School Accreditation Process. Many states tap the expertise of trained Field Consultants to support schools. Schools can contact their state offices to learn more about the range of services and support available to them. A complete directory of state offices can be found at [www.advanc-ed.org](http://www.advanc-ed.org) under the “Locations” tab.

# Introduction to School Accreditation

## Overview

Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools, and designed primarily to distinguish schools adhering to a set of educational Standards. Today the accreditation process is used at all levels of education, and is recognized for its ability to effectively drive student performance and continuous improvement in education.

Institutions seeking to gain or retain accreditation by AdvancED must meet AdvancED Standards. These Standards focus on systems within a school and systematic methods of attaining high student performance and organizational effectiveness. The Standards address preparing students with skills they will need for the future and include high expectations for professional practice. The Standards require demonstrated growth in student learning and achievement; a commitment to developing learning, thinking and life skills for all students; and formal structures whereby each student is well known. The power of the Standards lies in the connections and linkages between and among the Standards.

Institutions also must participate in an External Review, completed by a team of highly qualified external peer evaluators who examine the institution's adherence and commitment to AdvancED Standards. This review is the hallmark of the accreditation process and energizes and equips the leadership and stakeholders of an institution or school system to maintain areas of high performance and tackle those areas that may be thwarting desired performance levels. The External Review is a rigorous process that includes review of artifacts, interviews with stakeholders and observations of instruction, learning and operations.

## The Accreditation Process: Responsibilities of the School

The accreditation process is based on a five-year term accreditation. It is an ongoing process of meeting Standards, engaging in continuous improvement and demonstrating quality assurance. The following chart outlines how the process unfolds and the responsibilities of the school over the five-year term.

Timing	School's Responsibilities
Every year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adhere to the AdvancED Standards</li><li>• Engage in ongoing self assessment and continuous improvement</li><li>• Document results of improvement efforts</li><li>• Update school demographic and contact information</li><li>• Notify AdvancED of any substantive changes in the school's ability to meet the Standards</li></ul>

Between four weeks and six months before External Review all completed and submitted in ASSIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self Assessment</li> <li>• Improvement Plan</li> <li>• Executive Summary</li> <li>• Assurances</li> <li>• Student Performance Diagnostic</li> <li>• Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic</li> </ul>
Year of External Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare for the External Review Team, working with the Lead Evaluator to establish the review schedule and make arrangements for the team.</li> <li>• Gather evidence and documentation in preparation for the team's review of the school's adherence to the Standards.</li> <li>• Host the External Review Team.</li> <li>• Share the findings from the External Review Team report with the school community.</li> <li>• Begin acting on the team's required actions.</li> </ul>
Following the External Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.</li> <li>• Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school.</li> <li>• Develop action plans to address the required actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the required actions.</li> <li>• Use the report to guide and strengthen the school's efforts to improve student performance and school effectiveness.</li> <li>• Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report (APR) detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. Schools are required to respond to all required actions. The required actions should be completed before the APR is submitted. 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.</li> <li>• Continue to meet the AdvancED Accreditation Standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement and document results.</li> </ul>

## Role of the School Facilitator

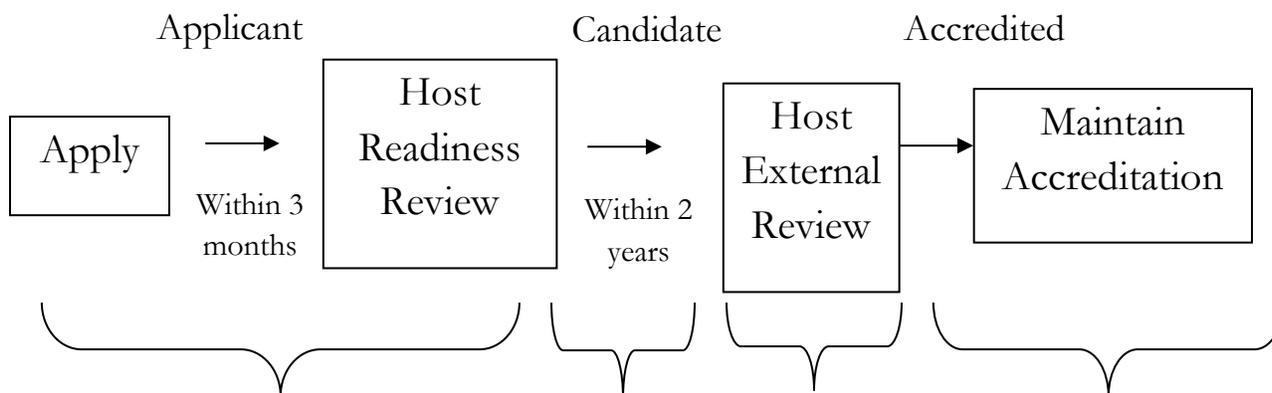
Often the Principal of the school assigns a senior staff member to facilitate the accreditation process for the school. The School Facilitator:

- Serves as the key point of contact between AdvancED and the school;
- Works with the External Review Lead Evaluator to prepare for and host the External Review;
- Oversees the accreditation process for the school;
- Supports school stakeholders throughout the accreditation process, answering questions and providing guidance;
- Ensures that all requirements of the accreditation process are met; and
- Manages the logistics and oversees the schedule for the External Review.

## Steps to School Accreditation

The following flow chart depicts the steps to accreditation. As the school successfully completes these steps, it moves from Applicant to Candidate to Accredited status. This handbook is designed to assist the school with each of these steps. The sections of the workbook that address the various steps are highlighted in blue.

### Steps to School Accreditation



Corresponding chapters from this handbook that address each step of the process

<p><b>Chapter 1:</b> Beginning the Accreditation Process</p>	<p><b>Chapter 2:</b> Engaging in Internal Review</p> <p><b>Chapter 3:</b> Preparing for the External Review</p>	<p><b>Chapter 4:</b> Hosting the External Review</p>	<p><b>Chapter 5:</b> Continuing the Journey</p>
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# Chapter 1: Beginning the Accreditation Process

## Applying

The school begins the accreditation process by reviewing the *AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools* and determining that it has both the school-wide commitment and the capacity to meet the Standards. The school then completes and submits an application and accreditation fees to AdvancED. The state office is notified of the application and sends the principal a Readiness Letter describing the expectations for the Readiness Review, along with a Self Assessment of Readiness for Accreditation tool.

## ASSIST

**The Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tools** (ASSIST) has been created to function as a school improvement planning framework and an accreditation manager. AdvancED accreditation and school improvement are two processes built upon systems thinking and therefore require schools to use a systems thinking approach. The ASSIST system provides resources and tools for schools and systems in developing informed improvement plans and to manage the accreditation process from beginning to end. Schools and systems can use ASSIST all the time, not just in preparation for an External Review. Institutions in the AdvancED network have access to ASSIST. Schools and systems can assign multiple users to access their institution's ASSIST account. The technology tools in ASSIST have been created to guide schools and systems through this continuous improvement process that includes: data collection, analysis, goal setting, planning, implementation and evaluation. The ASSIST system also provides tools for completing the required documents that are part of the accreditation process.

## Preparing for and Hosting the Readiness Review

**Purpose:** The Readiness Review is designed to reflect the institution's readiness for accreditation through a validation of the school's Self Assessment of Readiness and examination of its practices in relation to the AdvancED Standards for accreditation. By assessing the institution's readiness, a determination can be made regarding its capacity to meet the AdvancED Standards and requirements for student performance, stakeholder perception data and assurances.

For information regarding preparation for the Readiness Review and completion of the Self Assessment of Readiness, please go to <http://www.advanc-ed.org/schools> and click the link to Hosting the Readiness Review and the Readiness Self Assessment for Schools.

Based on the review, the State Office representatives make a determination as to the school's readiness for accreditation. If the representatives believe the school would benefit from more time to address specific areas of need, they will recommend that the school remain in Applicant status. If this is the case, the school will receive specific instructions regarding necessary next steps. If the representatives believe the school is ready for accreditation, they will recommend that the school be moved to candidate status.

## Moving to Candidacy

If the school is recommended for candidacy, the state office sends the school a candidacy letter that outlines the next steps of the accreditation process which include:

- 1) Addressing any required actions noted in the Readiness Report;
- 2) Ensuring that the school has the capacity to meet all Standards;
- 3) Identifying dates for the External Review; and
- 4) Preparing for the External Review.

The candidacy letter includes a Review Date and Team Member Expertise Request Form. The form asks the school to:

- **Identify three preferred dates to host the External Review.** The review needs to be scheduled within two years of the Readiness Review. Review date requests must be made at least six months prior to the preferred dates.
- **Indicate any specific expertise** the school would like members of the External Review Team to have based on the needs facing the school.

Most schools identify and submit their preferred review dates and desired expertise shortly after receiving their candidacy letter. This provides them with a targeted time frame for their review and helps them begin preparing for the External Review.

Upon receiving the school's preferred dates and desired team member expertise, the state office sends a letter confirming the dates for the review to the school. The letter provides instructions for preparing for the review.

## Chapter 2: Engaging in Internal Review

The Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tools (ASSIST) offers a suite of diagnostic tools, including a Self Assessment, Executive Summary, student performance, stakeholder feedback and more. These tools are designed to offer a comprehensive, yet simplistic way of identifying an organization's strengths and challenges.

Internal and external diagnostics results are an important part of the AdvancED accreditation process, but the intent is for education institutions to use diagnostic tools as part of their ongoing data collection and improvement process.

### Understanding and Completing the ASSIST Diagnostics

To prepare for the External Review, the school engages in a comprehensive internal review guided by the AdvancED Self Assessment (SA). The SA is designed to facilitate the process of internal reflection and assessment of the institution's current reality. The SA can be used as often as needed as a reflective process but is only submitted once prior to the External Review.

Go to [www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources](http://www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources) and click on the links to [Using ASSIST to Prepare for an External Review](#), the [Self Assessment Workbook for Schools](#) and the [Self Assessment Workbook for Schools - Concept Map](#).

In addition to completing the SA, the school collaboratively prepares and submits an Executive Summary (ES) in ASSIST. The ES allows the school to tell its unique story, providing the organizational context for the school's Self Assessment. Comprised of four sections, the ES includes: 1) an introduction; 2) a summary of student performance; 3) a discussion of challenges and opportunities; and 4) a conclusion. Guiding questions assist the school in crafting each section of the ES.

The school uses ASSIST reporting system to complete and submit the Self Assessment, Executive Summary, student performance and stakeholder feedback diagnostics as well as improvement plan, and the assurances.

Go to [www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources](http://www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources) and click on the links to [Quick Start Guide for ASSIST](#), [Guide to Administering Diagnostics](#), [Stakeholder Feedback Worksheet](#), [Student Performance Worksheet](#) and the [Student Performance Workbook](#).

Regular demographics updates are essential for AdvancED and the school to maintain communications and data collection.

Go to [www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources](http://www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources) and click on the link to [Access and Complete Demographics Update Online](#).

These components of preparation for the External Review must be completed within four weeks of the scheduled review.

## Chapter 3: Preparing for the External Review

### Working with the State Office and External Review Lead Evaluator

Having a general understanding of the purpose and functions of the External Review helps the school prepare for a successful review. In addition, the school has the ongoing support of the AdvancED State Office and assigned Lead Evaluator.

The state office is available to support the school with all aspects of the School Accreditation Process – from informing and engaging stakeholders to completing required reports to providing technical assistance in responding to the team’s required actions. Schools are encouraged to use their state offices as a resource and partner in their accreditation and continuous improvement efforts.

The Lead Evaluator also is available to support the school. As the review date approaches, the school works closely with the Lead Evaluator to:

- Establish the review schedule;
- Coordinate logistics for the team;
- Address any questions and/or concerns related to review preparation;
- Host a Pre-Review with the school approximately four weeks prior to the review; and
- Ensure the school is ready for the review.

### Developing the Review Schedule

The School Facilitator works with the External Review Lead Evaluator to develop the review schedule. School reviews last a minimum of two full days. A sample schedule is available at [www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources](http://www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources), click on Sample School External Review Schedule. Following is an overview of key components of a school External Review.

#### **Key Components of a Typical External Review Schedule**

##### **Evening Before Review (or early morning of the review)**

External Review Team Preparation (two- three hours)

##### **Activities During Review**

##### **School Overview and Standards Presentations**

- Principal provides general orientation to team
- School personnel provide brief presentation on the school’s adherence to each of the five standards and highlight key artifacts related to the Standard

##### **Interviews**

- Team interviews school leadership and improvement team, teachers, parents and community members, support staff and students (each interview lasts approximately 45 minutes)

**Artifact Review**

- Team reviews school artifacts (this occurs on an ongoing basis)

**Observations**

- Principal and/or designee provides an instructional tour of the school
- Team conducts classroom observations
- Team makes general observations throughout the review

**Professional Deliberations**

- Team meets to examine the data collected and reach consensus regarding the team's findings

**Meeting with the Principal**

- Prior to the delivery of the Oral Exit Report, the Lead Evaluator meets with the Principal to review the team's findings and discuss the team's required actions

**Oral Exit Report**

- Lead Evaluator provides Oral Exit Report to school stakeholders at the conclusion of the review

## Preparing the Principal's Overview

At the beginning of the External Review, the Principal welcomes the External Review Team and provides an overview of the school. The purpose of the Principal's remarks is to set the tone and context for the review. The following questions are designed to assist the Principal in thinking about the type of content to include in his/her remarks:

- What will help the team quickly gain an understanding of the school's challenges, strengths and opportunities?
- What information will best convey what the school is trying to accomplish for students?
- How is the school meeting the needs of its students – currently and over time?
- What does the school want the team to look for? What advice/support would the school like the team to provide over the course of the review?

Team members find it helpful when the Principal's comments include an overview of the school vision, basic demographic information about the school, a description of challenges, an overview of key programs and improvement initiatives and a snapshot of student performance results using multiple measures over time.

The Principal's overview typically lasts between 30 and 45 minutes. It is helpful to provide team members with a copy of the Principal's comments for use and reference during the review.

## Preparing Brief Presentations on the Standards

Typically, following the Principal's overview, school personnel provide brief presentations on each of the AdvancED Standards. The presentations provide the External Review Team with a general

overview and description of how the school is meeting each Standard. The overview lasts approximately one hour. The following questions are designed to help school personnel as they develop the presentations for the overview:

- What does the school most want the team to know about each Standard as the team begins its work?
- What information about each Standard does the school wish to highlight and/or clarify from the Self Assessment?
- What artifacts does the school wish to bring to the team's attention that helps demonstrate the school's adherence to one or more Standards?
- What processes and practices does the school wish to explain that demonstrate how the school is meeting the Standard?
- What does the school want the team to look for and/or verify with regard to each Standard as it conducts its review?

## Setting Up Interviews

**Purpose and coordination.** A critical component of the External Review is interviews of school stakeholders. The purpose of the interviews is to provide an opportunity for the External Review Team to gather information from a variety of stakeholders about the school's adherence to the AdvancED accreditation requirements. The Principal and/or School Facilitator, with support from the school leadership team, identifies, invites and schedules stakeholders to be interviewed by the External Review Team.

**Structure of the interviews and questions asked.** The interviews last between 45 minutes and one hour. They begin with a brief overview of the purpose of the interviews and the role of the External Review Team. The team members and the interviewees then introduce themselves. Following these introductory activities, the team asks approximately 9-10 broad questions which address each of the AdvancED Standards, the school's profile and the school's methods for quality assurance. The questions are tailored as appropriate for each stakeholder group. The school may request a copy of the sample interview questions from the Lead Evaluator. Some schools share the sample questions with interviewees so that they can prepare in advance for the questions that will be asked.

**Stakeholder groups to be interviewed.** The team interviews the following stakeholder groups:

- School leadership and improvement team
- Teachers
- Parents and community and board members
- Support staff
- Students

The school and Lead Evaluator may add to and/or adapt the groups interviewed as appropriate for the school setting.

**Selecting interviewees.** The following guidelines are designed to help the School Facilitator in identifying stakeholders to be interviewed.

### Guidelines for Identifying Stakeholders to Be Interviewed

Stakeholders should collectively:

- Reflect the school's broader community  
*(socio-economic levels, race and ethnicity, neighborhoods served by the school, etc.)*
- Provide a range of view points and perspectives  
*(strong and active supporters of the school, critics of the school, those who are less involved, etc.)*
- Represent all levels and departments in the school  
*(e.g., different grade levels and different subject areas)*
- Represent all major categories of positions in the school  
*(e.g., leadership, administrative, teaching, guidance and support functions)*
- Include individuals who can discuss the school's strengths and challenges

The overarching questions to ask when identifying stakeholders to be interviewed are:

- Will the stakeholders collectively provide an accurate assessment of the school for the External Review Team?
- Do the stakeholders collectively have enough knowledge of the school's practices with regard to the AdvancED Standards to yield meaningful information?
- Will the stakeholders collectively yield information that will prove valuable to the school in its continuous improvement efforts?

While it may be tempting to identify only those stakeholders who are active and strong supporters of the school, it does not maximize the insights and richness of the findings that can emerge from these interviews that ultimately benefit the school's improvement efforts.

**Inviting interviewees.** The Principal and/or School Facilitator should begin inviting stakeholders to be interviewed as soon as it has finalized the review schedule (approximately six weeks prior to the review). Following is sample language that can be adapted and used as appropriate when inviting stakeholders to participate in the interviews.

### Sample Invitation to Potential Interviewees

Dear <insert name>,

You are cordially invited to participate in <insert name of school>'s upcoming accreditation review by serving on a stakeholder interview team.

<insert name of school>'s External Review will take place <insert dates>. The review is led by a team of professionals. During the review, the External Review Team conducts interviews with a range of school stakeholders, reviews school documents and student performance data and makes professional observations to determine the degree to which the school meets Standards for accreditation. The team shares its findings in oral and written formats and makes an accreditation

recommendation for national review. The school uses the findings from the team to further its continuous improvement efforts.

On <insert day>, the External Review Team will be interviewing several stakeholder groups. We would like the team to interview you as part of the <insert interview group> at <insert time> in <insert location>. The interview will last approximately <insert allotted time for interview> minutes. We believe that you have experience, knowledge and insights that would enhance the team's understanding of our school.

Please reply to this invitation by <insert date>. I hope you can participate in this exciting and valuable process.

Sincerely,  
<Principal>

**Preparing interviewees.** After stakeholders accept the invitation to serve on an interview team, the school sends a brief note to confirm the interview date, time and location. The note should emphasize the importance of being on time. The note should repeat some of the information from the invitation letter that highlights the purpose and activities of the team. Depending on the stakeholder being interviewed, the school may wish to include supporting materials such as a copy of the school's Self Assessment and a list of the sample questions that may be asked in the interview (as noted earlier, these can be obtained from the Lead Evaluator).

## Understanding and Planning for the Instructional Tour

The Principal or his/her designee should lead the instructional tour of the school, which typically lasts 30 to 45 minutes. The tour should occur when classes are in session and should be scheduled to avoid the start of school, passing periods, and lunch.

The purpose of the tour is to allow the External Review Team to see instruction in action and to view the implementation of key improvement initiatives in the school; it is not a facilities tour. For example, if the school is focused on literacy, the Principal may wish to show the team a literacy lab where specialists are working one-on-one with students, classrooms where literacy coaches are aiding teachers in instruction, the media center where literacy is reinforced, a music class where literacy concepts are integrated into the curriculum, the teacher workroom where samples of student work are on display and an intervention wall tracks student's literacy progress, etc.

During the instructional tour, the External Review Team looks and listens for:

- The nature of the overall learning environment – how welcoming is it, does it support student learning, are teachers and students actively engaged in the learning process
- The use of a variety of instructional and assessment methods
- The implementation and monitoring of improvement priorities in the classroom and throughout the school
- The role all staff play in the teaching and learning process

## Understanding the Role and Purpose of Classroom Observations

During the External Review, team members will observe a variety of classrooms using the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT). The purpose of this tool is to help you identify and document observable evidence of classroom environments that are conducive to student learning. Results of your observations will be used to corroborate information obtained from interviews, artifacts and student performance data. Lasting a minimum of twenty minutes, the observations provide an opportunity to see how improvement initiatives are translated into the classroom and to view the impact on students. The observations allow the team to check for alignment from the administrative to the classroom level.

The Principal and/or School Facilitator should notify teachers that the team may observe their classrooms during the review. The Principal and/or School Facilitator should explain the purpose of the observations, emphasizing that the team is observing processes and activities in the school; they are not evaluating teachers. Team members are instructed to be as unobtrusive as possible and to not disrupt the learning process. Teachers should conduct class as usual.

## Preparing for the Presentation of the Team's Findings

**Meeting with the Principal.** When the team has finished its deliberations and solidified its findings, the Lead Evaluator meets with the Principal and any staff members he/she designates to participate in the meeting to hear the team's findings. The School Facilitator schedules the meeting time and location and ensures all participants are informed of the meeting. The meeting provides an opportunity for the Lead Evaluator to discuss the team's findings with the Principal, answer questions and address any concerns. The Lead Evaluator reviews the Oral Exit Report with the Principal prior to it being shared with the broader staff and school community.

**Planning for the Oral Exit Report.** At the conclusion of the External Review, the Lead Evaluator presents the team's findings in the Oral Exit Report, which is typically delivered to school staff and community members. Questions are not taken during the Oral Exit Report (the meeting with the Principal and Lead Evaluator prior to the presentation of the Oral Exit Report is the venue for questions). The Principal and/or School Facilitator schedules the time for the Oral Exit Report and ensures all desired participants are informed of the meeting. Schools find that the more stakeholders they involve in hearing the Oral Exit Report, the greater buy-in they achieve in acting on the team's findings. The school should consider inviting all faculty and staff members, parent and community groups, district leadership (if applicable) and board members to the Oral Exit Report.

**Logistics.** The Principal and/or School Facilitator coordinate the logistics pertaining to the meeting, including:

- Inviting participants
- Preparing a room for the meeting to occur with appropriate seating and audio/visual
- Providing a computer, LCD projector and screen for the Oral Exit Report presentation which will be delivered via PowerPoint slides

- Providing a podium and/or table from which the Lead Evaluator can deliver the findings
- Providing a microphone, if needed

**Agenda.** The Principal typically begins the meeting with welcoming comments that last approximately five minutes. The Principal explains the work the school has undertaken as part of the accreditation process and provides an overview of the External Review Team’s role and activities. The Principal then introduces the Lead Evaluator who introduces the rest of the team and begins the Oral Exit Report. The Lead Evaluator’s report lasts 20-25 minutes. Following the report, the Principal thanks the team and concludes the meeting.

## Coordinating Team Logistics

The school is responsible for coordinating the logistics associated with the External Review. The following checklist is intended to assist with this task:

- Coordinate transportation, if necessary, to and from the school for the team members for each day of the review.
- Provide team members with school or district reimbursement forms to pay for any meals paid out-of-pocket and mileage. Also provide a W-9 form if this is required. Prompt reimbursement, within 14 business days, is appreciated. Collect the completed forms at the end of the review.
- Secure hotel room reservations for team members, if necessary.
- Make all meal arrangements for the team for each day of their stay (and coordinate any necessary transportation to meals, such as dinner in the evenings).
- Reserve meeting space at the hotel or school for each night of the review. The meeting room should be organized as a hollow square, with enough chairs to accommodate all members of the team. A screen, LCD projector, power cords (2-3), flip chart paper (at least one full pad), markers (at least one for every member of the team), masking tape and sticky notes (standard square size, at least one pad for each member of the team). Water and light refreshments are appreciated.
- Reserve a team meeting room at the school where the team can work, discuss their findings and review artifacts. The room should include power cords for multiple computers.
- Secure rooms for the interviews.
- Ensure the logistics pertaining to the presentation of the Oral Exit Report (outlined earlier) are addressed.
- Make name badges for the team members and ensure that school personnel wear their name badges.
- Prepare information packets for the team’s arrival (often including a hard copy of the school’s Self Assessment, the final schedule and other school-specific materials). Please note that team members are not allowed to accept gifts from the school (school pens, pads of papers and other items to assist the team with their work are acceptable to provide).

## Hosting the Pre-Review with the Lead Evaluator

Approximately four weeks prior to the External Review, the Lead Evaluator conducts a Pre-Review with the school to ensure that the school is ready to host a successful External Review. This review can occur through conference call or an on-site review.

During the review, the Lead Evaluator /Associate Lead Evaluator meets with and/or contacts the Principal and School Facilitator to:

1. Ensure the school has completed all required reports.
2. Review artifacts assembled for the team.
3. Discuss the interview schedule and confirm interviewees. Ensure interviewees include a broad and representative cross section of the school community.
4. Confirm details for the Oral Exit Report.
5. Ensure the schedule and necessary logistics to accommodate the team have been finalized.
6. Answer any questions the school has with regard to the External Review.

## Making Final Preparations

Following is a checklist to help the school address final preparations for the External Review Team.

- At least a week prior to the External Review, confirm all details related to the schedule.
- Ensure that all stakeholders involved in the review have a copy of the External Review Team schedule.
- E-mail and/or send a reminder to all interviewees.
- Make sure that artifacts are accessible and ready for review.
- Confirm lodging reservations for the team, if applicable.
- Confirm transportation arrangements for each day of the review, if applicable.
- Confirm meals and dinner reservations for the team.

## Chapter 4: Hosting the External Review

By following the guidelines outlined in Chapter 2, the school should find that it is well prepared for the External Review. Chapter 2 provides a detailed overview of each component of the review and how to prepare for it. This chapter provides brief tips to help the school host a successful External Review.

The review schedule serves as the primary guide for the review. A sample External Review schedule is available at [www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources](http://www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources). The Principal and/or School Facilitator manage the schedule and ensure all activities of the review occur as planned. The Principal and/or School Facilitator should maintain the schedule and extra copies at all times during the review. He/she should be available for questions and to help the team access needed information throughout the review. It is a good idea for the Principal and School Facilitator to provide the Lead Evaluator and members with his/her contact information (including cell phone number) and the names and contact information of other school staff should questions or emergencies arise.

### Attending to the Details

Once the External Review Team has arrived, the School Facilitator ensures all details unfold as planned.

#### Arrival and Orientation

- Confirm lodging and dinner reservations for the team, if applicable.
- Provide team members with hard copies of any information needed for the review. Often, the school supplies name badges, a hard copy of its Self Assessment, a final schedule and additional school-specific materials. Please note that team members cannot accept gifts from the school (school name/logo items of nominal value such as pens and notepads designed for use during the review are acceptable).
- Check to see that the meeting room for the team's evening orientation is properly set-up (hollow square with enough seats to accommodate the team, flip chart paper, sticky notes, markers, masking tape, LCD projector, power cords, screen, any school artifacts that the school wants in the team's work room, water and refreshments).

#### Day One

- Ensure all team members have transportation to the school.
- Make sure the team's meeting room at the school is ready and meets the team's needs.
- Ensure easy access to artifacts the team will need.
- Manage the schedule and ensure that all activities stay on schedule.
- Provide lunch for the team.
- Make available coffee, water and light refreshments throughout the day for the team.
- Provide transportation to the hotel, if needed.
- Ensure dinner reservations are confirmed and transportation is provided, if needed.

- Ensure that the team's meeting room at the hotel (if applicable) is ready for the team.

### Day Two

- Ensure all team members have transportation to the school.
- Make sure the team's meeting room at the school is ready and meets the team's needs.
- Ensure easy access to artifacts the team will need.
- Manage the schedule and ensure that all activities stay on schedule.
- Provide lunch for the team.
- Make available coffee, water and light refreshments throughout the day for the team.
- Prepare for the final meeting between the Lead Evaluator, Principal and any designated staff.
- Set up the room for the presentation of the Oral Exit Report (see details in Chapter 2).
- Ensure team members' transportation needs are addressed.

### Keys to Success

Schools that have hosted External Reviews offer the following advice to their colleagues:

- **Be open and honest with the team.** The more authentic and accurate your responses are to the team, the better able the team is to assess the strengths and needs of the school.
- **Stay on schedule.** Use the schedule to guide the review.
- **Communicate with all stakeholders about the review;** the more people who know about the review and the activities of the team, the better. Be as open and transparent about the process as possible.
- **Use and refer to the Self Assessment.** The Self Assessment is perhaps the most valuable component of the review process. The Self Assessment represents the work and thinking of a broad range of stakeholders. Reference it regularly with the team so that it is used to maximize the team's time and their ability to provide meaningful feedback to the school.
- **Share and encourage the team to review specific artifacts** that you feel are critical to the team's understanding of your school.
- **Highlight the areas where you need the team's assistance.** The earlier in the process that the team discovers the challenges the school is facing, the more time the team has to consider and craft powerful required actions to support the school in addressing those challenges.
- **Remember, you get out of a process what you put into it.** The school has the ability through its own commitment to the process to make the most out of the External Review. The more committed the school is to gaining valuable support and feedback from peers, the more likely the school is to receive a meaningful External Review.

## Chapter 5: Continuing the Journey

While the majority of this handbook is devoted to preparing for the External Review, the majority of the school's time is spent following the review, acting on the team's findings and continuing the journey of the accreditation process. This chapter reviews the key activities that occur on an ongoing basis as schools seek to maintain their accreditation and continuously improve.

### Receiving the Written Report of the External Review Team

At the conclusion of the External Review, the Lead Evaluator works with the team to finalize the written report of the team's findings. The report is submitted for review and acceptance to the state office. The school receives the report within 20 working days of the review.

Upon receipt of the written report, the school communicates the External Review Team's findings to internal and external stakeholders. Sharing the results of the review with a wide range of stakeholders helps educate the school community about the school's accreditation and garners buy-in with regard to next steps that the school will take to address the findings in the report.

### Receiving Notice of Accreditation Status and Celebrating with the Community

The External Review Team's report is submitted to AdvancED for state and national review and action. The national AdvancED Accreditation Commission, the body that grants accreditation, reviews and acts on all accreditation statuses. After the Commission has taken action on the school's accreditation status, a letter is sent to the school confirming its accreditation status.

Upon receiving the accreditation letter, the school communicates its final accreditation status to internal and external stakeholders. The school receives and displays a certificate of accreditation. Press releases, flags, Q&A guides and more are available to help schools share and celebrate their accreditation with their community. Practices that many schools find useful include: sharing information about their accreditation with parents at every "Back to School Night" through brochures and/or handouts; including the accreditation seal on their website, school stationery and student transcripts; posting information about accreditation in a regular column of their school newsletters; and including a section on accreditation in their annual reports to the community.

### Acting on the External Review Team's Findings

The External Review Team report serves as a resource to the school as it furthers its continuous improvement efforts. The school celebrates and strengthens the successes and accomplishments noted in the team's commendations. The school builds on these accomplishments, enhancing their impact across the school.

The team's required actions identify areas of needed action designed to enhance school effectiveness and improve student learning. The school is held accountable for making progress on each of the team's required actions. Following the review, the school submits a report (discussed in the next section) which details the progress made on the Required Actions.

To begin acting on the team’s findings, the school reviews the full team report with school stakeholders. In addition to spending time discussing the team’s Powerful Practices and Required Actions, the school studies the detailed description of strengths and opportunities for improvement provided in each of the Standard reports. These reports provide greater clarity, guidance, and direction on the Commendations and Required Actions. Should questions arise during this process, the school seeks clarity from the External Review Lead Evaluator and/or AdvancED State Office.

After thorough review of the External Review Team’s findings, the school establishes a plan of action, engaging a representative group of stakeholders in the process. The school determines what this plan looks like and how it puts the plan into action to ensure ongoing progress. The plan typically outlines next steps related to the team’s findings, including actions to strengthen Powerful Practices and clear strategies for addressing Required Actions. In addition, the plan includes implementation strategies and methods for monitoring, documenting and analyzing results.

The school implements its strategies for responding to the team’s finding, tracks the progress it is making and is prepared to answer the questions, “What steps have been taken? What progress has been made? How do you know you’ve made an impact?”

## Completing the Accreditation Progress Report

Following the External Review, an AdvancED Accreditation Progress Report (APR) is opened in ASSIST. The APR is a report detailing the school’s progress in addressing the required actions from the External Review Team report. The school has one or two years, depending on their accreditation status, to summarize its actions to date related to each of the team’s required actions. In addition to the summary, the school is asked to classify the current status of each Required Action in one of four categories:

1. **Completed** – All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The school has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of the required action.
2. **In Progress** – The school is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the Required Action.
3. **Did Not Address** – The school has not taken any action for one or more of the following reasons: a) it lacks the resources necessary to address the Required Action; or b) it fully intends to address the Required Action but has yet to initiate action.
4. **Rejected With Rationale Provided** - The school has not taken any action because it professionally disagrees with the Required Action and does not believe that fulfillment of the Required Action will help the school improve (the summary statement must provide substantive evidence to support this claim).

The school completes the report and submits it to AdvancED for review and action at the state and national level. The school receives feedback from AdvancED on the report and notice of any change in accreditation status that may result from the report.

## Maintaining Momentum

Accredited schools understand and honor the concept of continuous improvement. They are dynamic, in motion and continuously evolving with an unrelenting focus on becoming better on behalf of the students they serve. Quality schools operate as learning communities by possessing healthy cultures where individuals collectively analyze practices and results, engage in professional learning and dialogue, take meaningful action and assume responsibility for results.

When the review concludes and progress reports are filed, the commitment and action continues. Schools remain focused on improving organizational effectiveness and student learning.

**Strengthening Accreditation.** On an ongoing basis, accredited schools adhere to the AdvancED Standards, and engage in review of student performance and stakeholder feedback. As schools continuously improve, they monitor, build capacity and grow more effective in each of these activities.

AdvancED is available to support schools as they further their improvement efforts. Schools are encouraged to take advantage of AdvancED's web-based resources, publications, workshops, conferences and on-site technical assistance as they continue on their journey of improvement.

**Sustaining Interest and Commitment.** Competent and committed educators are the key to sustained improvement. Schools recognize the importance of enhancing the capacity of staff through continued professional learning that is aligned with organizational purpose, improvement goals and Required Actions. Staff confidence comes from having the knowledge, understanding and skills to thrive while engaging in professional practice. School leaders who create conditions and provide resources to optimize performance and professional growth find the most success in sustaining improvement.

Successful schools shape a culture of learning, collaboration and high expectations for staff and students and weave it into the fabric of the school. All staff are encouraged to grow through action, experimentation and reflection. Successes are identified, celebrated and embedded into practice.

Educators are motivated by their collective mission to impact students and make a difference in their lives. Schools that find the most success with the accreditation process ensure that the connection between accreditation initiatives and student learning is established and understood by all stakeholders.

## Conclusion

Congratulations on your commitment to accreditation. As you engage in the accreditation process, you will find that all elements of your school become stronger. Your school will become more sophisticated as a system, as its understanding of systems improvement increases. The entire school community and, most importantly, students benefit, as the school works to improve its systems and processes to increase school-wide effectiveness and enhance student learning.

AdvancED looks forward to supporting you throughout the school accreditation process. We hope this handbook has been helpful, and we welcome any feedback you have on improving its usefulness. Please feel free to share your comments with us at [accreditation-info@advanc-ed.org](mailto:accreditation-info@advanc-ed.org).

## Appendix

**Resources:** [www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources](http://www.advanc-ed.org/schoolresources)