

**Baldwin  
County Public  
Schools**

# ***District Accreditation Issue***

***It's Simply Elementary***

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## **From the Desk of Dr. French**

We are looking forward to the culmination of our quest for district accreditation with the visit of the AdvancEd Quality Assurance Review Team, April 26-29. The process of district accreditation is designed to build a culture dedicated to excellence. Baldwin County's commitment to continuous improvement made our district the perfect candidate for district accreditation. Accreditation is a voluntary method of quality assurance developed more than 100 years ago by American universities and secondary schools. For many years, accreditation was earned through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS); SACS united with several other agencies and became AdvancED. In the past, each school conducted an individual, isolated review, but now AdvancED provides a national protocol for school districts committed to systemic, systematic, and sustainable continuous improvement. District accreditation engages the school district in achieving high quality standards, implementing a continuous improvement process, and engaging in quality assurance through internal and external reviews. We are excited about achieving district accreditation because it will ensure a consistency of high quality practices and continuous improvement across our district.

There are approximately 4,500 school districts in thirty states and sixty-five countries that have achieved the internationally distinctive mark of quality through district accreditation. Accreditation will benefit all of the students in Baldwin County Public Schools, because the entire district will be aligned and focused on a shared mission and vision for student learning. The accreditation seal will provide an educational stamp of excellence that is recognized worldwide, easing the transferability of credits among other accredited schools and enabling access to special programs, grants, and scholarships. To earn accreditation a district must meet the following standards:

- Has a clear vision and purpose
- Has effective and responsive leadership
- Has a rigorous curriculum taught through sound, research-based methods
- Collects, reports, and uses performance results
- Provides adequate resources and support for its educational programs
- Values and communicates with stakeholders
- Has a commitment to continuously improve

Mrs. Janice Prescott, Dr. Mike Merold, and I were appointed by Dr. Hollinger to chair the accreditation process. We have worked with members of the Board of Education, the Superintendent, central office personnel, principals, assistant principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders to examine every aspect of our school system. We gathered input from internal and external stakeholders to determine how closely Baldwin County Public Schools aligns with the quality standards. Stakeholder perception surveys have provided important data for the examination of trends, strengths, and challenges of our district. The results of this extensive self-study have been combined in the Standards Assessment Report that will be presented to the members of the Quality Assurance Review Team before their visit in April. Our mission for Baldwin County Public Schools is to work in partnership with the community to provide a quality education that fosters learning. Our vision is to create a world class learning environment. District accreditation is a process that will help us achieve our vision and mission. To be successful and effective, the responsibility of accreditation must be shared by all stakeholders.

### **INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

<b>The Process</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CIP</b>	<b>3</b>

### **Special Points of Interest:**

- ARMT/SAT-10 testing window: March 30, 2009 – April 10, 2009
- AdvancED Quality Assurance Review Team visit April 26-29, 2009

# The District Accreditation Process

On April 26-29, the AdvancED Quality Assurance Review Team will visit Baldwin County Public Schools. The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to evaluate the district's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards. Preparation for next month's visit has been a lengthy, but productive process. This process for the Baldwin County Public School System began in November, 2008 with a readiness visit from the state AdvancED office and will culminate with the submission of the Standards Assessment Report (SAR) and the Review Team visit in April.

The SAR engages the district in a comprehensive review of each of the seven AdvancED standards. It guides the district's internal review and is the basis for the Quality Assurance Review Team's external review. Conducting the internal review involved forming a District Accreditation Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is comprised of a broad range of stakeholders: administrators, teachers, parents, students, community leaders, school board members, and central office personnel. Each school and educational foundation has a representative on the committee. The committee members worked in teams to review the assigned standard, self-assess against the indicator's rubric, respond to the focus questions, and make an overall assessment regarding the district's level of adherence to the standard. Each team focused on one of the seven AdvancED standards. They then shared their work with the other standard teams, their school, district leadership, and the Board of Education for review, validation, and final refinement.

Key dates/events important in the process:

November, 2008	Readiness Visit
January, 2008	Candidacy
April 21, 2008	Presentation to the Board
May 14, 2008	Initial Steering Committee Meeting
May 19, 2008	Baldwin County District Accreditation website available to access accreditation resources
May 22, 2008	Committee Chairs send Self-Assessment of Standards Surveys
June 1, 2008	Compilation of surveys sent to Standard Committee Chairs
June 9, 2008	Overview meeting with educational foundation and parent representatives
June-August, 2008	Standard Committee meetings to gain consensus of district strengths and weaknesses
Sept. 8-26, 2008	Stakeholders complete online Perception Surveys
October 1, 2008	Meeting to review Perception Surveys
October 3, 2008	Steering Committee meeting to share and receive Focus Questions
October, 2008	Standard Committee meetings for Focus Questions consensus
December 5, 2008	Steering Committee meeting for Focus Questions consensus
January 30, 2009	First Draft of Standards Assessment Report (SAR)
February 6, 2009	Committee Chairs sent a copy of the first draft of the SAR
February 13, 2009	Standards Assessment Report (SAR) final revisions
April 26-29, 2009	Quality Assurance Review Visit

# Continuous Improvement & District Accreditation

The Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) is referred to frequently in the District Standards Assessment Report. In the executive summary, it states, "Each school works with a team of stakeholders to develop a plan for continuous improvement that reflects the needs of the students at that particular school. These continuous improvement plans are data driven and implementation is consistently monitored throughout the year." On April 28, a team from AdvancED will be visiting select schools as part of the district accreditation process. As part of their visit, they will be looking at implementation of the school's CIP.

## As you prepare for the AdvancED visit, ensure that:

- Everyone on your school campus has access to and is familiar with your school's CIP.
- Part I of the CIP adequately identifies your school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Continuous Improvement Goals in Part II are based on needs identified through analysis of student data.
- Strategies and action steps developed to achieve continuous improvement goals are being carried out.
- Members of the visiting team may ask about implementation of the strategies in the plan. All staff members should be prepared to discuss how strategies are being implemented.
- Strategies to address school safety, classroom management/discipline, and building supportive learning environments in Part IV of the CIP are being implemented.
- Part VI is complete and describes how parents are involved in school activities and have input into the CIP.
- Professional learning needs identified in Part VII are being addressed.
- Monitoring of the CIP is documented in Part IX.

Remember, you can make changes to your school's CIP at any time. If there are items in your plan that you have decided to change or not implement, be sure to indicate this in your plan. You do not have to retype the parts that are changed. You can mark through items and hand-write the changes. In fact, this is preferred because it indicates your CIP is a working document.

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**District Vision:** Our vision is to create a world class learning environment.

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