



**Report of the
Special Review Team for
Wake County Public Schools**

**Review Dates:
February 16-18, 2011**

About AdvancED[®] and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

Background

Dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 27,000 institutions in 71 countries. AdvancED provides accreditation under the seals of 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).

The Accreditation Process

To earn and maintain accreditation, an institution must:

- 1. Meet the AdvancED Standards and accreditation policies.**
Institutions demonstrate adherence to the AdvancED Standards and accreditation policies, which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for educational institutions to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2. Engage in continuous improvement.**
Institutions implement a process of continuous improvement focused on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 3. Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.**
Institutions engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, institutions host an external Quality Assurance Review team at least once every five years. The team evaluates the institution's adherence to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies, assesses the efficacy of the institution's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the institution improve. The institution acts on the team's required actions and submits an Accreditation Progress Report at prescribed intervals following the Quality Assurance Review. Monitoring visits may be conducted during this time to ensure that the institution is making progress toward the required actions.

Special Review

At any point, a Special Review may be conducted in response to complaints or information about the institution and/or its system (district, board, or corporation) to determine adherence to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies. The institution and/or its system must respond to the required actions of the Special Review Team. Monitoring Teams may be sent to the institution and/or its system at regular intervals to ensure that progress is being made toward the Special Review Team's required actions. Both Special Review Teams and Monitoring Teams are empowered to make accreditation recommendations based upon evidence obtained during said visit.

A Process of Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED accreditation process engages institutions in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help institutions be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

Special Review Visit Report

Introduction

In December 2009, AdvancED began receiving verbal, written and electronic communications expressing concerns that the actions and behaviors of members of the Wake County Board of Education were in violation of school system policies and AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies, including but not limited to Standard 2: *Governance and Leadership*. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed a formal written complaint alleging that the Board of Education had taken action that would dramatically and negatively impact the quality of education in the accredited high schools. Since the original complaint by the NAACP numerous communications have been received by AdvancED officials. The communications express a variety of viewpoints both in support of recent changes as well as concern for such decisions and actions.

As required by AdvancED policies and procedures, AdvancED sent a letter to the Superintendent detailing the alleged Standards violations and requesting a response to the referenced complaints. Based on the information contained in the complaints and the Superintendent's response received on April 19, 2010, a Special Review Team was appointed by AdvancED to make an onsite visit to the institution on February 16-18, 2011. The Team's purpose in visiting the school system was to gather information and evidence needed to determine if the alleged actions are in violation of the AdvancED Standards for Accreditation including, but not limited to, Standard 2: *Governance and Leadership*.

Specifically, the high schools in Wake County Public School System appear to be in violation of the following standard:

AdvancED Standard 2: Governance and Leadership

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

GOVERNANCE

In fulfillment of this standard, the school operates under the jurisdiction of a governing board that:

- 2.1. Establishes policies and procedures that provide for the effective operation of the school
- 2.2. Recognizes and preserves the executive, administrative, and leadership prerogatives of the administrative head of the school
- 2.3. Ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws, standards, and regulations

LEADERSHIP

In fulfillment of this standard, the school has leadership that:

- 2.4. Employs a system that provides for analysis and review of student performance and school effectiveness
- 2.5. Fosters a learning community
- 2.6. Provides teachers and students opportunities to lead
- 2.7. Provides stakeholders meaningful roles in the decision-making process that promote a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership

- 2.8. Controls curricular and extracurricular activities that are sponsored by the school
- 2.9. Responds to community expectations and stakeholder satisfaction
- 2.10. Implements an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel

It is important to note that the Standard clearly indicates the role of the governing board as a requirement. The governing board of the high schools in Wake County is the Board of Education. In addition, the Special Review Team has the responsibility to identify, if evident, violations of other AdvancED Standards and policies that may be discovered through this review process.

The core questions associated with the AdvancED Accreditation Standards that were the focus of the visit are:

- Is the governing board for the Wake County Public Schools effective in carrying out its roles and responsibilities?
- Is the governing board for the Wake County Public Schools following established policy related to the work of the board in fulfillment of its responsibilities?
- Does the governing board have appropriate controls and monitoring strategies to evaluate the impact of its adopted policies on the quality of the educational program?
- Does the governing board engage stakeholders in matters related to policy development and adoption? In particular, does the governing board provide authentic opportunities for the community to provide feedback to the board on potentially new or revised policies?
- Does the governing board adopt and implement policy that is aligned and supportive of the school system's vision and direction including its expectations for student learning?
- Do the governing board and system leadership meet the criteria and expectations for Accreditation Standard Two?

In addition, Special Review Team members asked questions during the interview process that sought to gain evidence and clarity about how the board operates, the impact of board decisions on individual schools, and how the board implements its policies.

The Special Review Visit should have occurred prior to October 15, 2010 however the Board of Education and system leadership resisted scheduling the visit. Specifically, the Board chair, interim superintendent, and legal counsel to the system expressed their belief in a letter dated January 13, 2011 that the actions and decisions of the Board of Education have no influence or impact on the quality of education being offered in the high schools. Additionally, system leadership repeatedly expressed that the accreditation agency does not have the right to review the impact of Board policy and action. AdvancED repeatedly and consistently provided the school system with information on how and why the actions and decisions of the Board of Education relate to the accreditation of the high schools. Therefore, the focus of the review is to determine what impact, if any, the actions and decisions of the Board of Education have on the high schools specifically in relation to Accreditation Standards.

Activities of the Special Review Team

In preparation for the review, the Special Review Team reviewed documentation provided by the school system on September 30, 2010 including board policies, minutes of meetings, student performance data, various communications related to issues associated with the review, and survey data.

In preparation for the onsite visit, the Special Review Team members also reviewed complaints received, school system policies, and various electronic documentation including minutes of board meetings conducted since December 1, 2009.

Once on-site, the team engaged in the following activities:

- Meetings with the Superintendent of Schools, all members of the Board of Education, and members of the system's leadership team including 12 high school principals
- Interviews with 78 stakeholders representing parents, students, teachers, and community representatives who were not employees of the school system
- Artifact review including board policies, minutes of meetings, annual budgets for 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, student performance data, various communications related to issues associated with the review, and survey data
- Professional deliberations and report preparation

Findings

Based upon the information collected and reviewed, the Special Review Team found sufficient evidence to support a finding that the actions and decisions of the Board of Education are in violation of AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies. The following analysis is the basis for which the team determined that the high schools in Wake County do not currently meet AdvancED Accreditation Standard on Governance and Leadership.

Over the past 14 months, the Wake County Public Schools have experienced significant governance issues that have caused tremendous uncertainty throughout the community. This period of instability began during the Board of Education meeting on December 1, 2009. At the beginning of this meeting four new Board members (John Tedesco, Chris Malone, Debra Goldman, and Deborah Prickett) were installed as a result of the October 2009 election. **Once installed the four new Board members joined forces with current Board member, Ron Margiotta, to launch a premeditated act that resulted in destabilizing the school system and community. Interviews with Board members revealed that these five members planned to set in motion actions that were designed to disrupt and redirect the work of the system. Relying on their own information and experiences, without any concern for Board policies, procedure or staff input and guidance, these five Board members took action to do the following as noted in the official Board minutes:**

Mr. Margiotta made a motion to add the following items to the Agenda as *immediate action* items, to be considered immediately after adoption of the agenda in the priority listed, with the public comment period to follow immediately thereafter:

1. Election of new Chair of the Wake County School Board,
2. Resolution to appoint interim special legal counsel,
3. Change in Student Assignment Policy,
4. Resolution to ensure parental choice regarding year-round schools,
5. Resolution to end all expenditures on the H-6 site and to seek an alternative site,
6. Resolution to save costs and expenses,
7. Resolution to end early release Wednesdays,
8. Scheduling of regular meeting for 12-15-09

As Chris Malone noted in his interview these were calculated acts to "deliver a shot across the bow." The resulting actions dramatically reshaped the environment and direction of the school system.

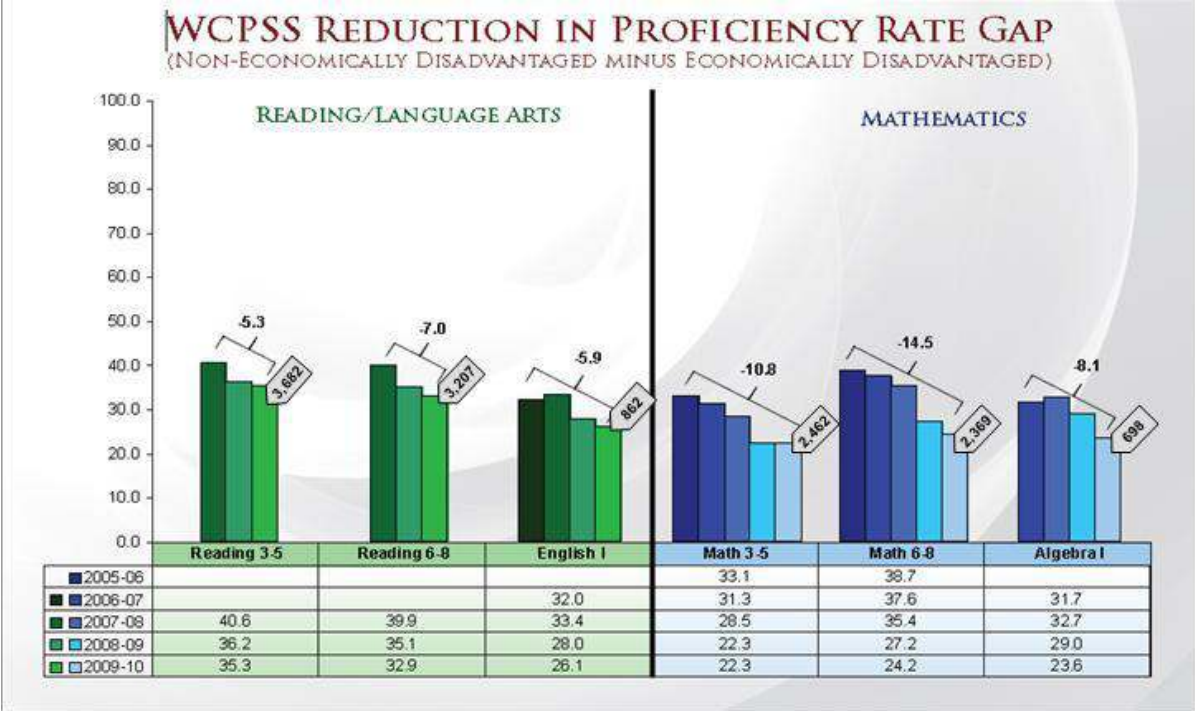
The Special Review Team sought to gather evidence to determine if these actions were in the best interest of high schools throughout the school system. In doing so the team reviewed student achievement data, Board policies, minutes and videos of Board meetings, and written communications. Additionally, the team interviewed every Board member, the Superintendent, key central office administrators, community groups, high school principals, parents, teachers, and students. Evidence showed that the actions of the Board to revise the Student Assignment Policy, eliminate early release days, change plans for the construction of a new high school, manipulate the Node System for student assignment, appoint interim special legal counsel, adopt policy related to year round schools, and schedule an additional board meeting resulted in community outrage. The majority of people interviewed during the review process indicated

that the Board didn't seek public comment prior to taking these actions and that the Board violated their policies in making these decisions.

Student Achievement

During the review process staff presented data that showed the school system was experiencing positive gains related to student achievement. In interviews, some board members expressed a different view and claimed to have their "own data" that refuted the data shared by staff and other Board members. This lack of alignment between staff and board has led to ineffective policy decisions. A review of student achievement data by the Special Review Team indicated that the system is experiencing noted improvements. School system staff provided student achievement data that indicated the system is closing the achievement gap between Caucasian and minority students; decreasing the dropout rate for minorities at a faster pace than Caucasians; improving the graduation rate for minorities as compared to similar urban systems in the United States; and increasing the performance of students in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. High School principals indicated that student performance has been steadily improving over the past decade.

As exhibited in the school system's charts and graph below, the system provided numerous examples of evidence that demonstrate the school system's gains in student performance. For example the following chart illustrates the system's success in closing the achievement gaps:



Provided by WCPSS Staff, February, 2011

Since the 2007-08 school year, high schools in Wake County have demonstrated significant performance improvement on the state required testing.

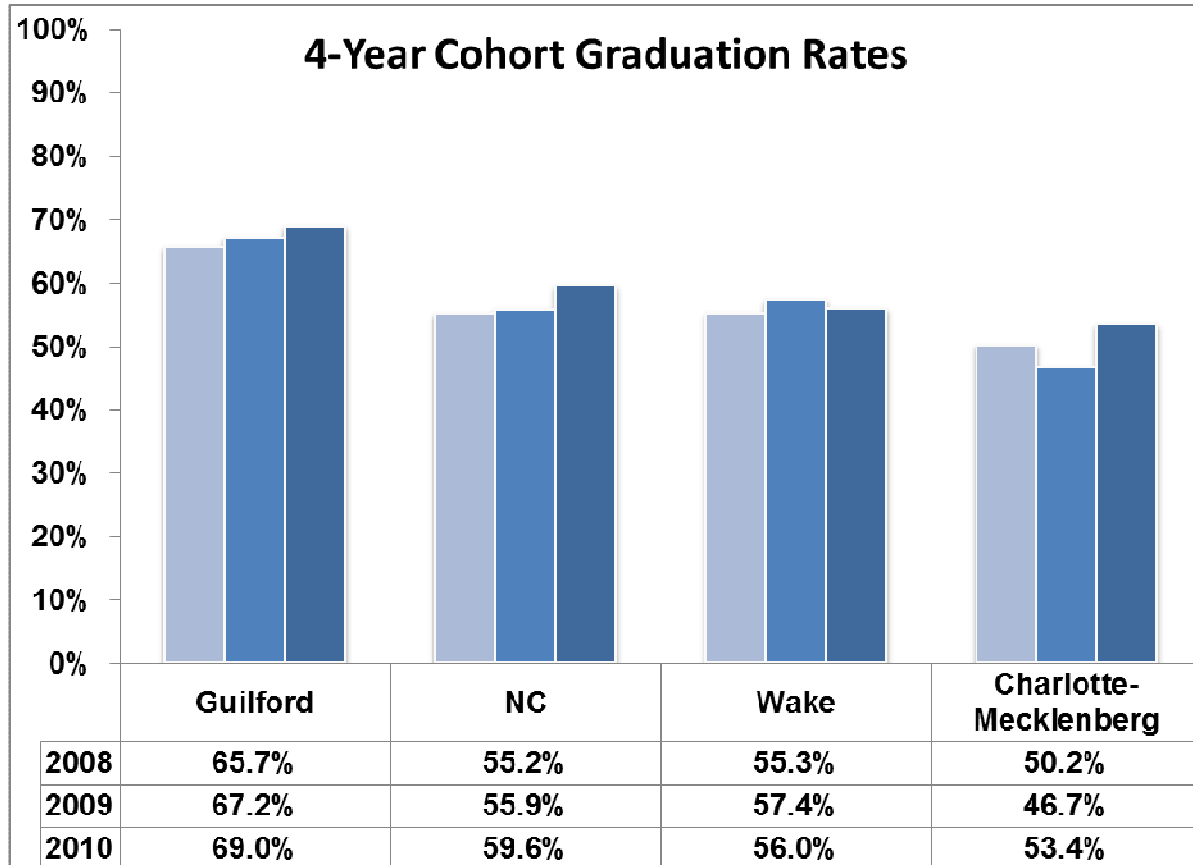
| High Schools | Grades | Area | Grad Rate | FR 09-10 | FR Prof 9-10 | 09-10 | 08-09 | 07-08 |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------------|-----------|----------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Apex High | 9-12 | Southwestern | 91.2% | 9.1% | 80.0 | 93.9 | 90.6 | 88.7 |
| Athens Drive High | 9-12 | Central | 78.1% | 30.0% | 69.7 | 84.4 | 80.9 | 80.3 |
| Cary High | 9-12 | Western | 80.9% | 25.6% | 82.2 | 89.5 | 85.3 | 83.3 |
| EW Arts, Ed, Global Studies | 9-12 | Eastern | 80.2% | 48.7% | 67.7 | 70.9 | 63.5 | 55.1 |
| EW Engineering Systems | 9-12 | Eastern | 92.8% | 43.8% | 66.0 | 73.4 | 59.0 | 54.4 |
| EW Health Science | 9-12 | Eastern | 86.3% | 41.3% | 61.6 | 70.2 | 55.0 | 54.1 |
| EW Integrated Technology | 9-12 | Eastern | 76.8% | 49.9% | 55.4 | 63.6 | 50.0 | 43.1 |
| Fuquay-Varina High | 9-12 | Southern | 81.0% | 25.6% | 72.3 | 84.9 | 80.8 | 75.4 |
| Garner Mgnt Magnet High | 9-12 | Southern | 72.6% | 38.6% | 69.6 | 77.8 | 68.7 | 64.2 |
| Green Hope High | 9-12 | Western | 92.6% | 6.0% | 75.9 | 95.5 | 94.6 | 92.5 |
| Holly Springs High | 9-12 | Southern | 82.1% | 19.3% | 77.9 | 90.0 | 84.7 | 79.0 |
| Knightdale High | 9-12 | Eastern | 74.8% | 40.0% | 64.3 | 72.3 | 66.7 | 59.8 |
| Leesville Road High | 9-12 | Northern | 86.6% | 18.4% | 70.4 | 88.5 | 86.1 | 83.7 |
| Middle Creek High | 9-12 | Southwestern | 83.1% | 26.5% | 67.3 | 83.8 | 82.2 | 78.2 |
| Millbrook Magnet High | 9-12 | Northern | 77.0% | 34.3% | 69.3 | 80.5 | 73.1 | 70.3 |
| Needham Broughton Magnet High | 9-12 | Central | 83.9% | 27.2% | 63.5 | 84.6 | 82.6 | 78.6 |
| Panther Creek High | 9-12 | Western | 92.8% | 11.6% | 80.8 | 93.1 | 89.0 | 87.6 |
| Sanderson High | 9-12 | Northern | 75.0% | 30.7% | 72.3 | 86.0 | 83.4 | 82.2 |
| Southeast Raleigh Magnet High | 9-12 | Southwestern | 82.6% | 38.6% | 59.2 | 69.2 | 66.2 | 64.7 |
| Wake Magnet Early College | 9-12 | Southwestern | N/A | 28.8% | 94.1 | 96.1 | 86.4 | 69.5 |
| Wake Forest-Rolesville High | 9-12 | Northeastern | 89.4% | 21.0% | 72.5 | 85.8 | 79.5 | 79.1 |
| Wakefield High | 9-12 | Northeastern | 83.4% | 22.1% | 68.0 | 84.4 | 80.6 | 77.5 |
| William G Enloe Magnet High | 9-12 | Central | 84.4% | 28.2% | 51.3 | 77.5 | 77.0 | 77.8 |

Provided by WCPS Staff, February, 2011

Interviews with Board members revealed a very different perception. Each of the four newly-elected Board members, as well as Ron Margiotta, refused to acknowledge the student achievement data compiled by the school system and displayed on large posters in the Board meeting room. Each of the five Board members indicated a reliance on their 'own' data to support their conclusions and defend their actions. Board member John Tedesco asserted that the previous Student Assignment Policy distributed low achievers throughout the system so that their needs would be hidden and consequently not be met. Mr. Tedesco has repeatedly advocated for concentrating low achieving students in a school so that their needs are not hidden.

However, when Board members were asked how they would ensure that schools with a significant population of low achieving students would be supported there were no solutions or plans offered. High school principals noted deep concern that the new policy would significantly compromise their ability to meet the needs of students. Additionally, principals indicated that there is no plan for providing the additional resources for a school with an exceptionally high proportion of low achieving students. Given that the school system is facing significant financial challenges there is much doubt among administrators that the necessary resources will be available and targeted to support the need for instructional interventions.

In several instances, Board members indicated that Wake County was struggling with improving the graduation rate of African-American males and that Wake County Public Schools are not keeping pace with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Although Wake County trails the state average as well as the success rate in Guilford County Schools, according to data provided by staff, the graduation rate among African-American males exceeds that of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and the national average.



Provided by WCPS Staff, February, 2011

On March 3, 2011 Wake County Public Schools released the following chart indicating the drop-out rate for all students in 2009-2010:

| North Carolina | Durham | Forsyth | Guilford | Mecklenburg | WCPSS |
|----------------|--------|---------|----------|-------------|-------|
| 3.75 | 4.32 | 4.07 | 2.81 | 4.15 | 3.53 |

In addition the school system recently released the following information regarding drop-out rates for minorities:

“There was news of improvement for minority students in the report. For only the second time in the past 11 years, the WCPSS dropout rate for Hispanic/Latino students fell below seven percent to 6.86%, marking the fourth consecutive drop for this group. African-American students had their lowest dropout rate since 2003-04 at 5.64 percent. The dropout rate for white students remained below two percent for the second year in a row.” - Wake County Public Schools web site, March, 2011.

Strategic Plan

The school system is operating today without the benefit of a comprehensive strategic plan based on a common vision and clear set of priorities. Throughout the interview process there was no consensus on the vision or direction for the school system nor did board members indicate knowledge of a strategic plan. Although some staff and board indicated that the Curriculum Management Audit (conducted in 2007) is guiding efforts for improvement, the audit is not a substitute for a comprehensive strategic plan. The new Superintendent indicated in his 90-day plan that the system must establish a common vision, direction, and strategic plan to guide the work of the Board, system leadership, and the schools.

The absence of a consensus vision for the school system resulted in the system taking actions and making ad hoc decisions that caused considerable uncertainty for stakeholders as to the expectations of the system. Although high school principals are fully aware and committed to meeting the expectations set by the state of North Carolina there is an absence of a system-wide vision guiding the work of high schools in Wake County.

The elimination of “early release days” has had a negative impact on the ability of the high schools to engage in instructional planning and professional learning activities to promote continuous improvement. The Board did not work in conjunction with the Superintendent to seek input from high school principals, parents, or students about the value and benefit of such days prior to taking the action to eliminate them from the calendar. As with other areas, the five Board members relied solely on their 'own' data and information as well as their personal experiences. Rather than consulting with the system’s leader to elicit feedback from professional staff to provide data for an analysis of the advantages or disadvantages of “early release days,” the five Board members summarily took action to end the practice. **To ensure the effective operation of schools (as required by Accreditation Standards) the Board must base its decisions on a comprehensive, objective analysis of data and information provided – at the request of the entire Board – by the Superintendent with evaluative feedback from professional staff.**

Managing Growth

The school system has experienced significant growth in student population over the past decade. Approximately 50,000 new students have enrolled in the system during the past 10 years. As a result of the growth, the minority population in the system has increased considerably to the point that today the majority of students are minorities. The school system has also built and opened 48 new schools to provide for the tremendous growth in student enrollment. The growth in student population has outpaced the system's ability to construct schools sufficient to meet the need for additional facilities. When school systems experience such rapid growth in student population and open new schools at a rate of approximately four schools yearly, the student mobility rate increases as the system restructures attendance boundaries and moves students from overcrowded schools to new schools to balance enrollment. Redistricting in Wake County Public Schools is no different. Regardless of the Student Assignment Policy (current or past), the system has had to reassign students to manage the significant growth in student population. In fact, the assertion that the previous Student Assignment Policy caused students to move frequently is unsubstantiated as the system cannot produce verifiable evidence that the policy was the cause of such movement. However, there is evidence that the growth in student population and opening of new schools did create situations where students were moved more often.

The administrative tool and process used to assign students to schools is called the “Node System.” The review of documentation as well as interviews with staff, parents, and community members revealed that individual members of the Board of Education as well as individuals on the Student Assignment Committee, formed following the installation of new board members in 2009, exercised undue influence on the assignment of nodes to particular schools. Such influence has resulted in a breakdown in the system and exacerbated student mobility.

The Student Assignment Committee meetings were often conducted with a majority of the members of the Board of Education present and participating. The committee minutes show that meetings on the following dates had a majority of the Board of Education present: March 18, 2010; May 25, 2010; June 8, 2010; July 27, 2010; August 31, 2010; September 28, 2010 (all members present); and October 12, 2010. In addition to the Student Assignment Committee, other committees of the Board of Education held meetings that included a majority of the Board present for the meeting, including the Superintendent Search Committee. Notices of the committee meetings were posted in advance of the meeting. However when Board members not on the committee attend these meetings and such attendance results in a majority of the Board being present, such a meeting by North Carolina Statute § 143-318.10 and Board Policy 1300 is considered a meeting of the Board of Education. Such meetings and the possible deficiency of said public notices may constitute a violation of the Open Meetings Statutes in North Carolina. Nonetheless such committee meetings with a majority of the Board present violate Board Policy 1300. The school system must seek a legal opinion on advertising and conducting committee meetings with a majority of the Board of Education present. The unannounced attendance of Board members at committee meetings, in sufficient numbers to constitute a quorum of the whole Board, further erodes public trust and creates greater stakeholder disenfranchisement.

The school system needs to re-establish a clear, coherent, and objective process for administering the node system. To eliminate instability and inequity, the school assignment process should be transparent and free of individual board or community influence. The Board should only consider the assignment of nodes to schools based on the objective work of staff designated to carry out the function of developing a viable school assignment process. The process should also include Board and community review prior to Board adoption. The reviews should be conducted in open, called meetings designated to focus on issues related to the school assignment process. Individual members of the Board need to remove their influence over the process and take action based on the recommendations from staff. Without such controls the integrity of the system will be questioned and the community will continue to doubt the intent, integrity, and objectivity of the Board in making such decisions.

Adherence to Board Policy

The school system defines its policy development process through Policy 1510. Board Policy 1510 indicates that "the superintendent shall submit to the Board written recommendations for adoption of new policies or revisions to existing policies in a timely manner." In addition, Board Policy 1510 states, "the superintendent shall designate staff responsible for revising existing policy, developing new policy and writing regulations and procedures." Interviews with members of the Board and the community as well as a review of Board minutes indicate that the Board has repeatedly failed to honor this policy. Beginning with the December 1, 2009 Board meeting, members of the Board have frequently added agenda items for action at the beginning of the meeting. Many of these items have been in the form of resolutions that are designed to enact new policy, revise policy, or abolish policy. The resolutions, although prepared in

advance, are not shared with all members of the Board in advance of the meeting. However, the Board is asked to take action on the resolutions being presented. This process of defining and determining policy violates the process defined in Board Policy 1510 which requires that new policies be prepared by staff and presented for consideration by the superintendent.

Board policy defines a clear and coherent process for policy development. The current practices of the Board to make policy decisions through resolutions eliminates the ability of staff to prepare information that would provide relevant and reliable data to support the need for a policy (revised or new) as well as the intended impact of such policy. Without such information the Board is taking action with limited information and without a clear understanding as to the impact of policy additions or changes.

The Board has policy that defines the process and purpose of establishing the Board agenda for scheduled meetings. The Board agenda is to be set and posted 48 hours prior to the scheduled meeting. All Board members should receive a copy of the agenda with all supporting materials in advance of the meeting so as to provide sufficient time for each member to prepare for the meeting. A review of posted Board agendas and the corresponding minutes of the Board meeting indicate frequent modifications to the Board agenda at the start of the meeting. These additions began in earnest December 1, 2009 with eight additional agenda items for the meeting. Although Board policy for agenda setting allows Board members to add information items to the agenda after the agenda is posted, they may not add action items. Many of the items added to agendas since December, 2009 have been action items. In order for an information item to be moved to an action item the Board must vote to approve such a change.

Since December 1, 2009 there have been several meetings of the Board in which members of the Board have added action items at the beginning of the meeting in clear violation of their own Board policy. Most of these items are in the form of resolutions that have been drafted by one or more members of the Board. When resolutions are presented, the Board is expected to act on the resolution even though all members of the Board may be inadequately prepared to consider the resolution prior to voting. In addition, late additions to the agenda make it impossible for the superintendent and professional staff to provide the Board with relevant and reliable information related to the resolution. **The practice of adding action items at the start of a meeting is being done to deliberately place other Board members at a disadvantage. As Board member Chris Malone indicated in his interview, "we deliberately added these items to the agenda to make an opening statement." Many members of the Board indicated that this practice has had a significant negative impact on the Board's ability to conduct professional, informed meetings representative of an effective governing body.**

Student Assignment Policy

Beginning with the installation of four new Board members on December 1, 2009, the Student Assignment Policy has been the centerpiece of the conflict and controversy in Wake County. **The five members of the Board of Education that sought to change the policy based their reasoning on several factors. The rationale for their position focused on issues including a perceived mandate from the community that resulted in the election of new board members, failure of the system to close the achievement gap, failure of the system to improve graduation rates for minorities, lack of stability in student assignments, long bus rides for students, and failure to meet the needs of low performing students because they are distributed throughout the system.**

The Special Review Team examined numerous data sources related to student achievement, graduation rates; frequency of changes in school assignments for students, length of bus rides, and the results of a parent survey. There is no compelling data to support the rationale and reasoning stated by members of the Board for the change in policy. In fact, throughout the interview process, it became very evident that Board members were shaping policy based on their personal experiences rather than relying on objective data and evidence reflecting the system as a whole. Adopting new policies without sound reasoning and reliable data has caused a breakdown within the Board and among the community. This breakdown is further exacerbated by the Board's ignoring of the results of the survey it performed to gauge stakeholder satisfaction in which approximately 95% of the respondents of the nearly 41,000 respondents were satisfied with their child's school for which they were assigned and approximately 90% were satisfied with their experience with the calendar for said school. These results were dismissed by Board members. It was even suggested that the respondents were mistaken in their response. As a result there is no trust within the Board or community; rather there is a significant amount of suspicion as to the motivation for such a change.

The Wake County Public Schools have experienced significant growth resulting in a majority minority student population. Most systems in the nation that have experienced the type of change that Wake County has experienced in the past 10 years have also experienced a decline in student achievement. However Wake County has closed the achievement gap and increased achievement levels for minorities as well as decreased drop-out rates while increasing graduation rates. The vast majority of high school principals, teachers, students, and parents indicated during the interview process a belief in the benefits of the prior Student Assignment Policy and concern with the potential negative impact of the recent changes. In fact, high school principals noted that the previous policy did not create unstable environments nor did it result in low performing students not getting the support they needed to succeed. Student performance data clearly indicated that low performing students were realizing gains in student achievement that outpaced their peers in other school systems.

The Wake County Board of Education is responsible for establishing policies that ensure the effective operation of all schools in the system and for providing the resources necessary to ensure that every student has the opportunity to receive a quality education. The current division on the Board has resulted in actions by the Board that do not take into account the needs and interests of the entire community and its schools. Effective Boards do not govern based on individual circumstance. Effective Boards govern based on the objective analysis of relevant and reliable data reflective of the entire community and the students being served. To become effective in governing the school system every member of the Wake County Board of Education must seek reliable information from the Superintendent and the professional staff; consider the needs of the entire community; and permit their actions to be guided by the system's vision, mission, and core beliefs.

Accreditation Status

Based on the findings of the Special Review Team and subsequent review by the AdvancED North Carolina State Council, AdvancED concludes that high schools in the Wake County Public Schools are in violation of AdvancED Standard 2: Governance and Leadership.

In accordance with AdvancED policies, all the high schools under the jurisdiction of the Wake County Public Schools have been placed in the accreditation status of **“Accredited Warned”** until November 30, 2011, by which time a Monitoring Team shall conduct a Monitoring Visit to assess the progress made in complying with the Special Review Team’s required actions listed in the following section.

Required actions

The institution must fully address by November 30, 2011 the following required actions made by the Special Review Team:

1. **Create and implement a Strategic Plan to guide the future work of the school system.** Board members indicated a lack of knowledge about the existence of a Strategic Plan guiding the work of the system. In the absence of a Strategic Plan, the school system and its schools will operate without the benefit of and commitment to clear expectations. The recent adoption of a newly formed vision, mission, and core beliefs should serve as the foundation for the creation and adoption of a Strategic Plan. In addition, schools in the system should be expected to create school level plans that are aligned and support achieving the objectives in the system’s Strategic Plan.
2. **Analyze and revise the “node” system of assigning students to schools to ensure objectivity, transparency, and consistency.** The review of evidence gathered during the visit indicated that the system has failed to follow a clear and consistent process for evaluating and selecting nodes for assigning students to schools. The process must be free from the undue influence of individual Board members and the community.
3. **Establish and implement an agenda setting process to ensure that every member of the Board of Education and key system leadership are well-prepared for each Board meeting.** Interviews with members of the Board and staff as well as a review of Board minutes revealed a breakdown in the agenda setting and adoption process. Board agendas must be posted 48 hours in advance of a called meeting. In doing so the agenda should coordinate the planned work of the Board in the upcoming meeting. All members of the Board must be provided with sufficient materials and information to be adequately prepared for the meeting.
4. **Define in policy the purpose and role of adopting resolutions as a governing practice.** Interviews with members of the Board and staff as well as a review of meeting minutes confirmed that Board members presented resolutions for adoption without having provided supporting information to all Board members, Superintendent, and staff prior to the meeting. Ensure that the process of drafting and considering resolutions stipulates that every member of the Board, as well as Superintendent and staff who support the work of the Board, have the draft resolution (including any supporting information) as part of the Board material in preparation for the meeting. Drafting and adopting resolutions can be a helpful practice for Boards that wish to make

special declarations reflecting well-thought out acknowledgements or beliefs, but should not be used to circumvent or distort the policy adoption process.

5. **Provide on-going cohesive and consistent training to all members of the Board of Education regarding their roles, responsibilities, and the strategic direction of the school system.** All members of the Board of Education described the training opportunities for the Board to be ad hoc and by individual choice. The result is a governing board that does not have a common view of their roles and responsibilities or a comprehensive understanding of the strategic direction of the school system. Whole board training that includes the Superintendent can build the capacity of the governance leadership team to provide effective, coherent, and focused guidance and direction for the school system.
6. **Institute a policy review, revision, and adoption process that support related board policy development.** In the past year the Board has deviated from board policy on the review, revision, and adoption process. In doing so, the Board has eliminated or significantly reduced the roles and responsibilities of professional staff in sharing data and evidence to inform all members of the Board about the need or basis for a policy and the potential impact. Maintaining a rigorous, systemic, and systematic process for policy review, revision, and adoption builds the capacity of the Board to provide clear and cogent direction for the work of the system. Additionally the Board needs to expect and require that the Superintendent and the professional staff provide objective data and evidence about the impact of policy on the performance of the school system and its schools, so that said data and information may form the basis of the Board's policy work.
7. **Ensure that policies and procedures guiding the work of the system are in alignment and support the newly formed vision, mission, and core beliefs.** A school system's vision, mission, and core beliefs are foundational statements that guide the work of schools and their improvement efforts. Communities depend on these tenets to develop an understanding and a strong commitment to advancing the work of the system. However if the system's governing practices contradict these beliefs then the schools and community will struggle. Organizational integrity is demonstrated to a significant degree by the ability to act in concert with the organization's beliefs. The Wake County Board of Education needs to restore integrity to the governing process and instill confidence throughout the schools and entire community.

Next Steps - Using and Acting on the Report

A copy of this report is sent to the Superintendent. The school system shall use the report to guide its response to the findings and its improvement efforts. The school system is accountable for addressing the required actions identified in this report within the specified timeline. AdvancED is available to assist the school system in its improvement efforts to address the requirements for accreditation. However such support is limited to understanding the expectations in fulfilling the Required Actions and the standards and policies associated with accreditation.

As follow-up on this Special Review Report, Wake County Public Schools will be expected to host a Monitoring Team visit by November 30, 2011. Depending on the level of progress in meeting the seven required actions identified within this report, recommendations regarding the

continuing accreditation status of the high schools within the Wake County Public Schools may be modified at that time. In preparation for the Monitoring Visit, the district must submit an *Institution Progress Report* to AdvancED/SACS CASI at least two weeks prior to the Monitoring Visit. Wake County Public Schools must use the Institution Progress Report to document all actions taken to address the required actions contained herein. Included with the progress report must be artifacts specifically describing and documenting what has been accomplished as required. AdvancED/SACS CASI is available to assist the school system in addressing the action steps therein stipulated with the noted limitation stated above. Please contact the North Carolina AdvancED/SACS CASI staff to access the template for completing the *Institution Progress Report*. Additionally, the district is responsible for all costs associated with hosting the Monitoring Visit.

Closing Comments

Since December 1, 2009 the actions and decisions of the Wake County Board of Education have resulted in creating a climate of uncertainty, suspicion, and mistrust throughout the community. It is critical that the Board of Education and the newly appointed Superintendent establish a cohesive governance-leadership team dedicated to serving all students attending Wake County Public Schools. Additionally, the Board of Education and Superintendent must work to gain the community's trust and confidence in the school system and its ability to meet the needs of all students.

Shortly after the conclusion of the on-site review, the new Superintendent shared additional documentation with the team indicating that the Board adopted a new vision, mission, and set of guiding beliefs for the school system. It is evident in these new documents that the system is seeking to recommit to serving a diverse population and ensuring that every child no matter their background is successful. However significant questions remain as to how the system is going to reflect in policy and practice the new commitments stated in their vision, mission, and core beliefs.

If the Board of Education is able to internalize the expectations and beliefs expressed in the newly formed vision, mission, and core beliefs, it can fundamentally change the manner by which the Board governs the school system. However, if the newly formed statements of vision, mission, and beliefs are simply platitudes that have no role in how policy and practice is exercised, then the current divisions within the community and lack of trust will be further magnified, thereby creating serious repercussions for students throughout the school system.

The Required Actions outlined in this report are designed to facilitate improvement in the governance of the school system. The actions and decisions of a Board of Education can dramatically impact the success of the schools under their jurisdiction. The results of the review process revealed that the Wake County Board of Education needs to rethink and reshape how it governs the school system. It is essential that the Board consider objective, relevant, and reliable data compiled by the staff to guide their decisions. Additionally, the Board must be guided in their decision making by the expectations and beliefs in their newly formed vision, mission, and core beliefs. Finally, the Board must learn to govern as a team, guided by policy, with the interests and needs of all students first and foremost in their minds and actions.