

**Quality Assurance Review Team Report
for
Washington County School District**

*Dr. Allen Lee, Superintendent of Schools
Mr. Curtis Burkett, Chair - Board of Education*

**Initial District Accreditation Five-Year Visit
Council on Accreditation and School Improvement
October 8 – 11, 2006**



Introduction

A Quality Assurance Review team representing the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) made a Quality Assurance Review visit to Washington County in Abingdon, Virginia on October 8 – 11, 2006. The review visit is the final step in the process of seeking district accreditation by the Washington County School District from the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Washington County is among the first 75 school systems in the nation to host a Quality Assurance Review for the purpose of achieving district accreditation. In seeking district accreditation, the Washington County School District must provide evidence that the system:

1. meets the Standards for Accreditation;
2. engages in a systemic and continuous process of improvement; and,
3. implements methods for quality assurance that provide for effective operations and functions.

In conducting the Quality Assurance Review, the review team was responsible for:

1. assessing the capacity of the system to meet the standards;
2. assessing the efficacy and impact of the improvement process;
3. assessing the effectiveness of the system's methods for quality assurance;
4. identifying strengths of the system deserving of commendation; and
5. developing recommendations which are designed to help strengthen the school system.

In fulfillment of the team's responsibilities, members:

1. reviewed documentation provided by the school system;
2. developed points of inquiry for the on-site review;
3. established, in collaboration with district personnel, a schedule of activities and interactions that would provide for significant stakeholder involvement;
4. conducted interviews of a representative set of stakeholders throughout the district; and
5. engaged in professional deliberations as a team to consider the capacity of the school system to meet the requirements for district accreditation.

The Washington County School District (WCPS) has a long history of association with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). In the mid 1960's the division became one of the first rural systems in Virginia to have all of its schools accredited by SACS. With the merging of the elementary commission and the secondary commission into Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), the school division was able to move into district accreditation in the spring of 2004.

The foundation for continuous improvement in Washington County is the Six Year Plan, or as it is now called, "The Comprehensive Plan." This plan is required by the Virginia Department of Education and has been expanded at the local level to cover the accreditation needs of local, state, regional, and federal organizations. The present plan, 2002-2008, was developed during the 2001-2002 school year with input from all of the stakeholders of the school system. The plan is reviewed annually and adjustments are made to keep it current and relevant. Building principals present an oral and written report on the progress their school has made in accomplishing the goals and objectives of the plan. A committee of central office instructional personnel reviews their report, writes an analysis of progress, and makes suggestions for future improvement where applicable. Three notable changes have been the inclusion of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) regulations, the ten SACSCASI standards for district accreditation, and revisions made by the Division Wide Improvement Team. An annual report of progress on the plan is given to the school board in the fall of the year when building principals are required to submit oral and written progress reports to the central office on their progress toward the plan. An evaluation of their progress by a committee of central office instructional personnel is given as part of the feedback process.

In the spring of 2004 a division wide school improvement team was established with each school having at least one representative. Members were also chosen to represent the administrators from the various building levels as well as the central office. The county PTSA has a permanent representative on the committee. The committee meets quarterly and is charged with the total school improvement process for the county. The members of the committee are appointed for a three year term and this allows one-third of the committee to be replaced each year and always provides for new ideas while keeping two-thirds of the committee for stability. The committee has recently completed the following tasks: revised the Comprehensive Plan (formerly Six Year Plan of Improvement), defined the core values established by the division, created a system for internal visits and reviews of schools and provided leadership for the Quality Assurance Review by defining how the school system meets each SACS CASI standard. The superintendent's management team and the division's improvement team have worked on the district accreditation standards and have responded with an effective process for meeting SACS CASI division standards.

The process of district accreditation has provided the vehicle for vast school improvement. All district plans are now more focused, progress reports are given annually, and schools still retain the flexibility to adjust their improvement plans to meet the changing needs of each school. Progress in meeting district wide expectations in all areas are listed on the district web page which can be found at www.wcs.k12.va.us. Sharing of these results has made the district a more open school division enabling it to become a school system instead of a system of schools. The superintendent of schools meets each Monday with the staff of the central office to review the work to be accomplished each week. The purpose of the meeting is to provide focus and direction for the division and to make sure that the lines of communication are open and available to all. In addition there are a large number of advisory groups that meet and provide

input for the school division. These include teacher, student, staff, career and technical, gifted, industry and parent committees.

The Quality Assurance Review Team is pleased to note that the school system provided many opportunities for various stakeholders to contribute throughout the process of seeking district accreditation. It is the perception of the Quality Assurance Review team that school system personnel with community support faithfully and effectively conducted the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study in fulfillment of the district accreditation requirements and in preparation for the Quality Assurance Review visit.

In fulfillment of the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study process, the school system personnel provided documented evidence for each of the Standards for Accreditation, summarized the district's systemic process of continuous improvement, and identified the methods and strategies implemented throughout the school district that provide for quality assurance of the district's operations, procedures, and functions for the benefit of student learning. In addition to the summary of documentation provided to the Quality Assurance Review Team, the district provided team members access to all system information including improvement plans at the school and system levels, student achievement data, the policies and procedures, financial information, and all other information and data maintained and monitored by the school district.

During the on-site visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed the superintendent of schools, five members of the Board of Education, twenty-three principals and administrators, sixty-four parents, ninety-six teachers and twenty-nine students. In considering the evidence as provided through data, documentation, observation, and dialogue, the Quality Assurance Team:

- sought a district perspective;
- pursued evidence that could be correlated through multiple sources;
- examined the context and capacity of the school system in relation to its vision, mission, and beliefs; and
- applied the criteria for accreditation.

Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for District Accreditation is that the Washington County School District provides evidence that it meets the ten standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the ten standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

Summary

The superintendent's management team and the division's improvement team coordinated and facilitated the district's compilation and consideration of evidence related to each of the ten standards for accreditation. District and school personnel were involved in the compilation and consideration of the documentation for each of the standards for accreditation.

BELIEFS and MISSION

A quality system develops and communicates a vision, beliefs and mission that provide a focus for the quality of the work of the students and the quality of the work of the system and schools.

School and community stakeholders, including students, parents, faculty, staff and administrators are actively engaged in the ongoing process of visioning in Washington County Public Schools. Visioning is exhibited in a variety of formats including such activities as structured advisory groups for parents and students, professional learning communities for administrators, and dialogue with the Board of Supervisors and Business Advisory Council. As these work together it is evident that collaboration, communication, care and respect are fostered by all. The vision and subsequent planning to make the vision a reality are driven by a collective dedication to continuous improvement and the quest for excellence

Washington County Public Schools are "*Committed to the Success of Every Student*" in all aspects of "*Working to Provide the World's Best Education*". These statements of vision indicate what is to be done as well as how it is to be accomplished. To that end, the Washington County School District strives to be a dynamic community of learners where:

- School administrators, faculty and staff are empowered and are shown respect, provided training in leadership, and provided resources. They communicate high expectations and respect for every student.
- Students are engaged through a rich curriculum to acquire a love of learning, obtain citizenship skills in an atmosphere that respects both diversity and cooperation, and exit with academic skills at or above grade level that position them for life-long success.

- A partnership with parents and the greater community extends to all citizens a greater appreciation of the value of an excellent education.

The vision and mission for Washington County Public Schools are rooted in core values as communicated in the 2006-2007 school calendar and handbook, and give rise to district and individual school improvement planning. Identification and development of specific improvement goals are driven by data.

Moving Washington County Public Schools from a local / regional focus to a truly dynamic, global perspective requires that all school community stakeholders share a greater awareness of and appreciation for the global future shared by all of today's students. The school district should develop an aggressive, comprehensive approach to building a community culture that embraces change and the global nature of our future world.

The dynamic nature of current visioning is its greatest strength in meeting the demands of ever accelerating change in the future; therefore, WCPS should continue to practice visioning as a dynamic, fluid process.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

A quality system provides for and promotes stability in the leadership, governance and organizational structure which include a focus in developing and maintaining a vision; an emphasis on improving student learning; and support for innovative efforts that produce desired results.

The Virginia General Assembly, acting under the Constitution of Virginia, has the responsibility of providing a system of free public education and directs the establishment of local school boards to operate, maintain, and supervise local schools. The Washington County School Board is a corporate body composed of seven members representing the seven magisterial districts of the county. These members are elected by the public to a four-year term of office on a staggered basis. The chairman and vice-chairman are elected annually by the board members at the board's organizational meeting in January. The school board employs a superintendent of schools who is responsible for educational leadership for schools and serves as chief officer of the district. The superintendent of schools provides leadership in the visioning process with all stakeholders.

The Washington County School Board Policy Manual outlines the philosophy and operational goals and guides the governance and operations of the school division including the administrative organizational plan.

It is the responsibility of the school board, superintendent, and administrative staff to manage the fiscal well being of the school system. The budgetary process allows the stakeholders a voice in determining the distribution of funds. Stakeholders feel they have

a voice in most aspects of decision making which is a testament to the openness of the leadership and the confidence in the administration.

Communication with all stakeholders is a strength of the leadership in Washington County Public Schools. Multiple methods are available for two-way communication which includes the following: web-sites, emails, phone messengers, newsletters, advisory committees, surveys, school board meetings, media, list serves, agendas, parent conferences, and phone conferences.

The superintendent provides professional reading and discussion opportunities for administrative staff through current books on trends, strategies, and improvement processes. The administrative staff uses this new knowledge to enhance the educational methods and discussions at the school level.

One of the challenges facing Washington County Public Schools is continuous fine-tuning of the comprehensive plan to address the issues of academic excellence, facility needs, program design, professional development, and funding necessary to deliver the best educational system in the world. Another challenge for the leadership is to continue the use of data and feedback to monitor the use of these resources in view of their support of the division's vision, mission, beliefs and students' performance. Another challenge for Washington County Public Schools is attracting and maintaining highly qualified personnel at all levels.

CURRICULUM

A quality system offers a research-based curriculum based on clearly defined expectations for student learning that is subject to review and revision at regular intervals.

In Washington County academic expectations for students are high. Evidence gathered indicates that all stakeholders in the system embrace this expectation. The student achievement goal consistently expressed throughout the district is to exceed state and federal mandated standards and benchmarks, not to simply meet them. This expectation, while challenging, can be sustained through continuous communication and collaboration with stakeholders, sustained vertical and horizontal curriculum planning, examining future trends in academic research, increasing rigor within the various curricular areas, and continued data analysis.

The total school community strives to ensure all students' needs are met. Stakeholders recognize the challenge and relentlessly continue to pursue this objective. Various means have been implemented in this area such as employment of an ESL teacher, the addition of two GATE coordinators, the implementation of inclusion, industry certification for the CTE programs, and diagnostic testing. These measures must be viewed only as a foundational base that will require further expansion in order to achieve long – term success in meeting the needs of all students.

Technology is a powerful instructional tool and motivator. Washington County Schools have worked diligently to provide staff and students the necessary infrastructure, hardware, and software to engage in its use. However, as with all technology, it is constantly changing. Therefore, the challenge for Washington County Schools is to keep the technology (i.e. infrastructure, hardware and software) current and accessible to all.

Washington County Schools have made great strides with their various curricular programs. With continued collaboration, research, self-reflection and study, and being willing to think outside the current parameters, Washington County Schools holds a bright future for its students.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

A quality system develops and employs instructional strategies and activities in support of student achievement of the expectations for learning defined by the curriculum.

The Washington County School Division delivers its curriculum through a variety of instructional programs designed not only to meet the needs of all its students, but to extend the achievement of all students to high levels. The instructional program is dynamic, changing as necessary based on results of Virginia Standards of Learning assessments, county benchmark tests, classroom assessment, and the professional judgment of school personnel. The curriculum and instruction area of school improvement plans are modified based on assessment information and relative to changes in the Comprehensive Plan. Instructional practices are continuously reviewed, modified, and supplemented as teachers and administrators participate in a multitude of professional development workshops and conferences. The knowledge and skills gained in such training are brought back to the county and shared with colleagues to substantially increase the variety and number of instructional strategies available to teachers as they continually strive to match instruction and student needs. Building administrators and specialists provide coaching for implementation.

The breadth of the instructional program has increased as the vision, mission and comprehensive plan expand. Programs for intervention, such as Reading Recovery, preschool, English Language Learners, inclusive special education, and tutoring have been added in response to student needs. Dual enrollment, career-technology completer programs, industry certification, the virtual Governor's School, advanced academic programs, and technology programs have been implemented as the vision has moved beyond the "best in Virginia" to aspire to be the "best in the world," in recognition of students' future in a global community. The overlay of all instructional programming is the pervasive and deeply held belief in high expectations for all students and high self-expectations on the part of all staff.

Programs are in place to provide a framework for intervention to address, standard, advanced, and special needs instruction. Within programs, there is clear evidence that instruction is delivered in a variety of ways appropriate to learner strengths and needs. It

is noted that staff continually seek alternate methods until the right “match” is found. They simply do not give up until there is a successful solution.

Support from technology and media services within schools provides additional instructional tools as well as modes of student expression. Higher order thinking skills, experiential learning, project-based instruction, and multiple intelligences considerations are evident in the instruction provided to students at all levels. Ongoing review and revision of pacing guides and benchmark tests, combined with effective instructional delivery meet the tripartite test of written curriculum - taught curriculum - tested curriculum.

As student needs are identified, diversity within enrollment increases, No Child Left Behind goals increase, and the school division’s expectations of student achievement are raised, the staff of the Washington County School Division rises to each challenge to improve and increase the instructional strategies available to them. Staff development provided through workshops and conferences and opportunities offered by the school division have provided teachers with an array of choices and options to deliver instruction. The capacity of the school division to support the tremendous number of instructional programs and strategies may be taxed, thus reducing effectiveness of implementation. Building-based coaches for job-embedded staff development have proven effective in implementing and sustaining instructional initiative efforts and provide a model for comprehensive school-wide and county-wide instructional implementation.

The school division demonstrates a clear focus in its Comprehensive Plan, but that same focus is not as evident in the staff development provided to prepare teachers to meet the objectives of the plan. The school division recognizes that quality teachers are the key to quality instruction and provide a multitude of staff development opportunities to its staff. Flexibility is required in order to be able to meet emerging and newly identified instructional needs, but a balance between the required flexibility and capacity of the school division to support instructional programs and strategies strengthens the delivery and sustainability of instructional programs. Evaluation of the effectiveness of instructional strategies through pilot programs or initial limited implementation is recommended. Recognizing that mathematics achievement is an emerging priority across all levels, the implementation of math instructional programs and use of math specialists should be consistent with the recommendations of this standard.

ASSESSMENT, MEASUREMENT, and EFFECTIVE RESULTS

A quality system uses effective and continuous performance management systems for assessing, aligning, and improving student learning and operation performance, including organizational and instructional effectiveness, at all levels and areas of the system.

The Washington County School Division incorporates a multi-strand data analysis system to evaluate student achievement and organizational effectiveness. Each school develops a School Improvement Plan under the guidelines of the school division's Comprehensive Plan, Virginia's Standards of Learning and the No Child Left Behind Act. Data is collected throughout the year for analysis and documentation of progress. A diverse group of stakeholders is invested in each plan and a report is presented annually to the superintendent. Realizing the importance of preparing students for the global community, the school division has also begun to explore the implementation of strategies to meet this challenge.

Performance expectations and key indicators for supporting student achievement are included in all aspects of the school improvement process. Data includes grades and division-level benchmark tests, Advanced Placement Tests, SAT and ACT test results, dual enrollment courses, and students' grades. At the elementary level Phonological Awareness Literary Screening (PALS) and Accelerated Reader results give teachers and students help in setting learning goals and establishing pacing guides for instruction.

The school division has recently implemented a benchmark testing program in the four core academic areas. These quarterly tests are intended to provide formative information about student progress and encourage timely instructional interventions for students. Staff development opportunities in differentiated instruction and high-yield strategies have been provided to many teachers to enhance their skills in meeting the unique learning needs of all students. Ongoing work by curriculum committees provides feedback and guidance in pacing, available resources and instructional strategies.

Each school surveys students, staff and parents annually. These surveys solicit input on instructional effectiveness, safe schools issues, maintenance of grounds, areas of pride and areas for improvement. Schools compile this data and share with the school division's leadership. This data is used to drive division-level and school-based initiatives. Support services and their effectiveness are assessed through work order analysis and anecdotal customer satisfaction feedback.

An emphasis in keeping the community informed of the school division's efforts is pervasive from the school board, the superintendent, and each school's staff. Information is available in newsletters, school board meetings, electronic postings and face-to-face communications. School websites are updated regularly and provide comprehensive profiles of programs. Community input is valued and sought as a vital part of meeting the needs of the whole child.

Washington County School Division has a commitment to continuous improvement which is monitored and assessed by embedded processes. A continuing challenge is to clearly identify critical data and to analyze it for strategic implications. Continuous support in staff development, technology and data analysis is essential for the continued effective use of data to impact decision making. The data analysis must lead to intentional instructional interventions that can be measured for effectiveness and in developing priorities for support services.

RESOURCES

A quality system has qualified staff that is supported by the financial and physical resources necessary to fulfill the vision, mission and goals of the system.

The Washington County School Division is providing the resources needed to support the vision, mission, and beliefs of the division and ensures that the focus of teaching and learning is the priority.

The staffing resources needed to support the mission included 657 licensed administrators and teachers and 382 support staff for a total of 1039 Division employees. An Automated Educational Substitute Operations Program (AESOP) provides an intangible benefit to site administrators by streamlining the process to secure substitute teachers. Salaries and benefits provided by the Washington County School Division enables the system to attract highly qualified teachers, administrators, and support staff. An amicable system of evaluation and assessment enables the division to retain competent personnel.

A balanced budget is adopted each year providing resources needed in all programs and ensuring equity of funding at all locations. Budget development evolves from the process of involvement of personnel at all levels to ensure that teaching and learning processes are fully supported and budget priorities are fully assessed. The Washington County School Division School Board is keenly aware of its responsibility in financial reporting and maintains an amiable working relationship with the Washington County Board of Supervisors.

Stakeholders and all division leadership are keenly aware of the needs to renovate, expand, and/or construct new facilities. An aggressive ten year capital improvement plan is in place. Funding for this aggressive initiative will be available to ensure the goal of making the division a world class educational system.

All financial records are in accordance with General Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP) as well as state and federal requirements and regulations. In keeping with the aforementioned statement, financial records are audited on an annual basis.

STUDENT SERVICES

A quality system identifies and has a network of services that support the development and well-being, including the health and safety, of each student.

The Washington County School Division provides support for the various needs of all students. Student services responsibilities are shared by several departments. Specific curricular expectations for student service activities are embedded in the core curriculum and student activities. Annual review of all services is conducted to ensure alignment with the vision statement of the district and individual schools. Indicators of the use of these programs include:

- Inclusion model for special needs students
- Safety Audits
- Family Life Education
- Presidential Physical Fitness
- Resource Officers
- Health Advisory Committee
- Healthy Lifestyles Committee
- Character Education and Anti-Bullying Programs
- Student/school activity calendars

Each school is responsible for implementing service oriented activities such as financial support and tangible items for community needs. Advisory boards exist at all levels and include representation from students, teachers, staff, parents, and other stakeholders.

Upon enrollment, students and their parents receive a copy of the school calendar which includes written guidelines for student conduct and attendance. These guidelines are also available on the internet and in each school. Individual schools have plans for reviewing and implementing the guidelines and are also responsible for formulating consistent behavior and discipline expectations within their buildings.

The *Character Counts* program is the backbone of the Character Education program. Responsible student behavior is a strength and campus visits provided evidence in morning announcements, student displays, and student recognition activities.

Each school has a guidance counselor and nurse. The guidance counselors are available for meeting the individual and special needs of students and families. There does, however, appear to be some concern that the testing responsibilities for counselors are encroaching on their abilities to deliver the guidance and counseling programs.

Other student services include Gifted and Talented Enrichment, advanced academics (Advanced Placement and dual enrollment), and career training and certification opportunities such as culinary arts, construction, etc. Each school is responsible for maintaining complete student records that are both secure and accurate.

Safety and security are high priorities of all students, staff and parents. All campuses are served by a school resource officer. Review and practice of Crisis and Emergency Plans have resulted in more secure environments for all campuses. Staff and visitors wear identification badges, grounds and land adjacent to school property has been evaluated for barriers, and the Homeland Security Plan is reviewed at least annually by all staff.

As Washington County Public Schools continue to provide safety and security for all, they need to review and refine all student service plans and curricula to ensure that they are current and relevant. These also need to be intentionally consistent with district and school improvement plans. The involvement of all stakeholders will continue to strengthen student service programs.

STAFF AND STAKEHOLDERS COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

A quality system develops and supports organizational patterns or structures that promote effective communications and relationships between and among the schools, stakeholders and system.

The Washington County School Division is committed to ensuring communication among system staff, stakeholders and schools are clear and effective. The division expects all staff and parents to receive the information they need concerning students and school operations. The division uses a variety of methods and instruments to maintain appropriate communication and relationships. Standard practices such as calendars, newsletters, student folders, report cards, student handbooks and agendas are used by the county and individual schools to inform students and parents of school guidelines and regulations. Each fall students, staff and parents of Washington County Schools are surveyed on their satisfaction in the areas of safety, instruction, discipline, facilities and communication.

Washington County has embraced the increased opportunity for communication through technology. SASI and Phone-Master create phone messages to inform staff and parents of upcoming events and activities. The division and individual schools use websites and email to communicate information to staff, students, parents and the community-at-large. Stakeholders interviewed consistently reported that they receive nearly immediate notice and information on plans or events which have positive and/or negative impact on the Washington County Schools.

Web pages and email provide two-way communication with schools and parents. Parents and students can access events, class assignments, and make contact with teachers on a regular basis. Parents interviewed verify that they get email from teachers on positive events as well as student progress concerns in a timely manner. They also confirmed that they get quick responses from teachers and administrators when they initiate contact by email. Those supplying an email address to the central administration get regular

communication from the superintendent on a variety of issues both academic and operational.

The central administration has established ongoing advisory groups for the budget process and strategic planning process to facilitate planning. Advisory groups represent all schools and cover all stakeholders including parents, students, teachers, support staff, community and administrators. These groups meet regularly with the stakeholders they represent for two-way communication which will generate representative plans for all those impacted.

Student records and documents are maintained by individual schools and follow local, state and federal guidelines. Records and any correspondence defining students' accomplishments are consistent with professional standards and monitored by the division office. Teachers and staff members are trained in both record keeping and data analysis.

The Washington County School Division provides professional development programs for all of its staff members to support goals and action plans set forth by the school board, Virginia Department of Education and division schools. Staff development is planned by the division office using input from staff members each year in the form of surveys and collaboration meetings. Teachers believe that they are represented and respected in decisions regarding professional development.

Interviews with numerous stakeholder groups indicate that they feel support, appreciation and respect in their efforts to educate the children of Washington County. Those interviewed agreed that the one of the division's great strengths is the devotion, skill and accessibility of the professional staff. School board members, central administrators and school level administrators are regularly seen in the community at school and community events. They are willing to talk and often initiate conversations about educational issues of interest to stakeholders. Washington County Schools believe that through team work they can accomplish anything.

FACILITIES

A quality system has the necessary resources to provide the facilities, sites and equipment for the educational programs and services to be fully implemented throughout the system and individual schools.

The Washington County School system maintains compliance with all local, state and federal laws. Evidence of this is validated through annual safety and facility inspections by local government agencies, adherence to procurement policies and auditing of financial records. Professional development for administrators and necessary training for responsible staff was reported. Local inspections are carried out by principals and head custodians to insure compliance with all safety codes and legal mandates.

During team visits, all sites observed were extremely clean and appeared to be well maintained. Regular maintenance is very apparent and verbal reports indicate a timely response pattern to maintenance requests. This indicates an appropriate planned process for maintenance needs. Visual inspection of campuses provides evidence of physical improvements. Evidence of this would include remodeling open “pods” designed during the open school trend into enclosed environments for individual classrooms.

The Washington County School system endeavors to provide a high quality education through outstanding utilization of facilities and space. Under the direction of past administration and under the current leadership of Dr. Tom Graves, all facilities visited appeared to be maintained in an exemplary fashion. Strong evidence of maximum utilization of space is evident at all locations although many staff and community members expressed concern about the limited availability for expansion.

It has been stated by the Washington County School system that “meaningful responsible change and innovation are critical to continuous improvement.” This idea has been applied for many years to the physical facilities. This is evidenced in the quality and condition of the existing buildings that range from 24 to 79 years in service. In every case, the facilities visited reflected the careful maintenance and updating needed to bring the school system into the 21st century.

The Washington County School System has developed a short and long term plan for upgrading facilities. The plan details expansion needs and projects designed to meet these challenges. This facilities plan consists of four stages that when completed will provide space for instructional program expansion and additions. When completed, the facility plan will have direct impact on over two thirds of the schools in Washington County.

At present, Phase I and Phase II are in the financial preparation stage pending submittal and approval of the Literary Fund. Phases III and IV will be implemented in the future as Phases I and II are monitored. Based on current data, the phases will be completed at a cost of \$24,229,726.00.

It is apparent that the challenge for the future of Washington County Schools will be to continue raising the standards for facility expectations both within and without the school system in correlation to raising their own standards for educational achievement. Both the school system and the shareholders for the school system seek to provide a challenging program that is the “best in the world”. It is apparent that a disparity of understanding exists between those within the school system and many outside the school system. This disparity is not based on desire for a “world class education”, but of understanding what is will be necessary to provide such an education. Under current facility limitations, obtaining this goal will be even more of a challenge.

CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF IMPROVEMENT

A quality system establishes, implements and monitors a continuous process of educational improvement clearly focused on student performance.

The Washington County School Division is committed to the development of a continuous process of educational improvement which focuses on student performance. It has identified a procedure for development of a Comprehensive Plan. The division's Comprehensive Plan includes objectives, strategies, and indicators for curriculum and instruction, data assessment and evaluation, operations and facilities, public relations and community involvement, security and safety, and student activities.

In addition to the Comprehensive Plan, the school system has developed a profile, which includes information on such areas as the system's history, academics, special services, support services, community resources and partnerships, budget and financial resources, facilities, communications, and demographics. The profile also contains data concerning the results of improvement efforts.

Every school in the system has established a school improvement plan focusing on two or three goals per year based upon the goals and objectives outlined in the division's Comprehensive Plan. Student performance data is utilized in the development of the plans. School principals are required to report progress and present updated plans to central office administrative staff each year in November. Upon analysis by the reviewers, progress toward these goals is recognized and suggestions for updated plans are made.

As part of the report of school improvement, each school is required to report compliance with accreditation standards of SACS CASI, the Virginia Department of Education, and the Standards of Quality. Another aspect of monitoring school improvement is determining if the school met Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act.

One strength of the school improvement process in the Washington County Public School division is the communication of high expectations for all students and division personnel. Another strength of the division is the commitment of elementary, middle, and secondary administrators who meet regularly to discuss various instructional issues as well as participate in the visioning process. Disaggregated data is used for vertical planning purposes.

The school division has placed a strong emphasis on the involvement of stakeholder groups in the improvement process. Central office personnel, teachers, parents, community members, and students serve on committees and participate in advisory groups. The division also makes a strong effort to convey the results of its improvement efforts to stakeholders. Information is communicated through advisory groups, PTA, booster clubs, committee meetings and the local media. On the school system web site,

information is available on the division's improvement efforts. Individual school web sites contain the Annual Report, Standards of Learning data, and School Improvement Plan.

One challenge of the continuous improvement process is fine-tuning the Comprehensive Plan to address the issues of academic excellence, facility needs, program design, professional development, and funding necessary to deliver the best educational system in the world. A second challenge would be to include timelines, estimated resources, persons responsible, and means for evaluation in both the Comprehensive Plan and school improvement plans. Finally, a challenge for Washington County Public Schools is to help parents become more knowledgeable about the improvement process and the different accreditation criteria.

Commendations and Recommendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team provides the following commendations and recommendations in response to the school system's execution of and participation in the SACS CASI Guided Self-Study in fulfillment of the requirements for district accreditation.

Strengths, Accomplishment, and Commendations

Washington County has a significant number of strengths and accomplishments which characterize the quality of the school district and its capacity to support student learning. Some of the strengths that contribute to the quality and success of the school district include the following:

1. Caring and competent faculty, staff, and administration
2. High quality communication
3. Commitment to the infusion and use of technology to enhance communication and learning
4. Commitment to high expectations

The Washington County School District has realized several accomplishments recently that are indicative of the quality of the school district. Some of the accomplishments that are representative of the school district are listed below:

1. Continuous improvement on SOL assessments
2. Collaborative culture and team approach to planning
3. Clean and well maintained facilities
4. Community scholars program
5. Majority of special education students earning standard diplomas as opposed to modified diplomas
6. Increased dual enrollment opportunities and industry certification for career and technical students

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the Washington County for:

1. A supportive Board of Education
2. Quality leadership from the superintendent to the building administration system wide.
3. Open collaborative culture with wide stakeholder involvement
4. Sustained emphasis on not just meeting but exceeding SOL standards
5. System-wide emphasis on planning
6. Willingness to meet challenges "head on"
7. Commitment to the success of every student

Limitations, Challenges, and Recommendations

The capacity of any organization to improve is directly related to its ability to recognize, acknowledge, and act on its strengths and limitations. Although the Washington County School District is guided and characterized by several strengths and accomplishments, there are challenges facing the school district that are opportunities for improvement. Some of the limitations and challenges include the following:

1. Enabling all students to reach academic expectations
2. Addressing spatial issues system-wide
3. Insuring equity of funding throughout the district
4. Sustaining technology at every level
5. Maintaining safety and security
6. Attracting and retaining quality faculty and administrators

The Quality Assurance Review Team recommends that the Washington County School District:

1. Sustain commitment to the improvement of school facilities and address spatial issues system-wide.
2. Expand the focus on literacy and mathematics throughout the system.
3. Develop and implement a systemic vision for the district goal to provide students "The World's Best Education" with particular emphasis on:
 - a. Long term facilities enhancement;
 - b. Strategies to enhance cultural and community buy-in;
 - c. Sustaining of technology system-wide; and
 - d. Systemic staff development initiatives designed specifically to support the district vision.

Closing Summary

The Quality Assurance Review Team found the Washington County School District to be an outstanding school system led by a dedicated, competent and caring professional staff, a committed board of education, supportive parents, and community that collectively hold the best interests of the students they serve as their highest priority. All goals and action steps are integrated and aligned system wide and are designed to foster the achievement of student success at every level.

The Quality Assurance Review Team certifies that the school system has satisfactorily met the expectations and responsibilities of the SACS Guided Self-Study. Additionally, the Quality Assurance Review Team certifies that the Washington County School District met all the standards for accreditation for District Accreditation. Consequently, the Quality Assurance Review Team recommends to the SACS CASI Board of Directors, unanimously and without reservation, that the Washington County School District be awarded District Accreditation.

With the primary focus of this process being on improving student performance, the Quality Assurance Review Team sincerely hopes that the recommendations presented in this report will help in the continuing efforts to improve the quality of the learning experience provided to all students in the Washington County School District. In order for the system and its schools to improve, the professional staff must continually assess, plan, implement, monitor, evaluate and reassess. The success of such an effort is largely dependent on the school system's understanding and level of commitment to a process of improvement that is systemic and continuous.

The Quality Assurance Review Team recommends that the school system with the support of stakeholders in the community immediately begin the Implementation Phase of the accreditation process. It is through the implementation phase that the instructional and organizational capacity of the school system can be strengthened and students' achievement of the desired results for learning will be accomplished. As such, throughout the Implementation Phase the school system should ensure that the following steps are taken:

1. Review and communicate the findings and observations contained in the report;
2. Consider and take action, where appropriate, on the recommendations contained in this report;
3. Continue to monitor accreditation requirements for the system and its schools;
4. Ensure that strategies identified at the system and school levels are executed to accomplish specific goals to improve student learning;
5. Update and communicate to all stakeholders the system and school level profiles of student performance at least annually;
6. Document growth in student learning and instructional and organizational effectiveness; and
7. Review and revise, as necessary, the improvement plans at the system and school level.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the professional staff at the system and school levels, members of the Board of Education, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality extended during the visit. The Quality Assurance Review Team challenges the professional staff and the Board of Education to receive and study this report and, through consensus, accept and act on those recommendations they believe will improve or enhance the quality and capacity of the school system to improve student learning. Additionally the team wishes the school system and its students much success in pursuit of student achievement through the continuous process of educational improvement.

Quality Assurance Review Team Members Washington County Schools District Accreditation

Dr. Edward Krenson, Team Chair (Georgia) currently serves as Senior Vice President for the East Region of AdvancEd. (*AdvancED is the parent organization for the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE). Some of his prior experiences include history teacher, history department, AP European History teacher, Principal of Father Ryan High School in Nashville Tennessee, and President and Head of Randolph School in Huntsville, Alabama.

Bruce Gillespie, Vice Chair (Virginia) serves as a state specialist for SACS CASI after retiring with more than 35 years experience in public education. Most recently he was the Assistant Director for Accountability for Chesterfield County Public Schools in Virginia. Other professional experiences include middle school principal for 18 years, middle school/junior high school assistant principal, chemistry teacher, earth science teacher, physical science teacher, and certified Phi Delta Kappan Curriculum Management Auditor.

Dr. Strader E. Blankenship, (Virginia) currently serves as the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction for Carroll County Public Schools. Some of his prior experiences include miner, computer programmer/analyst, adjunct instructor (community college), social studies and math teacher (grades 5-12), secondary assistant principal, secondary principal, division-wide coordinator of computer services, and Assistant Superintendent for Finance.

Larry Eminhizer, (Virginia) is presently Director of Secondary Education for Prince George County Schools in Prince George Virginia. His professional experience has been in the secondary schools serving as a teacher, department chair, assistant principal, and principal. He has worked in both public and private schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Dr. Linda Fernandez, (Virginia) currently serves as Assistant Superintendent for the Goochland County (Virginia) Schools. Some of her prior experiences include central office, higher education, and school-based administration as well as associate professor, executive director, associate principal, laboratory school director, and special education teacher.

Dr. Mike Ladner, (Mississippi) currently serves as Superintendent of Education for schools in the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi, Mississippi. He formerly served as Superintendent of Education for the Hancock County Public School District in Hancock County Mississippi.

Linda G. Reviea, (Virginia) is the Director of Academic Services & Instructional Technology for York County Schools. She has been a Virginia educator since 1983 working in 5 school divisions (Stafford County, Chesterfield County, Newport News, Virginia Beach and York County). Before joining the administrative ranks she taught

middle and high school courses in life science, physical science, earth science, biology, chemistry, geometry, reading, and marine biology.

Mark Sale, (North Carolina) is currently Assistant Principal for Swain County Middle School in Bryson City North Carolina. Prior to beginning his administrative career he was a nineteen year veteran music teacher. He is also a certified SACS CASI Chair and accreditation coordinator and committee member.

Dick Spohr, (Illinois) presently serves as a NCA CASI Ambassador. Dick was Principal of Carlinville High School in Carlinville Illinois for twenty two years before assuming the position of Illinois NCA Program and External Relations Director for the University of Illinois. He was also Interim NCA Illinois State Director for two years.

Brian Stuart, (Virginia) is currently in his first year as Principal of Galax Elementary in Galax Virginia. Prior to this appointment served as Assistant Principal at Carroll County High School and taught Earth Science for ten years at Galax High School.

Libby Vansant, (Virginia) currently serves as Assistant Superintendent for Administration for Pulaski County Public Schools. Some of her prior experiences include elementary teacher; guidance counselor; assistant principal; principal; Title I Supervisor; and Executive Director of Administration.

QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW TEAM VISIT AGENDA

October 8 - 11, 2006

Sunday – October 8

- 5:30 p.m. Dinner (Quality Inn Conference Room)
- 7:00 p.m. Orientation Meeting for SACS CASI Quality Assurance Team
(Quality Inn Conference Room)

Monday – October 9

- 7:45 – 8:30 a.m. Check-in and Orientation
(Washington County School Board Office – Board Room)
- 8:30 – 9:15 a.m. District Presentation – *Dr. Alan Lee*, Superintendent
(Board Room)
- 9:15 – 10:00 a.m. Superintendent Interview – SACS CASI Team (Board Room)
- 10:05 – 10:50 a.m. Planning Team (Board Room)
- 11:00 – 11:45 a.m. Interviews with School Board Members (Board Room)
- 12:00 – 12:45 p.m. Lunch
- 1:00 – 1:45 p.m. Principals Interview (Board Room)
- 1:45 – 2:30 p.m. School Improvement Committee (Board Room)
- 2:45 – 3:30 p.m. District PTSA Interview (Board Room)
- 3:30 – 4:15 p.m. Parent Advisory Committee Interview (Board Room)
Student Advisory Committee Interview (1st Floor Lunch Room)
- 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. Dinner – SACS CASI Team (Martha Washington Inn)
- 7:15 – 9:00 p.m. SACS CASI Team Meeting (Quality Inn Conference Room)

Tuesday – October 10

- 7:45 a.m. SACS CASI Team Depart from Motel for School Visits
(Schools Assistant Principal will provide transportation)
- 8:00 – 11:15 a.m. Team School Visits
#1 Glade Spring Middle
#2 Holston High
#3 Damascus Middle
#4 Abingdon High
#5 E. B. Stanley Middle
- 11:30 – 12:30 pm Lunch with Principals of Schools Visited
- 12:45 – 4:00 p.m. Team School Visits
#1 High Point Elementary
#2 Rhea Valley Elementary
#3 Meadowview Elementary
#4 Valley Institute Elementary
#5 Watauga Elementary
- 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. Dinner – SACS CASI Team (The Tavern)
- 7:15 – 9:00 p.m. SACS CASI Team Meeting (Quality Inn Conference Room)

Wednesday – October 11

- 7:45 a.m. SACS CASI Team Depart Hotel to School Board
- 8:00 – 10:15 a.m. SACS CASI Standards Teams Meet with District Personnel
Planning Team Available in Office
- 10:15 – 1:15 p.m. SACS CASI Team in Deliberations
- 1:30 – 1:50 p.m. Team Chair and Co-Chair Brief Superintendent and Directors on
Team Findings
- 2:00 – 2:30 p.m. Oral Exit Report to School Board Members, Superintendent, and
Other key stakeholders
(Report will be given at an open (public) meeting of the Board)
- 2:35 p.m. Return home or depart to airport