



## **External Review**

### **South Tech Academy**

Mr. James R Kidd, CEO  
1300 SW 30th Avenue  
Boynton Beach, FL 33426

Mr. Thomas L Shaw, Lead Evaluator

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## **Introduction to the External Review Process**

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

Institutions seeking to gain or retain accreditation must meet AdvancED standards specified for their institution, demonstrate high levels of or improvement of student performance if applicable, and provide evidence of stakeholder satisfaction with the operation of the institution. The accreditation standards focus on conditions and processes within a system that impact student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of AdvancED Performance Accreditation lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards, student performance, and stakeholder feedback.

Institutions participate in an External Review by a team of highly qualified evaluators who examine the institution's adherence and commitment to the accreditation criteria. The External Review is the hallmark of AdvancED Performance Accreditation as it energizes and equips the leadership and stakeholders of an institution to achieve higher levels of performance and address those areas that may be hindering efforts to reach desired performance levels. External Review is a rigorous process that includes examination of evidence and relevant data, interviews with stakeholders, and observations of instruction, learning, and operations.

The AdvancED External Review Team used the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators and related criteria to guide its evaluation, looking not only for adherence to standards, but also for how the institution functioned as a whole and embodied the practices and characteristics of quality.

Using the evidence at their disposal, the AdvancED External Review Team arrived at a set of findings contained in this report. The report is presented in three sections: Findings, Conclusion, and Addenda.

## Part I: Findings

The Findings section presents the External Review Team's evaluation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators. It also includes Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement identified by the External Review Team, observations of the Learning Environment, as well as Required Actions.

### Accreditation Standards and Indicators

Standards help to delineate what matters. They provide a common language through which an education community can engage in conversations about educational improvement, system effectiveness, and achievement. They serve as a foundation for planning and implementing improvement strategies and activities and for measuring success. AdvancED's Standards for Quality were developed by a committee comprised of effective educators and leaders from the fields of practice, research, and policy who applied professional wisdom, deep knowledge of effective practice, and the best available research to craft a set of robust standards that ensure excellence and continuous improvement. The standards were reviewed by internationally recognized experts in testing and measurement, teacher quality, and education research.

This section contains an evaluation of each of AdvancED's Accreditation Standards and Indicators, conclusions concerning Powerful Practices and Opportunities for Improvement related to each of the standards, and a description of the evidence examined by the External Review Team. Indicators are evaluated and rated individually by the External Review Team using a four-level performance rubric. The Standard Performance Level is the average of indicator scores for the standard.

#### **Standard 1: Purpose and Direction**

Purpose and direction are critical to successful institutions. A study conducted in 2010 by the London-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported that "in addition to improving performance, the research indicates that having a sense of shared purpose also improves employee engagement" and that "...lack of understanding around purpose can lead to demotivation and emotional detachment, which in turn lead to a disengaged and dissatisfied workforce."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution commits to a shared purpose and direction and establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the institutions' vision that is supported by internal and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and overall institution effectiveness.

Standard	Standard Performance Level
The school maintains and communicates a purpose and direction that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	3.0

Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
1.1	The school engages in a systematic, inclusive, and comprehensive process to review, revise, and communicate a school purpose for student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Purpose statements - past and present</li> <li>•Documentation or description of the process for creating the school's purpose including the role of stakeholders</li> <li>•Minutes from meetings related to development of the school's purpose</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Examples of communications to stakeholders about the school's purpose (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, student handbook)</li> <li>•Communication plan to stakeholders regarding the school's purpose</li> </ul>	3
1.2	The school's leadership and staff commit to a culture that is based on shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning and supports challenging, equitable educational programs and learning experiences for all students that include achievement of learning, thinking, and life skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Agendas and/or minutes that reference a commitment to the components of the school's statement of purpose</li> <li>•The school's statement of purpose</li> <li>•Learning teams, interviews</li> </ul>	3
1.3	The school's leadership implements a continuous improvement process that provides clear direction for improving conditions that support student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The school data profile</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Communication plan and artifacts that show two-way communication to staff and stakeholders</li> <li>•Agenda, minutes from continuous improvement planning meetings</li> <li>•The school continuous improvement plan</li> </ul>	3

***Opportunities for Improvement***

***Indicator***

1. Based on speaking with the staff and other stakeholders, everyone is not on the same page as far as expectations. There is definitely a high expectation in the Academy areas. It was not evident that teachers used differentiated instruction, and core classes and academies operated without much interaction or planning. Most teachers need training on differentiated instruction. There is some confusion in regards to knowing the difference between cooperative learning and differentiated instruction. By understanding the importance and infusing cooperative learning, students will buy-in to the educational experience by joining in the lesson as a team and sharing in each other's growth. The process of differentiated Instruction enhances student learning by modifying the curriculum to suite student needs and learning styles. 1.2

**Standard 2: Governance and Leadership**

Governance and leadership are key factors in raising institutional quality. Leaders, both local administrators and governing boards/authorities, are responsible for ensuring all learners achieve while also managing many other facets of an institution. Institutions that function effectively do so without tension between the governing board/authority, administrators, and educators and have established relationships of mutual respect and a shared vision (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998). In a meta-analysis of school leadership research, Leithwood & Sun (2012) found that leaders (school and governing boards/authority) can significantly "influence school conditions through their achievement of a shared vision and agreed-on goals for the organization, their high expectations and support of organizational members, and practices that strengthen school culture and foster collaboration within the organization." With the increasing demands of accountability placed on institutional leaders, leaders who empower others need considerable autonomy and involve their school communities to attain school improvement goals. Leaders who engage in such practices experience a greater level of success (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Similarly, governing boards/authorities that focus on policy-making are more likely to allow school leaders the autonomy to make decisions that impact teachers and students and are less responsive to politicization than boards/authorities that respond to vocal citizens (Greene, 1992).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has leaders who are advocates for the institution's vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for school improvement among stakeholders. The institution's policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.		3.33
Indicator	Source of Evidence	Performance Level

2.1	The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School handbooks</li> <li>•Governing body policies, procedures, and practices</li> <li>•Communications to stakeholder about policy revisions</li> <li>•Staff handbooks</li> <li>•Student handbooks</li> </ul>	3
2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•List of assigned staff for compliance</li> <li>•Proof of legal counsel</li> <li>•Governing body minutes relating to training</li> <li>•Historical compliance data</li> <li>•Governing body training plan</li> <li>•Governing body policies on roles and responsibilities, conflict of interest</li> <li>•Governing code of ethics</li> <li>•Assurances, certifications</li> <li>•Communications about program regulations</li> <li>•Communication plan to inform all staff on code of ethics, responsibilities, conflict of interest</li> <li>•Findings of internal and external reviews of compliance with laws, regulations, and policies</li> </ul>	4
2.3	The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Stakeholder input and feedback</li> <li>•Survey results regarding functions of the governing body</li> <li>•Roles and responsibilities of school leadership</li> <li>•School improvement plan developed by the school</li> <li>•Communications regarding board actions</li> <li>•Maintenance of consistent academic oversight, planning, and resource allocation</li> <li>•Agendas and minutes of meetings</li> </ul>	4



2.4	Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Examples of collaboration and shared leadership</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Examples of decisions in support of the school's continuous improvement plan</li> <li>•Examples of decisions aligned with the school's statement of purpose</li> </ul>	3
2.5	Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the school's purpose and direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Communication plan</li> <li>•Minutes from meetings with stakeholders</li> <li>•Copies of surveys or screen shots from online surveys</li> <li>•Survey responses</li> <li>•Involvement of stakeholders in a school improvement plan</li> </ul>	3
2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Examples of professional development offerings and plans tied specifically to the results from supervision and evaluation</li> <li>•Governing body policy on supervision and evaluation</li> <li>•Representative supervision and evaluation reports</li> <li>•Job specific criteria</li> </ul>	3

**Powerful Practices**

**Indicator**

1. The governing body has implemented a process to evaluate its decisions and actions to ensure they are in accordance with defined roles and responsibilities, a formally adopted code of ethics, and conflicts of interest.

2.2

South Tech Academy has fully defined all of its roles and responsibilities, and by adopting the school district codes has allowed the school to stay free of conflicts of interest.

2. Members comply with all policies, procedures, laws, and regulations and function as a cohesive unit for the benefit of effective system operation and student learning.

2.3

South Tech Academy has demonstrated a high level of utilization of policies with a high sense of integrity.

3. The governing body consistently protects, supports, and respects the autonomy of school leadership to accomplish goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations of the school. 2.4

South Tech Academy's governing body does not second-guess their leaders. It allows them to make the appropriate decisions to ensure the school operates in a manner of excellence. The stakeholders interviewed stated the governing body has been given the necessary autonomy. This was clearly evident in the presentation of the school-wide Reading Plan. The leadership team was able to implement a comprehensive plan which has been placed into action with success and with the support of the stakeholders.

4. The School's culture is characterized by collaboration and a sense of community among all stakeholders. 2.4

There is no doubt South Tech Academy uses collaboration to bring about a sense of community. It does so by utilizing learning communities which are divided up by grade levels, departmental meetings, parent meetings and office staff meetings. It is very evident the staff and stakeholders want to make sure the culture of the school is something that has everyone's full attention. This was evident when the School's Leadership Team presented an overview of the school to the External Review Team.

5. Leaders consistently and effectively communicate with various stakeholder groups, provide opportunities for stakeholders to shape decisions, solicit feedback and respond to stakeholders, work collaboratively together on school improvement efforts, and provide and support meaningful leadership roles for stakeholders. 2.5

South Tech Academy has done an excellent job of making sure all stakeholders are involved, valued, and supported. Every stakeholder interviewed stated they feel valued individually; their input was listened to and they were able to help make improvements to the school. The School's leaders went above and beyond to make sure each stakeholder had opportunities to participate in the decision-making process.

### ***Opportunities for Improvement***

### ***Indicator***

1. Most policies and practices promote effective instruction and assessment that produce equitable and challenging learning experiences for all students. Additional planning is needed among teachers of common and sequential courses to be effective. 2.1

It is recommended that the instructional team provide time and support of horizontal as well as vertical planning .

### ***Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning***

A high-quality and effective system has services, practices, and curriculum that ensure teacher effectiveness. Research has shown that an effective teacher is a key factor for learners to achieve to their highest potential and be prepared for a successful future. The positive influence an effective educator has on learning is a combination of "student motivation, parental involvement" and the "quality of leadership" (Ding & Sherman, 2006). Research also suggests that quality educators must have a variety of quantifiable and intangible characteristics, which include strong communication skills, knowledge of content, and knowledge of how to teach the content. The school's curriculum and instructional program should develop learners' skills that lead them to think about the world in complex ways (Conley, 2007) and prepare them to have knowledge that extends beyond the academic areas. In order to achieve these

goals, teachers must have pedagogical skills as well as content knowledge (Baumert et al, 2010). The acquisition and refinement of teachers' pedagogical skills occur most effectively through collaboration and professional development. These are a "necessary approach to improving teacher quality" (Colbert et al, 2008). According to Marks, Louis, & Printy (2002), school staff that engage in "active organizational learning also have higher achieving students in contrast to those that do not." Likewise, a study conducted by Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010), concluded that leadership in effective schools, "supports teachers by creating collaborative work environments." Institutional leaders have a responsibility to provide experiences, resources, and time for educators to engage in meaningful professional learning that promotes student learning and educator quality.

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process. Teachers provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations. Teachers give students feedback to improve their performance.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The school's curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide and ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning.			2.75
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
3.1	The school's curriculum provides equitable and challenging learning experiences that ensure all students have sufficient opportunities to develop learning, thinking, and life skills that lead to success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Representative samples of student work across courses</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Course schedules</li> <li>•Lesson plans</li> <li>•Posted learning objectives</li> <li>•Course descriptions</li> </ul>	3

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3.2	Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are monitored and adjusted systematically in response to data from multiple assessments of student learning and an examination of professional practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Lesson plans aligned to the curriculum</li> <li>•Standards-based report cards</li> <li>•Surveys results</li> <li>•Common assessments</li> <li>•Curriculum guides</li> <li>•A description of the systematic review process for curriculum, instruction, and assessment</li> <li>•Products – scope and sequence, curriculum maps</li> <li>•Class Walkthroughs, interviews</li> </ul>	3
3.3	Teachers engage students in their learning through instructional strategies that ensure achievement of learning expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Professional development focused on these strategies</li> <li>•Findings from supervisor walk-thrus and observations</li> <li>•Surveys results</li> <li>•Student work demonstrating the application of knowledge</li> <li>•Authentic assessments</li> </ul>	3
3.4	School leaders monitor and support the improvement of instructional practices of teachers to ensure student success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Surveys results</li> <li>•Curriculum maps</li> <li>•Documentation of collection of lesson plans and grade books</li> <li>•Administrative classroom observation protocols and logs</li> </ul>	2
3.5	Teachers participate in collaborative learning communities to improve instruction and student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Calendar/schedule of learning community meetings</li> <li>•Examples of improvements to content and instructional practice resulting from collaboration</li> <li>•Survey results</li> </ul>	2
3.6	Teachers implement the school's instructional process in support of student learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Examples of assessments that prompted modification in instruction</li> <li>•Samples of exemplars used to guide and inform student learning</li> </ul>	3

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3.7	Mentoring, coaching, and induction programs support instructional improvement consistent with the school's values and beliefs about teaching and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Personnel manuals with information related to new hires including mentoring, coaching, and induction practices</li> <li>•Professional learning calendar with activities for instructional support of new staff</li> <li>• Survey results</li> <li>•Records of meetings and walk thrus/feedback sessions</li> </ul>	3
3.8	The school engages families in meaningful ways in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's learning progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•List of varied activities and communications modes with families, e.g., info portal, online, newsletters, parent centers, academic nights, open house, early release days</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Calendar outlining when and how families are provided information on child's progress</li> </ul>	2
3.9	The school has a formal structure whereby each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Master schedule with time for formal adult advocate structure</li> <li>•Curriculum and activities of formal adult advocate structure</li> <li>•List of students matched to adult advocate</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Description of formal adult advocate structures</li> </ul>	3
3.10	Grading and reporting are based on clearly defined criteria that represent the attainment of content knowledge and skills and are consistent across grade levels and courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sample report cards for each grade level and for all courses</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Policies, processes, and procedures on grading and reporting</li> <li>•Samples communications to stakeholders about grading and reporting</li> <li>•Evaluation process for grading and reporting practices</li> </ul>	3
3.11	All staff members participate in a continuous program of professional learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Evaluation tools for professional learning</li> <li>•Brief explanation of alignment between professional learning and identified needs</li> </ul>	3

3.12	The school provides and coordinates learning support services to meet the unique learning needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Data used to identify unique learning needs of students</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•List of learning support services and student population served by such services</li> </ul>	3
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**Powerful Practices**

**Indicator**

1. South Tech Academy provides students many opportunities for success upon graduation.

3.1

The merging of core academics and career academies, with students graduating from the same school with diplomas and industry certifications is an outstanding model of modern educational practices.

2. South Tech Academy has undertaken many changes over the recent past history, and in doing so has grown a culture of close interaction with students and their families.

3.9

The school's teachers and staff know and respect their students and work hard to provide opportunities for success. Although the school's entry criteria requires certain grade level skills, they have gone to great lengths to accept students on probationary status in an effort to assist children to overcome learning shortfalls.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

**Indicator**

1. Engaging parent participation at the high school level is challenging. This is important but especially difficult for South Tech Academy because it is not a community school and most of its students are bussed.

3.8

Although efforts are made to engage parents in the school, participation needs improvement. The Charter calls for parent volunteer contracts, but it was not evident they were effectively utilized. A task force of stakeholders can examine ways to increase participation and make recommendations going forwards.

**Standard 4: Resources and Support Systems**

Institutions, regardless of their size, need access to sufficient resources and systems of support to be able to engage in sustained and meaningful efforts that result in a continuous improvement cycle. Indeed, a study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Pan, 2003) "demonstrated a strong relationship between resources and student success...both the level of resources and their explicit allocation seem to affect educational outcomes."

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, to meet special needs, and to comply with applicable regulations. The institution employs and allocates staffs who are well qualified for their assignments. The institution provides a safe learning environment for students and staff. The institution provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The institution ensures

compliance with applicable governmental regulations.

Standard			Standard Performance Level
The school has resources and provides services that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.			2.86
Indicator		Source of Evidence	Performance Level
4.1	Qualified professional and support staff are sufficient in number to fulfill their roles and responsibilities necessary to support the school's purpose, direction, and the educational program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Assessments of staffing needs</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Policies, processes, procedures and other documentation related to the hiring, placement and retention of professional and support staff</li> <li>•Documentation of highly qualified staff</li> <li>•School budgets for the last three years</li> </ul>	3
4.2	Instructional time, material resources, and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School schedule</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Examples of efforts of school leaders to secure necessary material and fiscal resources</li> <li>•School calendar</li> <li>•Alignment of budget with school purpose and direction</li> </ul>	3
4.3	The school maintains facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, clean, and healthy environment for all students and staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Documentation of compliance with local and state inspections requirements</li> <li>•Records of depreciation of equipment</li> <li>•Documentation of emergency procedures such as fire drills, evacuation and other emergency procedures.</li> <li>•Maintenance schedules</li> <li>•Safety committee responsibilities, meeting schedules, and minutes</li> <li>•System for maintenance requests</li> </ul>	3

4.4	Students and school personnel use a range of media and information resources to support the school's educational programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Schedule of staff availability to assist students and school personnel related to finding and retrieving information</li> <li>•Data on media and information resources available to students and staff</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Budget related to media and information resource acquisition</li> </ul>	3
4.5	The technology infrastructure supports the school's teaching, learning, and operational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Assessments to inform development of technology plan</li> </ul>	2
4.6	The school provides support services to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the student population being served.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Schedule of family services, e.g., parent classes, survival skills</li> <li>•Social classes and services, e.g., bullying, character education</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Student assessment system for identifying student needs</li> <li>•Agreements with school community agencies for student-family support</li> <li>•List of support services available to students</li> </ul>	3
4.7	The school provides services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning needs of all students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Description of referral process</li> <li>•List of services available related to counseling, assessment, referral, educational, and career planning</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Budget for counseling, assessment, referral, educational and career planning</li> <li>•Description of IEP process</li> </ul>	3

**Powerful Practices**

**Indicator**

1. Guidance services are accessible to all stakeholders and highly valued.

4.1

Students, parents, and staff are keenly aware of the services available through guidance and counseling. The guidance and counseling department are seen as an intricate part of school's environment. Individual and group counseling and student recruitment practices directly impact student enrollment and graduation outcomes.



2. All stakeholders are clearly involved in school safety practices as evidenced by administrative actions, peer support, and parent observations. 4.3

The safety ambassador program, anti-bullying activities supported by all instructors, and student services surveys demonstrate safety initiatives that went beyond required actions and helped gain support of parents.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

**Indicator**

1. The use of technology for instruction in the classroom is limited. 4.5  
Evidence of needs assessments or use of technology linked to instructional practices are not evident. As part of the professional growth activities, the school can provide inservice to teachers on how to incorporate technology strategies into their daily instructional practices.

**Standard 5: Using Results for Continuous Improvement**

Systems with strong improvement processes are moving beyond anxiety about the current reality and focusing on priorities and initiatives for the future. Using results, that is, data and other information, to guide continuous improvement is key to an institution's success. A study conducted by Datnow, Park, & Wohlstetter (2007) from the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California indicated that data can shed light on existing areas of strength and weakness and also guide improvement strategies in a systematic and strategic manner (Dembo et al., 2005). The study also identified six key strategies that performance-driven systems use: (1) building a foundation for data-driven decision making; (2) establishing a culture of data use and continuous improvement; (3) investing in an information management system; (4) selecting the right data; (5) building school capacity for data-driven decision making; and (6) analyzing and acting on data to improve performance. Other research studies, though largely without comparison groups, suggested that data-driven decision making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Lafee, 2002; McIntire, 2002).

AdvancED has found through its own evaluation of best practices in 30,000 institutions around the world that a successful institution uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures. The system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine strategies to improve student performance. The institution implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained, and the institution demonstrates progress in improving student performance and institution effectiveness.

Standard		Standard Performance Level
The school implements a comprehensive assessment system that generates a range of data about student learning and school effectiveness and uses the results to guide continuous improvement.		3.0
Indicator	Source of Evidence	Performance Level

5.1	The school establishes and maintains a clearly defined and comprehensive student assessment system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Evidence that assessments are reliable and bias free</li> <li>•Brief description of student assessment system including range of data produced from standardized and local assessments on student learning and school performance</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•Documentation or description of evaluation tools/protocols</li> </ul>	3
5.2	Professional and support staff continuously collect, analyze, and apply learning from a range of data sources, including comparison and trend data about student learning, instruction, program evaluation, and organizational conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Examples of use of data to design, implement, and evaluate continuous improvement plans and apply learning</li> <li>•Survey results</li> <li>•List of data sources related to student learning, instruction, program effectiveness, and conditions that support learning</li> <li>•Written protocols and procedures for data collection and analysis</li> </ul>	3
5.3	Professional and support staff are trained in the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Professional learning schedule specific to the use of data</li> <li>•Training materials specific to the evaluation, interpretation, and use of data</li> <li>•Documentation of attendance and training related to data use</li> </ul>	3
5.4	The school engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness for and success at the next level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Examples of use of results to evaluate continuous improvement action plans</li> <li>•Agendas, minutes of meetings related to analysis of data</li> <li>•Student surveys</li> <li>•Description of process for analyzing data to determine verifiable improvement in student learning</li> </ul>	3

5.5	Leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•School quality control procedures for monitoring information about student learning, conditions that support learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals</li> <li>•Sample communications to stakeholders regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals</li> <li>•Communication plan regarding student learning, conditions that support learning, and achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders</li> </ul>	3
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**Powerful Practices**

**Indicator**

1. Leadership monitors and communicates comprehensive information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals to stakeholders.

5.5

Students and parents strongly indicated that both academic and vocational teachers frequently had data chats with them and that the teachers knew and respected them as people.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

**Indicator**

1. The Leadership Team needs to ensure that data analysis of both academic and vocations programs is an ongoing and continuous process.

5.2

Systematic processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and applying learning from all data sources (longitudinally and latitudinally) should be formalized and used consistently by staff members.

2. The school engages in a continuous process to determine verifiable improvement in student learning, including readiness and success at the next level.

5.4

Leaders are encouraged to arrange on-site visits of other schools to explore new concepts and successful programs. Leaders are encouraged to develop written systematic procedures for monitoring information about student learning, conditions that support student learning, and the achievement of school improvement goals.

## Learning Environment

Every learner should have access to an effective learning environment in which she/he has multiple opportunities to be successful. The Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT) measures the extent to which learners are in an environment that is equitable, supportive, and well-managed. An environment where high expectations are the norm and active learning takes place. It measures whether learners' progress is monitored and feedback is provided and the extent to which technology is leveraged for learning.

Observations of classrooms or other learning venues are conducted for a minimum of 20 minutes per observation. External review team members conduct multiple observations during the review process and provide ratings on 30 items based on a 4 point scale with 4=very evident, 3=evident, 2=somewhat evident, and 1=not observed. The following provides the aggregate average score across multiple observations for each of the 7 learning environments included in ELEOT.

### Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT)

<b><i>Environments</i></b>	<b><i>Level</i></b>
Enter the Equitable Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.9
Enter the High Expectations Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.2
Enter the Supportive Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.5
Enter the Active Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.4
Enter the Progress Monitoring and Feedback Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.4
Enter the Well-Managed Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	3.8
Enter the Digital Learning Environment value from the Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool (ELEOT).	2.2

## Part II: Conclusion

### Summary of the External Review

In off-site and on-site review sessions, the AdvancED External Review Team examined artifacts and evidence provided by the institution. During the on-site portion of the review, the team reviewed additional artifacts, collected and analyzed data from interviews, and conducted observations.

The external review team visited South Tech Academy in Boynton Beach, Florida, on October 17-18, 2012. The institution was thoroughly prepared and all essential artifacts were available to the team. Interviews were held with the following groups: school administration (4); school leadership team (6); teachers (8); students (11); support staff (5); parents (5); and Board members (2). The Administration's first day Power Point presentation on all of the standards was well done and provided the external review team the necessary background for beginning the on-site Standards Review process. The external review team was impressed with the openness of the staff and stakeholders and their willingness to share information. The school was clean and orderly and there was a welcoming presence everywhere we went.

The visit was well-coordinated and stakeholders gave sufficient testimony as to the functioning of the school. The school's governing board members gave detailed and knowledgeable information about its history and purpose, and students and teachers were equally prepared to give us information. Staff was on-hand to assist the team whenever needed. The school had obviously prepared well for our visit, making the review process go smoothly and providing more than adequately artifacts and information in support of meeting the Standards.

Using the evidence collected, the team engaged in dialogue and deliberations concerning the degree to which the institution met the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Indicators.

South Tech Academy has many positive aspects with regard to continuing improvement and success. It has converted from a district school to a charter which enables it to be unique and largely self-directed in terms of providing programs for students. It has a clean and more-than-adequate facility whose shortcomings, mainly lack of a cafeteria, have been identified and are in process of being corrected. It has adequate funding and is in good standing as evidenced by its independent audit findings.

One of the most important elements the external review team found was a warm and inviting learning climate where there was mutual respect among teachers and students, and parents supported the mission of the school. Staff worked cooperatively to achieve the goals of the School Improvement Plan and supported its leaders. The governing board operated efficiently and gave necessary autonomy to the administration to accomplish the mission. Wide-ranging expertise among board members added to the strengths of the school, with one member having been a school superintendent of a large district and another heading a district exceptional student education division. There was even continued participation of former parents and board members in support of the ongoing efforts of the school.

Finally, as evidenced by the school's history, past concepts and opinions regarding the school's purpose

have been changed from being a vocational and alternative educational site to a fully functioning school which graduates students with meaningful degrees including industry certifications. Continued refinement of this process and strengthening of the academic program will insure success of the mission.

During the on-site review, members of the External Review Team evaluated the learning environment by observing classrooms and general operations of the institution. Using data from these observations, the team evaluated the quality of instruction and learning that took place classified around seven constructs or environments: equity, high expectations, support, engagement, progress monitoring and feedback, management, and use of technology.

South Tech Academy has established its practices and programs beginning with the school's Charter calling for combined efforts in educating its students. Students at the Academy could, according to the Charter, get challenging quality instruction in core academic courses that allow students to advance to colleges if that is their choice. At the same time, the Academy offers career vocational complete courses in a number of areas that grant industry certification and opportunities for the world-of-work upon graduation. The concept is proven and beneficial, and it is clear that the Academy is well on its way to becoming a model of the concept. Career Academies were in place and core course offerings were adequate. The school, in keeping with its Charter requirements, did not try to represent all things to all people, and in doing so could concentrate on using its resources to maintain certain quality standards. While improvements and increased expectations are necessary, the external review team saw the emergence of an independent school anxious to determine its own future.

Students, in general, want to be at the school. Staff, in general, want to be at the school and seem amenable to improvement. There is a wholesome and supportive learning environment. Entry qualifications to the Academy are such that students should possess certain basic skills prior to enrollment. Support services are more than adequate to meet success. Learning data are widely available and examined. There is adequate and ongoing monitoring of the classes and feedback to students and staff regarding their learning/teaching processes. In summary, the school provides a good learning environment for its students.

Needed areas of improvement include staff training in differentiated instruction, which, if initiated, will help with catching up almost a third of the student body who are below grade level in reading skills. In addition, teachers need encouragement to include the latest technology in their instructional practices. For example, most of those observed were not using electronic textbooks to supplement instruction, nor were they proficient in utilizing computerized learning stations in the classroom to facilitate differentiating instruction. Another area which seemed lacking was the interaction between the core classroom teachers and the career academy teachers. There are vast opportunities for coordinating the two and using interdisciplinary approaches to further instruction. These include common planning opportunities, cooperative teaching sessions, using technology such as video conferencing to connect the classes, comprehensive subject selection done by career academy, and allowing students to bring laptops or tablets to class for instructional purposes.

The external review team's visit to South Tech Academy was very positive. We were welcomed by an enthusiastic group of educators who seem to be proud of their school and willing to commit to a process

of continued improvement. After years of being a district school and not having a lot of autonomy to make changes, they are beginning to understand their role as a true charter school and striving to make good use of it.

Kathryn McInerney was the school's Review Coordinator and did an outstanding job of preparing for our visit and coordinating the activities. President and Chief Executive Officer Jim Kidd and his Principal, Myron Cost, were very helpful in providing a history of the school and addressing every need of the Review Team. Other leaders - Eileen Turenne, Maria Rosado, and Debbie Bucholtz - were equally supportive and candid, and also provided much help during the review.

In conclusion, the External Review Team felt that South Tech Academy was on the cusp of creating a new identity for itself, one which reflects the tenants of the school's charter and provides quality education for all of its students. The willingness of the staff and stakeholders to commit to an ongoing process of continuous improvement, and the gains already made by the school in accomplishing the mission and goals of the school help serve as evidence that they will be successful in accordance with the AdvancEd Standards.

Based on the evidence collected in the report, The external review team recommends the granting of a new five-year term of accreditation by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

## **Required Actions**

1. The team did not observe differentiated instruction in any class. With a student population that indicates that over one third are reading below grade level, this teaching strategy is essential for improvement

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.3

Implement a comprehensive program to utilize differentiated instruction in all classes, including teacher training, modeling, monitoring, and evaluating practices.

2. The teachers observed did not demonstrate the utilization of technology in their instructional strategies or practices.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.4

Incorporate technology into the instructional practices of all teachers including use of computers, smartboards, on-line textbooks, on-line references, and interactive software.

3. Career Academies and core instructional programs operate in separate communities rather than integrated programs within the school. By combining the curriculum and creating interdisciplinary projects, the school can improve the effectiveness of its instruction and the performance of its students. Small learning communities evolve but are not organized or structured.

Primary Indicator or Assurance: 3.5

Integrate the Career Academies and academic curricula to insure continuity of instruction and expectations.



## Part III: Addenda

### *Next Steps*

The institution should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the Powerful Practices section to maximize their impact on the institution.
3. Develop action plans to address the Required Actions made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the Required Actions.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the institution's efforts to improve student performance and system effectiveness.
5. Following the External Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the Required Actions. Institutions are required to respond to all Required Actions. The Required Actions should be completed before the Accreditation Progress Report is submitted. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to monitor and ensure that the system has implemented the necessary actions to complete the Required Actions. The accreditation status will be reviewed and acted upon based on the completion of the Required Actions and the resulting improvement.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

### *Celebrating Accreditation*

Following the External Review, the Team submits the final report to AdvancED for review and for action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and upon the institution. Upon receiving its accreditation, the institution should share its achievement with internal and external communities.

### *About AdvancED*

In 2006, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), both founded in 1895, along with the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form AdvancED: one strong, unified organization dedicated to education quality. In 2011, the Northwest Accreditation Commission (founded 1917) joined NCA CASI and SACS CASI as part of AdvancED. AdvancED is the world's largest education community, representing 30,000 public and private schools and systems across the United States and in 75 countries worldwide and educating 16 million students. The Northwest Accreditation Commission joined the AdvancED network in 2011.

Today, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI, NWAC, and SACS CASI share research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help educational institutions continuously improve.