

**Report of the
Quality Assurance Review Team
for
Westhill Institute**

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North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) are accreditation divisions of AdvancED.

Quality Assurance Review Report

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About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

Background. Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) accredit public and private schools and districts in 30 states, the Navajo Nation, Latin America, and the Department of Defense Schools worldwide.

In April 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), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) came together to form one strong unified organization dedicated to education quality. That unified organization, known as AdvancED, creates the world's largest education community, representing 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 65 countries worldwide and educating 15 million students.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help schools continuously improve.

The Accreditation Process. To earn and maintain accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, schools must:

- 1) Meet the AdvancED Standards and Policies for Quality Schools.** Schools demonstrate adherence to the AdvancED standards and policies which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.
- 2) Engage in continuous improvement.** Schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose the school is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results).
- 3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.** Schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, schools host an external Quality Assurance Review Team once every five years. The team evaluates the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and required actions to help the school improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school and a written report detailing the team's required actions. The school acts on the team's required actions and submits a progress report following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help schools be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

Purpose. The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

1. Evaluate the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and policies.
2. Assess the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and required actions to improve the school.
4. Make an accreditation recommendation for review by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

A key aim of the Quality Assurance Review is to verify that the school is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

School Preparation. To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school community engages in an in-depth self-assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that it is meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school effectiveness.

Summary of Team Activities. The Quality Assurance Review Team is led by an AdvancED certified team chair and comprised of professionals from outside the school. The team reviews the findings of the school's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school's adherence to the standards for accreditation. The team provides an oral exit report and prepares a written Quality Assurance Review Team Report designed to help the school improve.

The Quality Assurance Review Team Report. Following the visit, the review team completes the Quality Assurance Review report. After review by a nationally-trained reader, the report is submitted to the school. The report contains commendations and required actions for improvement.

Using the Report - Responding to the Required Actions. The school uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school is held accountable for addressing the required actions identified in the report. The NCA CASI/SACS CASI State Office is available to assist schools in addressing the required actions. At prescribed intervals, the school must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress the school has made on the team's required actions. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school is addressing the required actions.

Accreditation Recommendation. The Quality Assurance Review Team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed at the state level and by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school following action from the commission.

Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the SACS CASI International (SACS-CASI-INTL), a division of AdvancED, visited the Westhill Institute in Mexico City, null, Mexico on 04/17/2010 - 04/21/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 5 members of the administrative team, 23 students, 24 parents, and 22 teachers. In addition, 23 board members and support staff members were interviewed. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

1. Vision and Purpose
2. Governance and Leadership
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Documenting and Using Results
5. Resource and Support Systems
6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems within a school and systematic methods of attaining high student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of the standards lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards. The Quality Assurance Review Team used the AdvancED standards to guide its review of the school, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics of a quality school.

Through its examination of the school's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following commendations and required actions.

Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review Team commends the school for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted.

- **High levels of student and parent satisfaction are generated due to the school's focus on inclusion, values, teacher dedication, and recent school improvement initiatives.**

Survey data and interviews with parents and students evidenced high levels of satisfaction with teacher efforts to meet student needs, the school's philosophy on inclusion, the school's commitment to a well-articulated set of values, and recent school improvement initiatives focused on improvement in student learning and school effectiveness..

High stakeholder satisfaction levels sustain a culture of warmth to and loyalty for the institution which presents a positive image of the school to the larger Westhill Institute community and will generate enthusiasm for and commitment to school improvement initiatives.

- **The school provides and maintains a safe and superior facility for use by all stakeholders that facilitates student learning and a culture of pride in the school.**

Observations, visits to classrooms, and interviews with all stakeholders including support personnel, demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with and pride in the facility.

A well-appointed and purpose-built educational facility provides students and teachers the most favorable environment for teaching and learning.

Required Actions

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review Team identified the following required actions for improvement. The team focused its required actions on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall school effectiveness. The school will be held accountable for addressing each of the required actions noted in this section. Following this review, the school will be asked to submit a progress report on these required actions.

- **Develop, adopt, and implement a comprehensive set of board-adopted policies.**

Interviews with board members and the headmaster confirmed that a board policy manual does not exist.

Comprehensive and clearly articulated board policies provide decision-making guidance for school administration and are essential for effective school management.

- **Develop a comprehensive PreK-12 assessment system to effectively inform instruction and curriculum development and to meet the needs of all students. In addition, provide professional development to maximize teachers' understanding and use of data.**

During interviews with faculty and administrators and a review of artifacts it was apparent to the QAR Team that some data are collected for assessing student progress, but the data are limited and the results are not always used to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum initiatives or to determine interventions to improve student performance.

An assessment system that yields accurate information and is utilized effectively by appropriately trained staff members enables a school to facilitate sustainable improvement.

- **Develop, adopt, and implement a comprehensive curriculum for students with special needs.**

School-provided data verified that a high percentage of special needs students attend Westhill Institute and that a curriculum specifically designed for special needs students was not evident.

A comprehensive curriculum for all students provides clearly articulated standards and benchmarks to facilitate student learning and achievement.

- **Generate and analyze data and develop a plan to improve the retention rate of all staff members including foreign-hire teachers.**

Stakeholder interviews and a review of data verified low staff retention rates, particularly among the

foreign-hire faculty.

Initiatives designed to improve student learning and school effectiveness are much more sustainable with a stable employee base and with faculty who have been on staff for several years

- **Create a marketing plan to promote community awareness about Westhill Institute, its programs, facilities, and inclusive environment.**

Declining student enrollment in recent years has resulted in underutilized facilities with low, and in some cases very low, student/teacher ratios. This was particularly evident on the Santa Fe campus.

Optimal utilization of the superior Westhill Institute facilities by increasing student enrollment will result in more dynamic classroom teaching and learning opportunities and will increase the school's revenue base.

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools: The team reviewed the school's adherence to each of the AdvancED standards. The findings from this review are provided in the next section of this report.

Next Steps

The school 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 commendations section to maximize their impact on the school.
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 school's efforts to improve student performance and school effectiveness.
5. Following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the required actions. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the required actions. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork, provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help schools with their improvement efforts. Available any where, any time, the network can be queried for information on a variety of school improvement subjects. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides research, handbooks, and tools to assist schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for more information on the range of resources available to you.

Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review Team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED

for state review and for action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school should celebrate its achievement with the school community. The SACS-CASI-INTL accreditation seals are available at www.advanc-ed.org/communicationskit for accredited schools and districts to post on their website and to use in school communications. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and lapel pins are also available and can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

Summary

The accreditation process engages the school in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the strengths and address the required actions noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.

Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the Westhill Institute demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

Standard 1. Vision and Purpose

Standard: The school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Westhill Institute has established a clear mission based on four controlling ideas: inspiring students to contribute to a global community; cultivating an inclusive environment; providing a meaningful education that fosters lifelong academic excellence; and stressing core ethical values. Through its vision, the school aspires to be “at the vanguard of educational practice.” Both the mission and vision were originally written in 2007 and reviewed in 2009 in collaboration with the school’s stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, and administrators; however, support services personnel were not involved in the process. Although this effort was shared, the school has not sought supplementary ratification from the larger community through surveys or other instruments, thereby forgoing an opportunity to further enhance both the mission’s and vision’s expression of the school’s essence. The school has done an exemplary job of disseminating the mission and vision to the community. Posted in the corridors (in English only) and classrooms, included in communications from the school, and incorporated in school publications, including the yearbook, it’s hard to miss the mission and vision and the opportunity to enhance the community’s understanding and support of it.

Although staff responses to their integration of the mission and vision in teaching and learning were sometimes vague, the school has established several methods for advancing the mission and vision through activities carried out on both campuses. Character education is an important part of promoting students’ participation in a global community, cultivating an inclusive environment, and stressing core values. The Character Counts program (focusing on the core values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship), Westhill Day, and Westhill Cares all allow students to recognize and accept differences; in addition, the school’s commitment to special needs students creates an opportunity for students to work with and accept the individual differences of others. Their current school improvement plan (SIP) emphasizes academic excellence through the revitalization of the school’s curriculum and focus on Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing, which allows for the differentiation of instruction and the ability to work more successfully with both high and low achieving students. Teaching and learning is also guided by the mission and vision. Utilizing a modified Understanding by Design (UbD) lesson plan format, the areas of “Big Ideas,” the “Six Facets of Understanding,” “values education,” and “AdvancED SACS-CASI Quality Education Standards” echo the components of the mission and vision. Activities and curriculum choices are also driven by the mission and vision. For staff members, professional development has been made available to help with connecting these important elements of the school’s philosophy and practice.

The school's profile is updated annually by the headmaster and the School Improvement Council (SIC). Most used for those applying to universities, the profile contains the mission and vision, principal members of the administration, the school's accreditations, information about the school and academic programs, graduation requirements, a list of AP courses available at the school, a curriculum overview, grading and ranking procedures, past university attendance, and athletic programs available at the school. A new database under construction, WestNet, will contain all student and demographic data, including test results, in one database, allowing for staff and parents to access this information through one interface.

Teacher comments addressed the need to review the mission and vision on a regular basis, and there are plans to do so yearly. The SIC already has a list of recommendations for the end of the current academic year. Seeking to include several of the changes in direction the school has undergone the last two years, the modifications for the mission, vision, and beliefs will also include more data-driven statements and quantifiable goals.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The mission, vision, and beliefs are disseminated throughout the school and community.
- The mission, vision, and beliefs are integrated into the lesson planning process.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Develop a quantifiable mission, vision, and set of beliefs.
- Seek ways to solicit feedback from the entire community of stakeholders about the mission, vision, and beliefs.
- Post the mission, vision, and beliefs in Spanish.

Finding: Westhill Institute has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 2. Governance and Leadership

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

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The Westhill Institute board consists of seven members and includes parents, alumni, the school owner, and past and present headmasters. The board meets monthly to discuss issues facing the school. Stakeholders normally present at board meetings, in addition to board members, include the principal of the Carpatos campus, assistant principals, directors of the Mexico Ministry of Public Education – Mexico (Secretaria de Educacion Publica -- SEP) program, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) leadership. A student-learning related presentation by a faculty member has become a recently implemented monthly addition to board agendas.

The QAR Team's review of artifacts and interviews with the board and headmaster verified that a board policy manual does not exist. A board manual consisting of internal operational standards and responsibilities for board members is in place. School operational procedures are evident and cross-

referenced in student, faculty, and parent handbooks. Interviews with members of the board and the headmaster validate adherence to the best-practice principle that recognizes and preserves the executive, administrative, and leadership prerogatives to the administrative head of the school. The board and headmaster ensure the school is in compliance with applicable local rules and regulations.

The school's leadership team consists of the headmaster, assistant headmaster, curriculum coordinator, the Carpatos campus principal, the Santa Fe campus principal, and the middle/high school principal for the Santa Fe campus. Additional administration personnel include an assistant principal on each campus, the SEP coordinator for each campus, a dean of students on the Santa Fe campus and the SEP/UNAM coordinator for the middle/high school on the Santa Fe campus. The administration team meets weekly to review school events, activities, and other important details about school life as well as to review improvement initiatives. It was noted that several administrators and a large percentage of teachers are in their first year at the school and that the retention rate for foreign-hire faculty is low.

Sub-committees of the SIC meet on a regular basis and are tasked with monitoring and reporting progress on the four elements of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and on school effectiveness in general. These elements include the following: increase student performance in all content areas, reduce achievement gaps of special needs students, improve professional development, and improve perception and communication among stakeholders. The SIC reviews status reports submitted by the sub-committees and then shares this information with the board.

School leadership fosters a learning community and stakeholder satisfaction by encouraging stakeholder participation in the decision-making process, by allocating sufficient funds to support the learning process as well as professional development, and by scheduling and promoting community-wide events such as Westhill Day. The school also encourages community service with its Westhill Cares program.

Student comments during interviews evidenced their participation in the school's decision-making processes and opportunities to lead within the Student Council and as class representatives as well as by inclusion on SIC sub-committees. During interviews parents validated monthly PTA meetings are scheduled and that parent participation on SIC sub-committees facilitate parent input on school improvement initiatives. Teachers also provided evidence that appropriate and significant opportunities exist for participation in the decision-making process. Additionally, parents, teachers, and students have multiple and continuous opportunities to impact decision-making and school improvement through response to surveys, open-door policies in effect for all administrative staff, and attendance at regularly scheduled meetings for these respective stakeholder groups. It was also confirmed through interviews that members of most stakeholder groups participated in the revision of the vision and mission statements and serve on the SIC and the newly configured sub-committees addressing the four SIP elements.

The school's extra-curricular athletic program is administered by school personnel and consists of the following activities: basketball, volleyball, soccer, and swimming. During student interviews a high level of satisfaction with the program was expressed by the male students, however, the female students expressed a concern the male program received preferential treatment in terms of resource allocation and scheduling. The students also expressed that a lack of late bus service contributed to a lower than desired participation rate.

The QAR Team's review of files and data verified that an employee evaluation system is in place that is aligned with the school vision, mission, and beliefs and aligned with the professional development plan, and that also informs instructional strategies and curriculum development. Professional staff are evaluated on an annual basis, the results of which are utilized to facilitate professional growth. Support staff are evaluated informally by the support staff manager and are provided feedback on job performance.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- All stakeholder groups are included in the decision-making process.
- Open communication with parents is encouraged by maintaining an open door policy for administrators and teachers.
- The school generates a high level of student and parent satisfaction.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Develop and adopt a comprehensive board policy manual.
- Evaluate the school's athletic program to ensure equal access for both female and male students and to evaluate the transportation needs for student athletes.
- Conduct an in-depth analysis and review data related to low foreign-hire faculty retention rates and develop a plan to address this pattern.
- Implement a formal evaluation system for support staff including elements to guide professional growth.

Finding: Westhill Institute has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 3. Teaching and Learning

Standard: The school provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Westhill Institute provides students with access to both a Mexican national curriculum program and an American curriculum program. The national program is guided by the SEP, follows the Mexican educational standards, and is taught in Spanish. Students who enroll in the SEP program attend a half day of classes in the national curricular program and attend half day of classes in the American curricular program. The school also offers a complete American curriculum program for non-nationals, delivered in English, which utilizes American curricular standards. The school does identify itself as a tri-lingual school offering a complete language course of studies in Spanish, English and French.

The curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment protocols are now in the process of significant improvement as reported during interviews with the curriculum director. He indicated the following changes and/or additions have been or are in the process of being implemented:

- Massachusetts Academic Content Standards (MACS) in grades K-12
- Core Knowledge Sequence (CKS) in grades K-9
- Problem-based Learning (PBL) in grades 1-12
- Understanding by Design Unit Planning (UbD) – all grades
- Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) in grades 1-12
- Benchmark Semester Exams (BSE) in grades 1-12
- Additional AP Courses (AP) in grades 10-12

In 2009, the school adopted and implemented the CKS along with the MACS. During interviews with teachers and administrators, the staff indicated that both the CKS and the MACS will provide them with a more standardized benchmarking system than the previous teacher-designed curriculum (each teacher creating their own benchmarks and expectations). A review of artifacts validated the fact K-12 staff have already adopted a curriculum framework that is based on the Massachusetts standards and the CKS.

During interviews with staff and students it was expressed that teachers do include students in the teaching and learning process. As an example, students are encouraged to determine benchmark-focused topics of study within content areas. Students then research topic concepts, contribute to classroom instruction, and implement assessments protocols within guidelines provided by the teacher. Students also reported during their interview session they are given the opportunity to select the method of assessment that best suits their individual learning styles, assist teachers in teaching concepts by researching and developing peer lesson plans, and are encouraged to form problem-solving work groups. During classroom observations it was also noted teachers used problem-based learning strategies that promote critical thinking and employed inquiry-based approaches to teaching and learning.

Teachers reported during interviews they use the MAP test results for grouping students. Teachers also review student testing data to evaluate effectiveness of classroom instruction and to guide curriculum and instructional strategy modifications. For example, if a majority of students have demonstrated mastery of a concept as determined by MAP testing data, that concept would be omitted from the lesson for those who demonstrated mastery and retained for those who have not. Teachers shared they have yet to initiate team planning to analyze data across grade levels (vertically) or within their own grade level groups (horizontally). Teachers and administrators indicated during interviews that the school plans to provide in-service meetings to review CKS and MAC documents and to determine how they can be used to facilitate vertical articulation. Teacher will also develop interdisciplinary teams to facilitate horizontal articulation. Currently, this is being accomplished through informal discussions between teachers in the hall or at lunch times.

Classroom observations confirmed that the researched-based model of PBL was being practiced by some teachers. Teachers were observed facilitating learning groups in which students were actively engaged in cooperative problem solving and subsequently presented their findings. The school's Standards Assessment Report (SAR) indicated that staff will continue participating in PBL professional development over the next two years. This is also an element of the SIP..

The school has adopted the UbD lesson planning model for teacher planning, and staff report that they have been provided with initial appropriate training. According to interviews with the curriculum director and a review of the SAR, the training and further development of this lesson planning technique will continue over the course of the next two years.

Board members indicated that the school was the first of its kind in Mexico City to offer educational services to children with special needs, and the school's vision and mission statements speak to providing an inclusive environment that fosters lifelong academic excellence while providing a global framework of education to meet the needs of its international multicultural clientele. Students report they feel that the community at large promotes equality and appreciation of diversity and that people are accepted for who they are at Westhill Institute. It was reported by parents and teachers that the school strives to meet the needs of the identified children and provide a safe, inclusive, supportive environment.

The school offers Advanced Placement classes as well as honors level courses to promote academic excellence and to meet the needs of high achievers. Students who have other special needs are provided

opportunities for inclusion with their peers in most of their classes. The school has nine special needs support staff that service approximately 80 students across all grade levels at both campuses. Interviews with support staff indicate they support the special needs students by offering resource programming (pull out), inclusive programming (co-teaching or support teaching within mainstream classes), and consultative programming (providing support for teachers in the mainstream classrooms). Teachers indicated they do not have a prescribed research-based curriculum that supports the needs of these students and that they modify or adapt the current curriculum. Girl Power and Westhill Silent Day evidence inclusion and are embedded within classroom activities and lessons. Girl Power is a learning unit in which students research women in key areas of leadership, such as Ambassadors to Mexico from various countries and business leaders in Mexico who are women. Westhill Silence Day is a day to recognize the students with same gender preferences. A review of lesson plans also indicated the inclusion of cultural activities and global integration of concepts which promote appreciation of diversity. The school also promotes responsible behaviors and positive social skills through the Character Counts program.

It was observed and reported in the student interviews that students have opportunities to meet with administration and teachers to express concerns or obtain extra support facilitated by an open door policy for both teachers and administrators. It was not evident, however, that a comprehensive guidance and counseling program that includes college and career counseling as well as social and emotional counseling is provided to the student body. Students indicated during interviews that they would appreciate help in planning for college and more consistency in obtaining their transcripts and all documents from the school needed for college applications. Additionally, students reported that they have not used their science labs as frequently as necessary in order to meet science program requirements. Finally, students reported that significant and positive changes have been evident concerning attitudes and actions in providing the needed technology, instructional supplies, and support.

The media center is equipped with more than 10,000 volumes of books that are catalogued using the Dewey Decimal System, EBSCO (an online library), and online Encyclopedia Britannica. Teachers schedule time to utilize the media center for curriculum delivery, unit-focused student research, student study groups, and book check-out. The media specialist indicated she works collaboratively with teaching staff to provide books and other resources, such as journal articles, DVDs, or magazine references to support teaching and learning. Staff members have been trained in using EBSCO and Encyclopedia Britannica for classroom instruction and student research.

The school has committed to making technology a viable teaching and learning tool in every classroom. To that end classrooms are being equipped with LCD projectors and laptops with speakers to enable multimedia presentation capability. Approximately half the classrooms on the Santa Fe campus have been outfitted with LCD projectors and laptops with the remainder of classrooms scheduled for technology purchase and installation. The Carpatos campus does not have computers in each class nor were LCD projectors installed at the time of the QAR visit. Staff at the Santa Fe campus use DVDs for instructional purposes and utilize video beam projectors for web-based curriculum delivery. Each classroom on the Santa Fe campus is hard-wired for internet access, and both the Carpatos and Santa Fe campuses have wireless access.

In an effort to provide comprehensive academic and athletic activities during after school hours, the elementary staff at the Santa Fé Campus has developed and participate in an after-school program for all students in grades pre-kindergarten through grade six. This program is in effect Monday through Friday from 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. for students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and from 3:30 – 4:30 pm for children in grade one through six. Classes included in the after school program include swimming, volleyball, soccer, basketball, robotics, chess club, and homework club. During interviews students expressed that they would appreciate late bus services which would facilitate their participating in the

program. Girls also expressed a desire for more athletic options.

Teachers reported administrative staff have made improvements to protect instructional time. Teachers also reported that special assemblies and other events are scheduled into the school calendar and shared with the staff and that the administrative team also refrains from making announcements over the PA system during the school day.

The school distributes surveys to staff, parents, and students in order to mine data that will guide plans to improve learning and school effectiveness. A review of surveys indicated that the school has been making efforts to improve many elements of operations including administrative practices, curriculum, technology, support services, and student activities.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- A variety of teaching methodologies is to facilitate learning.
- The school maintains a positive learning environment which promotes inclusion, collaboration, risk-taking, and support.
- Changes to teaching and learning are being implemented.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Provide professional development opportunities in special education strategies for those staffing the special needs department.
- Ensure classroom instructors receive sufficient support in addressing the needs of students who are learning challenged.
- Formulate and utilize standardized procedures for in-school referrals to the guidance program for middle and high school program.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive special needs curriculum.
- Staff the special needs department with personnel who are trained to meet the requirements of special needs students.

Finding: Westhill Institute has earned the overall assessment level of "Emerging" and has not met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results

Standard: The school enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Westhill Institute recently initiated use of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test as the primary standardized performance measure for student learning. The MAP test (language arts, reading, math, and science) provides timely information to staff and students keyed to the school's curriculum, allowing teachers to determine the academic level of students with regards to the curriculum and provide either additional support or enrichment for those students so identified. Additionally, the MAP results allow teachers to select teaching strategies, differentiation

methods, and ability groupings within their classroom instruction. In the classroom, MAP testing provides teachers with clear feedback on the curriculum to determine areas within the curricular standards that need further emphasis or which may be omitted. The MAP test is reliable, valid and bias-free and was developed based on clear educational research by the NWEA. In addition to this standardized test, teachers use a variety of other assessments, including problem-based projects, standard multiple choice and essay tests, and, in the future, benchmark testing (in language arts, math, science and social studies). Other examples of performance measures used include portfolios, homework and class activities, and summative and formative exams. Finally, high school students are encouraged to take the AP, PSAT, and SAT, and 8th grade students sit for the ENLACE (Evaluación Nacional del Logro Académico en Centros Escolares), a Mexican governmental exam.

Although MAP offers a plethora of information for the school, it is not comprehensive enough to meet the total expectations for special needs students as they may require additional standardized or other testing protocols to provide a better understanding and measure of their academic, social, and emotional growth.

The teaching staff was given a day long workshop on implementing and interpreting MAP data by Dr. Robert Nation (NWEA representative) in the fall of 2009. One additional workshop on statistical analysis and interpretation was hosted by a parent at the school who is recognized as an expert in the field of statistics.

The data derived from the MAP test allows the teaching staff to make decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning by developing strategies to fill in gaps in the curriculum and eliminate overlap in their lesson planning and teaching. In addition, teachers are able to establish learning goals for each subject that provide students greater direction in their learning. Already, several changes to the curriculum are planned, including

- additional science period for elementary classes,
- a transitional math course from grades two to three and five to six,
- greater integration between math and English and math and Spanish,
- implementation of a writing across the curriculum workshop,
- purchase of the Everyday Math textbook series,
- use of Open Court Reading,
- reorganization of math classes based on skill level rather than grade,
- a cross-grade skill level specific program in both math and English in middle and high school to remediate school-wide weaknesses, and
- placement of students in grades seven through nine based on skill rather than grade.

Other than how teachers are currently using the data, the changes in curriculum and structure are planned for the future and are not currently being implemented 100%. For now, teachers are relying on traditional assessment methods mentioned earlier to successfully monitor expectations for student learning.

Given the current state of MAP testing and analysis at the school, teachers are not conducting a systematic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness based on this data to improve student performance. However, the school plans on establishing a student information system called WestNet which will allow for a systematic analysis of testing and other data. Analysis of classroom assessments is also somewhat haphazard and dependent upon the willingness of teachers across grade or subject levels to meet and then articulate and analyze student results.

The school provides several opportunities for parents to be informed about their children's progress. Report cards are distributed five times per year and a parent /guardian is required to pick up the report card

thus making contact with the school. In addition, all administrators and teachers have an open door policy, and parents stated that many take advantage of this opportunity to meet with their child's teachers or administrative staff even more regularly. Furthermore, the school has established a clear vehicle through which both the results of MAP tests and the significance of those results are made available to stakeholders. These include parent conferences in which specific concepts and activities that students need to pursue are shared in order for parents to support the learning process. Parents who were interviewed were clearly impressed with the test, the result presentation, and the opportunity to be involved in their children's education. Students, as well, were supposed to receive scores from the relevant instructor; however during interviews, many expressed the fact that this did not take place. Finally, newsletters were sent to the community that shared general results from the MAP testing.

Although the school plans on offering the MAP test three times per year, it had only been given once as of the QAR visit. The MAP test itself does provide comparison data but only from all those students who take the test world-wide and not just comparable schools. With further testing, trend data will be available for teachers and students, but neither comparison nor trend data is available at the school at this time. There was no evidence that the mining of comparison and trend data for traditional assessments is taking place.

The school has concrete plans to continue using the MAP test protocol to demonstrate verifiable growth in students' performance. In fact, it is part of the long-range plan. However, as only one MAP test has been given, it is impossible to demonstrate growth at this time. Nevertheless, traditional classroom assessments continue to be used to measure growth in student performance as witnessed in reviews of sample curricular assessments, lesson plans, and problem-based project outcomes.

Upon examination of student records, it was apparent that student records are aligned with national regulations. In fact, all records must be submitted to the Ministerio de Educacion every grading period (five times a year).

Although Westhill Institute has significant plans for the use of MAP testing in the future, the school is currently relying on the results of one test and the traditional classroom assessments that have always been used by the staff.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- A holistic solution (curriculum, standardized testing, benchmarking) for assessment through the use of the MAP test has been adopted.
- A professional development plan for all staff to facilitate meeting assessment goals has been created.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Adopt additional forms of standardized assessment to meet the needs of the entire student population.
- Provide opportunities for staff to fully understand and utilize assessment data to drive decision making.
- Further develop the school's assessment protocols to ensure that a comprehensive school-wide assessment system, which meets the needs of all students, is in place.

Finding: Westhill Institute has earned the overall assessment level of "Emerging" and has not met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems

Standard: The school has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The Santa Fe campus is situated in the west section of the city and is comprised of three buildings, two of which house the elementary and middle school/high school. The third building houses the university which is not part of this accreditation review. Both buildings are identical and have 4,297 square meters of floor space. Each includes handicap access, 43 classrooms, an elevator, a cafeteria, a library with 10,000 volumes, a nurse's office, computer lab, an open air amphitheater, and an underground gymnasium adjacent to an olympic size pool. The Carpatos campus houses another K through grade six program, and this building has 2,320 square meters of floor space. This facility includes 32 classrooms, a library, a computer lab, a cafeteria, a basketball court, and a playground.

The maintenance department for both campuses is staffed with 25 employees, and there are ample funds available for all repairs and to implement the long-range maintenance plan according to the maintenance coordinator. Stakeholders unanimously agreed that both sites are safe, and that safety is facilitated by closed campuses with 24 hours security, a security staff of 21, a public address system, bombproof mylar windows, and 100 security cameras purchased through a grant from the U.S. Embassy. In fact, there hasn't been a security-related incident at Westhill Institute in 13 years. All stakeholders interviewed from both campuses validated that the facilities clearly meet the needs of the educational program and also offer room for growth.

The school employs a professional staff that is adequate in number to fully implement a curriculum that enables students to meet their own personal expectations as well as school-wide expectations for student learning. As evidenced through the review of documentation, personnel files, and the faculty assignment lists, teachers are assigned to specific teacher positions based on their academic preparation, appropriate degrees, certifications, and previous teaching experience. In regard to the special needs department, however, there is not a sufficient number of certified special education teachers to meet the needs of the large percentage of special education students who attend the school. A clear distinction should be made between the roles of certified special education teachers, psychologists, and counselors. Additionally, in the meeting with the students, it was pointed out that many of this year's seniors had received little or no help in searching for and applying to American colleges and universities. Most of the seniors in attendance also felt that they had not received sufficient help in applying for scholarships. According to the students, the only help they did receive came from teachers at the expense of the teacher's planning time.

Westhill Institute has established a diversified professional development program that is responsive to the needs of the faculty and to the school. Twenty-three faculty members are enrolled in the masters degree program at Endicott College, and the school contributes to the tuition and enrollment fees for the teachers. Other faculty members are enrolled in online college courses that will enhance their teaching skills. The school funds all costs for online courses. Teachers who do not possess a master's degree are required to complete 120 hours of professional development over a three year period. The school also schedules and funds in-house staff development during the school year which takes place on campus after classes finish on shortened days.

Maintaining a low student/teacher ratio is a guiding principle of the school. The trigger point to create two classes from one is 1:13 in prekindergarten and kindergarten, 1:15 in grades one through six, and 1:22 in grades seven through twelve. Currently, due to a drop in enrollment, many of the classes are much smaller than the maximum allowed.

The school's budget meets yearly operational expenses as well funding for school improvement initiatives. Budgetary planning for the 2009-2010 year includes costs for improvements in the science labs, library and media resources, classroom technology hardware and software, other classroom improvements, and online subscriptions. Staff members validated the resources available are sufficient to meet teaching and learning requirements and that staff members are generally able to request and receive additional items as needed. Although the number of students on both campuses has dropped by almost 30% over the last 5 years (the school currently has an enrollment of 642 students), the school maintains a balanced budget and it appears a 2.13% budget surplus will be realized at the end of the 2009-2010 school year. Additionally, the school has a sizeable reserve fund in the event of an unexpected cash requirement. The annual budget is managed on site by the director of finance and the school's finances are audited annually by RJB y Asociados S.C., an external accounting firm. The only source of revenue to fund the budget is derived from payment of tuition.

There are written security and crisis management plans for fire, earthquakes and other emergencies in place. Responsibilities have been assigned to staff, teachers, administrators, maintenance, librarians, secretaries, the nurse, and members of the administration. Drills are conducted at least once a month at the Santa Fe campus and biweekly at the Carpatos campus. The U.S. Embassy also conducts annual security visits at both campuses to review security procedures and offer advice.

The school has recently invested in installing video beams and laptops classrooms to facilitate teaching and learning. The three computer labs on both campuses presently meet basic staff and student instructional requirements. Teachers, students and staff members did all feel, however, that the need for further improvements should be evaluated including improved bandwidth and completion of video beam purchase and installation plans. The staff also felt technical support at school could be improved.

The stakeholders feel strongly that their special needs program is a distinguishing factor for their school. Nine specialists are currently on staff to meet the needs of the student population, including four psychologists, four resource teachers, and one special education teacher. A written procedure for admitting students into counseling for emotional, physical, or educational concerns commences with a teacher referral, a follow up from previous interventions, or enrollment of a new students with a previous diagnosis. This is followed by an observation in the classroom and, if necessary, a referral evaluation. If required, students who have been diagnosed with emotional issues must follow an independent emotional plan. Students who are academically challenged must follow an independent educational plan. The nine specialists work with students who have the following challenges: ESL, SSL, ADHD, visual or auditory problems, autism, dyslexia, or Asperger's Syndrome, among others. Special classes are scheduled for students who require remedial assistance with math, reading and writing skills, and speech. Parents, teachers, school specialists and external health providers meet on a regular basis to assess the progress of students and update learning plans as necessary. Members of the special needs department mentioned in interviews they feel an increase in special needs staff would better meet the needs of the students, including special education teachers, assistants, and a gifted and talented teacher. QAR Team members could not determine a clear leadership structure within the special needs department. This leads to communication issues which include teaching staff feeling they were not provided sufficient support, little information on how to manage the special needs students in their classrooms, little articulation with the regular academic program, and lack of scheduling and resource management oversight.

The QAR Team noted one element of the vision statement expressed the school's desire to be "...one of best international schools in the Americas..." To attain this goal, it will be necessary to employ only highly qualified teachers. It was also validated by the director, principals, and board members that a high rate of foreign-hire faculty turnover has become a recent trend.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- The school employs a sufficient number of teachers to maintain a low classroom teacher-student ratio.
- The school maintains secure educational facilities with security-focused campuses, appropriate security staffing, and well-planned and often-practiced safety and security drills.
- Funds for school improvement projects are budgeted.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Staff the special education department with a sufficient number certified special education teachers to meet the needs of the students.
- Provide training and additional office time for the high school career/college counselor, and provide enhanced career and college counseling services to students.
- Review the current technology available on campus to determine areas needing improvement and growth.
- Assign a member of the special needs staff to oversee the department.

Finding: Westhill Institute has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

Standard: The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

Stakeholders affirmed in interviews that they are indeed involved in supporting student learning, educational program review and development, extra-curricular activities participation, and review of the school's vision, mission, and beliefs. A comprehensive list of stakeholder volunteers, the parent/administration general monthly meeting calendar including attendance data, and stakeholder attendance at the QAR Team interview session with parents are all strong indicators that positive and comprehensive stakeholder involvement exists at Westhill Institute. Additionally, the school has an extremely active and very large PTA. Four members of the PTA representing kindergarten, elementary, middle school, and high school attend all school board meetings.

The school has a number of ways through which it communicates with, and listens to, the stakeholders including PTA meetings, student government, board meetings, staff meetings, administration/parent meetings, the school newsletter, parent/teacher conferences, progress reports and report cards, and stakeholder representation on the SIC and SIC subcommittees. PTA members aid the school in a myriad of activities, but one of its most important functions is that of providing a two-way communication channel

between the stakeholders and school. The school is very conscious about sending a newsletter to the stakeholders on a regular basis. Recently newsletter publication has changed from weekly to bi-weekly, while still proving to be a very successful means for school information dissemination. The SIC meets bi-weekly and is open to any interested stakeholder. It provides another means of two way communication.

Report Cards are sent out five times during the school year. Both a paper copy and an electronic version are sent to each parent. The report card not only contains information about the student's academic progress, but it also contains information about the student's MAP scores. There are five parent/teacher conferences during the school year that provide an excellent forum for communication between the school and parent stakeholders.

The QAR Team identified that there is a close working relationship between the stakeholders and the teachers. Examples of this include parent meetings with faculty members on many mornings at 7:15 a.m. to discuss student participation and progress, the new parent-developed school website, and parent classroom presentations during which professional expertise is shared with students. The staff affirms they regularly include stakeholders in preparing instructional activities, and parents confirmed that they regularly participate in, and help plan, school-wide activities. Parents also participate on the Westhill Day planning committee and in planning and organizing events for Westhill Cares, including the initial levels of supervision for students to acquire the requisite number of community service hours for graduation.

The school communicates student expectations and goals through a bi-weekly newsletter, an online calendar, schedules, and email updates. A parent handbook is also used to inform parents about school expectations, rules, and procedures. The principal of each school conducts monthly meetings with parents at which parents can ask questions and share concerns.

Institutional effectiveness and progress on SIP initiatives are discussed at board meetings during which parent representatives can share information and ask questions and in turn disseminate information to other parents through the PTA framework. Additionally, elementary parents are kept informed through a student homework journal in which teachers frequently send messages about student progress.

The school is planning to establish WestNet, a student information system that will facilitate the collection, analysis, and dissemination of student learning data.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Timely and relevant information about school activities has created an exceptionally high level of stakeholder satisfaction.
- The school has encouraged and achieved effective and substantial parent involvement,

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Ensure all relevant student learning data are disseminated to appropriate stakeholders.

Finding: Westhill Institute has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Standard: The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:

The vision and mission of the school were adopted by the board in 2007 and revisited in 2009 by a representative group of stakeholders and members of the SIC. During the review, the wording and intent of the vision and mission were validated and left unchanged. To further the vision and mission of the school, a comprehensive list of belief statements is in place. This school's vision and mission are prominently located on placards in every classroom and belief statements, along with the vision and mission, are evident in all common areas of the school. These three school-guiding philosophies can also be found in parent newsletters, on the website, and were verbalized in interviews by students, parents, teachers, and board members. Additionally, teachers and students provided evidence during interviews with QAR Team members how the vision, mission, and beliefs impact instruction and student learning.

The school profile consists of the school's vision, mission and belief statements and very basic demographic teacher and student data. The profile also includes learning areas for elementary school students, course offerings for upper school students, a list of Advanced Placement classes, athletic, art, music options for students, a list of community events, a very brief statement about admissions, a list of the school's accreditations, graduation requirements, universities at which graduates have been accepted, as well as elements of the school calendar.

A three-goal SIP was formulated and implemented in 2007. In the fall of 2009 the SIC determined two of the three goals had been attained while the third remained in progress. Subsequently, the SIC developed a four-element SIP that is aligned with the school's vision, mission, beliefs, and expectations for student learning. The four elements include: increase student performance in all content areas, reduce achievement gaps of special needs students, improve professional development, and improve perception and communication among stakeholders. Separate sub-committees consisting of teachers, parents, students, and administrators are responsible for implementing action items, monitoring efforts, and reporting progress to stakeholders as the school strives to attain each of the four goals. The SIP was developed with input from all stakeholder groups, however, interviews with stakeholders evidenced a large percentage are not knowledgeable about the details of the four improvement plan elements. .

While not included in the adopted SIP, interviews with students, teachers, administrators, and board members reflected a need for additional technology resources and the desire to increase student enrollment. Obtaining additional technology resources for teaching and learning has and continues to be a commitment by school leadership. Students and teachers noted recent improvements in this area but also that additional resources would enhance the learning process. Student enrollment has declined by approximately 30% over the past three years due to world-wide and local economic conditions which has negatively impacted the budget. Santa Fe campus facilities can easily accommodate a significant increase in student enrollment while the Carpatos campus facilities can accommodate a smaller increase. Including technology and student enrollment initiatives as additional components of the SIP would result in action plan development and resource allocation dedicated to addressing these two issues.

Professional development for teaching staff include the locally administered Endicott College master's

program for international education partially funded by the school, a comprehensive online course program funded by the school, on-campus in-service training and activities, and school-supported university courses for local staff. Additionally, all teachers who will be responsible for MAP testing administration and data use have received initial appropriate training.

Strengths - The team noted the following successful practices deserving of recognition:

- Most stakeholder groups were involved when reviewing the vision, mission, and belief statements as well as when developing the SIP.
- Implementation of school improvement initiatives by the newly formed school leadership team has been action-oriented.

Opportunities - The team offers the following opportunities for improvement for consideration by the school:

- Enhance the school profile by including significantly more data about school resources, employee and student demographics, school programs, and student learning data.
- Ensure all stakeholder groups remain informed about progress on the SIP elements and other initiatives impacting student learning and institutional effectiveness.
- Develop a detailed action plan matrix, including timelines and responsible persons, to ensure school accountability for school improvement initiatives.
- Revisit the SIP areas and consider including technology and student enrollment as additional elements of the plan.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy.

Finding: Westhill Institute has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

Conclusion

The commendations and required actions in this report are designed to focus the school on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and school effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and required actions only have meaning when acted upon by the school. The strength of this report lies in the school's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified required actions for improvement that the school will need to address. Following this review, the school will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's required actions.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to the School Administration, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality throughout the visit. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS-CASI-INTL accreditation with AdvancED.

Appendix

Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Mr. Stephen Sibley, Chair (Escuela Bella Vista)
- Dr. Jennifer Morrow, Team Member (Belize Christian Academy)
- Mr. Richard Wieburg, Team Member (Cochabamba Cooperative School)
- Mr. Thomas Rompf, Team Member (Colegio Bolivar)

AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

The AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As schools reach higher levels of implementation of the standards, they will have a greater capacity to support ever-increasing student performance and organizational effectiveness. Each of the seven standards listed below has corresponding indicators and impact statements which can be accessed at www.advanc-ed.org.

Vision and Purpose

The school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

Governance and Leadership

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

Teaching and Learning

The school provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Documenting and Using Results

The school enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

Resource and Support Systems

The school has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.