

**Report of the  
Quality Assurance Review Team  
for  
Shades Mountain Christian School**

2290 Old Tyler Road  
Hoover, Alabama, United States 35226

**Mr. William L Crump, Headmaster  
Dr. Daniel Carden, Chairperson - SACS-CASI-AL Team**

---

---

**Review Dates: 05/10/2010 - 05/11/2010**



*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

## Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI .....	3
Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review .....	4
Summary of Findings .....	5
Commendations .....	5
Required Actions .....	6
Next Steps .....	7
Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools .....	9
Standard 1. Vision and Purpose .....	9
Standard 2. Governance and Leadership .....	10
Standard 3. Teaching and Learning .....	12
Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results .....	13
Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems .....	14
Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships .....	16
Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement .....	17
Conclusion .....	20
Appendix .....	21
Quality Assurance Review Team Members .....	21
AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools .....	21

# 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 Alabama State Office (SACS-CASI-AL), a division of AdvancED, visited the Shades Mountain Christian School in Hoover, Alabama, United States on 05/10/2010 - 05/11/2010.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed 6 members of the administrative team, 12 students, 14 parents, and 14 teachers. In addition, lunchroom staff and secretarial staff 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.

- **The “open door” policy of the administration provides access for all stakeholders.**

The administration has a willingness to listen to all stakeholders. There is a shared sense of decision making in the school. Answers to questions were always available.

This openness appears to alleviate problems before they develop.

- **The close working relationship with the sponsoring church is a model for other schools to emulate.**

The teachers, staff, and students all demonstrated a willingness to work closely with the sponsoring church to maintain the facilities and share resources. The school and the church shared costs such as internet access and some utilities.

Because the church actually owns the school, there is the potential for conflict over shared resources creating chaos in the learning environment. This is not the case for the school right now.

- **The collegiality and closeness of the staff is commendable.**

Many stakeholders praised the “family” atmosphere at Shades Mountain Christian School. The parents were especially grateful for the family atmosphere of the school.

The learning environment for the students is improved when the students feel happy and accepted.

## 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.

- **Review and expand the safety guidelines and procedures for the entire school.**

The school is located on a very busy road in a major metropolitan area. Students must cross the road several times a day. Good supervision was available but there is always a present danger. Also the doors were open to all who wished to enter at all times of the school day.

In today's society the protection of our students is of paramount importance.

- **Expand the application of new technology in each classroom.**

There was evidence of availability of some technology in the school but some grade levels had limited access to it.

In order to be well prepared for the future, all students must be at least familiar with the new technology available in today's society.

- **Develop a detailed scope and sequence for each subject area in grades 7-12. Review and fill in any gaps in the elementary curriculum.**

The QAR team found evidence of some work on the scope and sequence for the school but there were subjects that were incomplete.

A detailed scope and sequence will provide continuity for the entire curriculum insuring that all students are well prepared for the next level in their education.

**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](http://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-AL accreditation seals are available at [www.advanc-ed.org/communicationskit](http://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 Shades Mountain Christian School 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:**

According to many stakeholders, Shades Mountain Christian School has created an atmosphere of caring and responsible teachers who work together to support the school's mission to provide quality educational opportunities to students. The mission statement was reworked by a group of stakeholders over a period of time about five years ago. It is now current and relevant. The stakeholders who were interviewed by the QAR team demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the mission and its relation to guiding student learning. Teachers wholeheartedly agreed with the mission of the school. The teachers, coaches and administration have regular discussions of how the mission statement is the driving force within the school.

As the school prepares a school improvement plan for the future, the mission will be at the forefront of the plan. Goals are clearly delineated and are in line with the mission. Stakeholders seemed satisfied that their voices were heard in relation to questions and possible revisions of the mission.

The mission and goals are found throughout the literature and the website of the school. It is displayed in visible areas of the school. The Bible teachers used opportunities to explain how the mission related to the expected outcomes for the graduates of the school. The students also knew how the mission related to their future.

The information needed for the profile of the school is updated on an annual basis. Test data is analyzed for assessment of conformance to the mission. Profile data is accessible to the stakeholders in a variety of ways ranging from publications to website files.

The school includes a special needs program called Educational Therapy for students with minor learning disabilities. Students are identified within existing classrooms as potential candidates for the program. Because there is an additional cost, parents are consulted about the availability of the program.

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

- The stakeholders are knowledgeable of the stated mission of the school and its application to the educational practices used throughout the school.
- The school includes the recitation on the mission statement in the morning pledges and devotional time.

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

- The explanation of the mission statement in full detail to all new students and families will help alleviate any misconceptions of the exact purpose of the school.
- Review and refine the Educational Therapy protocols as related to the mission of the school. The profile of the school should be concise, comprehensive and informative. The information was available but should be compiled in one report and included on the website.

**Finding:** Shades Mountain Christian School has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" 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 school has established policies and procedures that provide for an effective school. The faculty/staff handbook provides comprehensive guidelines and expectations at Shades Mountain Christian. The school also maintains an extensive parent/student handbook with guiding principles for students and parents. Interviews with teachers, parents, and students indicated a clear awareness of school policies and procedures.

Interviews indicated that the church board oversees the operation of the school, with the school committee acting as a sounding board for the Headmaster. The administration and teachers described a healthy working relationship with the church and the church board, which allowed the Headmaster and other school employees to effectively run the day-to-day operation of the school. All stakeholders expressed a strong desire to separate from the church, but no indication was given who would oversee the school in place of the church board.

Shades Mountain Christian is in compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws, standards, and regulations. The teacher contract outlines issues of legal counsel and complaint procedures. Parent interviews indicated a strong belief in the administration and church board to lead the school in an ethical way.

Edline is used as a database management system and to collect data on student performance. Administrators discussed looking at certain areas where the data analysis has shown a weakness and formulated plans to improve in those areas. The administration is aware of student performance issues and seems willing to address issues to improve student performance in those areas.

Interviews with teachers, parents, and students suggest a strong sense of community at Shades Mountain Christian. Teachers talked about the support they received from the administration and the open door policy that administrators practice. Parents were complimentary of the access to the school administration and the teachers and felt that there was a partnership between the school and the home.

Teachers were instrumental in the development of the SAR; administrators allowed teachers to lead committees assigned to each standard. Each department at Shades Mountain is headed by the Department

Chair. The Chair helps the administration make changes in their department that will help with student performance. Students are given opportunities to lead in various groups such as Student Government Association, National Honor Society, and as Student/Teacher aides.

Interviews and minutes of stakeholder meetings showed a shared leadership approach at Shades Mountain Christian. Teachers and parents confirmed meaningful roles in the decision making process. Parents expressed a strong sense of partnership with the school leadership.

Artifacts such as the athletic handbook and bylaws for various student organizations indicate that the school administration controls activities sponsored by the school. Teacher interviews show that they were compensated for sponsoring extra-curricular events.

Stakeholder's satisfaction and expectations are taken very seriously by the administration at Shades Mountain Christian. Stakeholder surveys reveal that the school leadership hears and acts upon suggestions and recommendations. The school leadership is not able to meet every suggestion or recommendation due to financial constraints.

The faculty/staff handbook demonstrates a staff evaluation system, salary schedules, and termination process. New staff orientation materials are provided along with a mentoring program for new teachers. The administration provides professional learning opportunities even though the tough economic times have caused the administration to do some of the professional development is in-house. The PTF raised a significant amount of money to help teachers pay for their professional learning opportunities.

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

- Stakeholders believe that the school leadership values their opinions.
- The head of school is recognized as the executive and administrative leader of the school.
- Teachers are provided opportunities to lead throughout the school.

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

- Explore in more detail the possibility of establishing an independent christian school. Be sure to consider both the positive and negative aspects of such a move.
- Establish a plan to absorbing the responsibilities left by the vacancy of an elementary principal.

**Finding:** Shades Mountain Christian School has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" 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:**

The school promotes clear expectations for student learning. These expectations are shared with students and parents through course syllabi, parents' night events, parent conferences, and Edline. Teachers and school leaders have made collaborative effort to protect class time from interruptions. The school is discussing the possibility of adding a school-wide intercom for safety purposes but this may also increase classroom disruptions.

Student progress is monitored through Edline. Teachers communicate with parents through email and progress reports. Teachers make themselves accessible through phone calls and conferences. The National Honor Society and Student Government Association are vital parts of student activity.

Standardized test scores over the last four to five years have demonstrated high student performance. Students have scored consistently higher on all areas of the ACT than state and national averages. Students have consistently received above average amounts of scholarship offers from recognized Universities.

The QAR team noted the presence and consistent use of smart boards in several classrooms. Teachers were observed using the smart boards. Teachers were trained in the use of the boards to enhance instruction. There are opportunities for projects and interdisciplinary activities. Computer classes are taught Power Point to coincide with projects in other classes. Service project activities provide opportunities for integrated faith based alignment with the mission statement.

The administration realizes the need for a detailed curriculum mapping project that will provide the school with the opportunity to align the learning process over all levels of the school. This will strengthen the academic environment so that continuity will ensue even when there is teacher turnover. The QAR team noted through interaction with teachers and stakeholders that the school has developed a collegial atmosphere in which communication and feedback are a part of an ongoing process.

The faculty is involved in ongoing improvement through in-service activities. In-service activities include a collegial effort to improve the school, most notably by working on the SAR together. All teachers are periodically monitored through observation. Those with difficulties are visited more often. Teachers are held to a high standard of teaching. Also student surveys to assess teacher performance are done on a regular basis. Teachers are informed of areas that need attention and given opportunity to improve them.

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

- There is a high degree of parental support across all grade levels within the school.
- The students and parents both perceive the faculty as caring and committed and maintain strong relationships with them.
- The ABeka curriculum provides a strong unified curriculum in grades K-6.
- Provisions for band, art, athletics and other elective subjects are available to all students.
- There is strong cooperation with the sponsoring church in the use of the shared facility, i.e., the library, sanctuary.

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

- Establish consistent posting of information to Edline by all faculty.
- Develop and implement a complete plan for technology to include expansion of its use in the elementary grades and throughout the school.
- Complete and adopt a scope and sequence through a curriculum mapping project for each subject with vertical alignment in each area for grades 7-12.

**Finding:** Shades Mountain Christian School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has 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:**

The school has established performance measures for student learning with a combination of standardized testing (SAT, PLAN, Explore, and ACT) and classroom results. This information is used by teachers and administrators to decide what information students are retaining and what information needs to be re-taught.

Staff uses the data at regular meetings for instructional and program planning. Administration discussed that testing data showed a weakness in a particular area and the process they are going through in order to improve that area. Stakeholders were aware of the data from standardized testing and seemed to have access to the data. Tracking data for an extended period of time would allow the school to find areas of weaknesses and strengths.

Data is used to support and shape key decisions about curriculum and classroom practices. The counselor receives data and presents testing data to the administration. It is not clear if the data from standardized testing is used by classroom teachers to help improve student performance.

The school uses data from the local community, multiple surveys of stakeholders, graduates, and post-graduates to examine instructional and organizational effectiveness. During the interviews the staff and parents shared a strong belief that students left Shades Mountain Christian prepared for college and generally did well at college. Several teachers mentioned that they personally sought out prior student's advice as to how they could better prepare students at Shades Mountain Christian for the challenges they would face in college.

During the interviews with parents and teachers both groups expressed a strong knowledge of the testing that the school used to gather data. Parent-teacher conferences are used to discuss individual student performance. The school's weekly newsletter provides the administration a chance to communicate overall student performance and school effectiveness.

The school used data provided by the testing companies to compare how they are doing on state and national levels. No official comparison of local schools is done by the school.

The administration is aware of trends in school testing. Administrators and counselor were attentive to problem areas and are focused on improving student performance in those areas.

The school is in compliance with state and federal regulation in maintaining secure, accurate and complete records. School policy manual provides the outline with this procedure. Interview with the school counselor revealed that she had a thorough understanding of the procedures.

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

- Secondary teachers took the time to seek out graduates of the school to find out how they could better prepare current students for college.
- When the administration notices a negative trend in a particular subject area, efforts will be made with different actions to correct the problems.
- Shades Mountain Christian School uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly defined performance measures that yield valid results.
- Tests results and reports are communicated to students, parents and teachers in timely and efficient ways.

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

- Document how testing data is being used by classroom teachers to improve student performance.
- Monitor student testing data over an extended period of time in order to follow trends in the data.

**Finding:** Shades Mountain Christian School has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has 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 school recruits, employs, and mentors qualified professional staff. The school administration assigns staff responsibilities based on qualifications as evidenced through data available through the website, master schedule, and handbook. Interviews with support staff, teachers, parents, and the leadership team reveal a strong desire for stakeholders to collaborate to provide sufficient resources to ensure maximum achievement by all students.

A budget based on input from the leadership team and department heads is in place to support educational programs. The Head of school monitors financial transactions through a recognized accounting system that is audited annually.

A safe, orderly environment for all stakeholders is supported by a school plan that is included in the

student, teacher, and parent handbooks. Interviews with teachers and students revealed a view that the school is very safe. The school is considering a comprehensive intercom system that will be critical in a crisis.

A variety of guidance services are readily available to each student for counseling, mentoring, leadership coaching, postsecondary advising, and career planning. The Guidance Department regularly reviews testing data and assesses the competence of each department. The Guidance department works with students to search for available scholarships and complete the enrollment process for college. The students expressed satisfaction with the high degree of competence exhibited by the guidance department.

School staff are provided multiple and diverse opportunities for professional growth. Workshops are provided during the summer months to teach new educational practices. New teachers are assigned a mentor during their first year to ensure acclimation to the school culture. Professional development enhances the educational environment within the school.

The school has begun to add new technology to individual classrooms. The QAR team observed SMART BOARDS being used in several classrooms. The one computer lab helps to meet the needs of students in the acquisition of computer skills that will prepare them for the future. All stakeholders noted the need for more technology throughout the school.

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

- The staff is highly qualified and collaborates to ensure the success of students.
- The school provides a safe and orderly environment for everyone.
- There is a mentoring program which is teacher-led.
- Publication of budget information so that the stakeholders are all cognizant of the school's financial information.
- There is evidence of strong fiscal support for teachers' professional development and for the acquisition of curricular materials by the Parent Teacher Fellowship (PTF).

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

- Update the Professional Development Plan.
- Complete a crisis management plan that details communication between all classrooms.
- Make additional efforts to improve the technology in the school and provide additional training for the staff as funds become available.

**Finding:** Shades Mountain Christian School has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" 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:**

Shades Mountain Christian School has a strong and vibrant set of communication patterns as well as structures in place to support them. Communication has been streamlined to allow for all stakeholders to have clear direction to whom they should consult for specific issues and concerns. Parents, students, teachers, and administrators alike are not only considered vital sources for important communication, but essential for school well-being and growth.

One main strength of the Shades Mountain Christian School's stakeholder communications and relationships is the school's streamlined availability of the administration. When parents have a concern, they know all administrators are ready to discuss any issue. The teachers have experienced consistent efforts by the school to meet their needs. All stakeholders – parents, teachers, and students – interviewed noted that they can take concerns directly to the appropriate person. For example, some parents questioned the suitability of the purchase of an existing public school for the needs of Shades Mountain. Public meetings were held with everyone allowed to voice their concerns and all voices were heard and opinions considered. Now a new committee has been formed to explore possibilities of separation of the church and school. Parents seemed excited about the possibilities of working closely with the administration to solve this dilemma.

The school actively seeks to have strong communication with parents and other stakeholders. One example of the openness of the faculty is that parents feel they can ask any faculty member for additional help for their children and a teacher will come to school early or stay late to give additional help. The consistency of communication sought is shown in part through the incorporation of EdLine, an online communication vehicle, to allow parents to receive weekly updates on students' grades. Parents also receive progress reports, although they may be provided to the parents even more regularly if deemed necessary.

The parents find the school to be responsive, both in terms of rapidity of response as well as the willingness of the school to adapt to meet their needs. For example, the school has a rapid email turn-around policy. The parents greatly appreciated that they could trust teachers and administrators to reply to email within a day's time. The Parent Teacher Fellowship (PTF) is highly active at SMCS. Teachers can come to the PTF with any classroom need and the PTF will do everything possible to meet that need. An open house is also conducted at the beginning of the year and is also a main avenue for parents to find out about classroom expectations and school improvement processes such as curriculum mapping.

The input of students is highly valued as well, not just that of their parents. The administration conducts an interview with each senior prior to graduation. There the students were asked what they believed was working well within the school and what was not. Both the faculty and the students interviewed expressed the positive outcomes of the senior's voices being heard in such a forum. The administration uses this data to make changes in class schedules and course offerings.

The level of common respect among all of the stakeholders was readily apparent. Faculty discussed the appreciation they are gaining of their colleagues through their regular faculty meetings and the meetings

that were held to complete the accreditation report.

There also have been other exceptional opportunities for communication and relationship building that take advantage of the unique institutional mission of Shades Mountain Christian School. Service day projects allow for parents and teachers to get to know one another in a different environment while performing important service to the community. This has clearly helped strengthen the relationships of those who have been involved together.

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

- Stakeholders note the admirable sense of family and connection at the school.
- Multiple stakeholders note the value of EdLine for weekly reporting of grades to the parents and the connection it provides them to the school and what is happening.
- The school's flattened hierarchy, making direct line of communication easier to follow and support, received strong support as important to school functioning.
- The Parents and students appreciate the direction the school is headed.
- The Parent Teacher Fellowship (PTF) provides funding for a number of projects for teachers that contribute to both morale and an improved learning environment.

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

- Raise awareness of value in face-to-face conferences with parents and teachers, not simply to discuss concerns, but just as importantly to share insights into students' learning.
- Utilize new and innovative ways to involve parents in the recruiting process for new students.
- Foster even stronger alumni stakeholders who are more active in school functions and feel a stronger sense of connection and devotion to the school and its other current stakeholders.
- Expand the solicitation of student feedback, such as the end of year interviews for school improvement.

**Finding:** Shades Mountain Christian School 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:**

Shades Mountain Christian School's steadfast commitment to continuous improvement permeates its culture, providing a rich and rewarding learning community for all stakeholders. The faith, dedication, and expertise of the administrators and faculty are absolutely commendable.

Much of the process of continuous learning is shared among teachers and administrators. Teachers meet in departments to discuss not only their learning and patterns they see among students, but also for improvements in the curriculum. The records also indicate regularly scheduled meeting process for teachers and administrators to discuss improvements and where the school is going. The school further

provides time through professional development days for teachers to learn together and develop collaborative efforts.

The process Shades Mountain Christian School uses for continuous improvement is a blend of learning from parents via surveys, learning from students via surveys and senior meetings with administration, and copious reading of the latest research on student learning and cognitive development as well as shared experiential learning of the faculty.

The school has a collaborative, ongoing process for seeking improvement across the board. It is because of many of their conversations with various stakeholders (as discussed in Standard 6 above) that the school community has found important ways to improve their curriculum. For instance, stakeholders felt that there was a need for greater math course improvement and other elective options. The school is pursuing options to improve the math department. Likewise, many stakeholders noted the desire to secure an administrator at the elementary level which is now being done.

The school continues to be interested in improvement efforts around the use of technology. Shades Mountain Christian School allocates resources not merely for the purchases of new technology, but more importantly for both the staff to teach teachers and students how to use the technology most effectively and the staff to keep the technology functioning. The cooperation with the sponsoring church is commendable in this area. The PTF has provided funding for SMART BOARDS for several classrooms where both teachers and students noted their effectiveness. The administrators' understanding of the importance of ongoing teacher training as they develop their understanding of the scope of such a tool is praiseworthy. As with other professional development, the teachers are provided time through staff development days to continue to increase their knowledge of new technology and its application to education. Like student learning, time for teacher learning is protected as well. The use of the EdLine system allows for more immediate feedback for parents to see how their child is progressing and is yet another prime example of how the school uses technology to improve school functioning.

What the school and its officials have found from both stakeholders and their own prior efforts, as well as from literature, inform new efforts. The ideas surrounding the importance of a professional learning community, for example, is not only well-documented in the literature but has shown to provide dividends to school functioning elsewhere. This focus, when fully implemented at Shades Mountain Christian School, will only make the community of scholars engaged in developing student learning even more effective and aligned in values and collective, cohesive school functioning.

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

- The school's teachers and administrators continuously seek to serve God and equip students as global citizens.
- The educational professionals at the school clearly value each individual's gifts and role in the community.
- There is a readily apparent dedication to improving the curriculum.
- A careful analysis of the results of improvement efforts also is ongoing, leading to cyclical efforts of improvement and evaluation.
- The school has a focus on research driving the curriculum and school-wide decisions, such as developing teaching methods.

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

- Develop a more cohesive system for sharing results of improvement efforts with the rest of the school community.

- Foster and develop more professional learning communities with the faculty and staff.
- Develop a comprehensive school improvement plan that will sustain and provide vision for SMCS for the next five years.

**Finding:** Shades Mountain Christian School 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-AL accreditation with AdvancED.

# Appendix

## Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Dr. Daniel Carden, Chair (American Christian Academy)
- Mr. Chad Hudelson, Team Member (Jefferson Christian Academy)
- Mrs. Linda Sheikh, Team Member

## 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](http://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.