



**Special Review Team Report
Liberty County Public School System
Hinesville, Georgia**

**Dates of Review:
January 29 – 31, 2018**

Special Review Report

Introduction

A Special Review may be conducted in response to complaints or information about an institution and/or its system (district, board, or corporation) to determine adherence to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards, Assurances, and Policies. The institution and/or its system must respond to the Improvement Priorities of the Special Review Team. Monitoring Review Teams may be sent to the institution and/or its system at regular intervals to ensure that progress is being made toward the Special Review Team's Improvement Priorities. Both Special Review Teams and Monitoring Review Teams are empowered to make accreditation recommendations based upon evidence obtained during the review.

The Liberty County School System (LCSS) received a Special Review on January 29-31, 2018. The review was scheduled as a result of ongoing stakeholder complaints and allegations about improper actions of the Board of Education which began July 23, 2015. A letter of notice from AdvancED on December 11, 2015, provided notice of the complaints to the system but required no further action. An additional complaint was submitted on June 24, 2016. AdvancED corresponded with LCSS regarding the complaint and allegation that suggested the system may be in violation of the *AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality School Systems*, with regard to the Standard for Governance and Leadership and the below indicators:

- Indicator 2.1 – The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.
- Indicator 2.2 – The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.
- Indicator 2.3 – The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.

The school system's required response to the AdvancED notification encompassed an email message from the LCSS Superintendent on July 18, 2016. The message indicated that there were no current issues with the Board. Complaint letters continued to be submitted to AdvancED following the system's response. On January 27, 2017, AdvancED received complaints alleging there had been numerous violations of board procedure and protocol. On February 15, 2017, AdvancED sent a letter to the superintendent requiring a response from the school system.

From February to August 2017, numerous stakeholders filed verbal, written, and/or electronic complaints and allegations with AdvancED expressing concerns that the actions and behaviors of one or more board members were in violation of AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Policies, including but not limited to Standards associated with the Leadership Capacity Domain. Stakeholders alleged the following actions and/or behaviors by the LCSS Board of Education:

- Lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities
- Overstep of governance role
- Lack of trust and respect of fellow board members
- Use of social media to communicate inappropriate information
- Interference with work of principal(s)
- Failure to self-monitor
- Failure to complete and submit required board self-assessment
- Public discredit of the superintendent and staff
- Micromanagement of the superintendent and staff by the Board

On March 9, 2017, AdvancED determined that a Special Review of Liberty County Schools System was warranted. On March 13, 2017, AdvancED sent a letter of notice to LCSS stating that a Special Review would be conducted in the fall of 2017. A Special Review Team was appointed by AdvancED to conduct an onsite review of LCSS in November, 2017. Unforeseen circumstances resulted in the rescheduling of the Special Review.

The purpose of the Special Review was to gather information and evidence to determine if the alleged actions and behaviors of the Board of Education were in violation of the AdvancED Performance Standards including but not limited to:

AdvancED Accreditation Standards for Quality School Systems (Effective school year 2016-2017)

- Indicator 2.1 - The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.
- Indicator 2.2 - The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.
- Indicator 2.3 - The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.

Subsequent to the notice of the Special Review, AdvancED transitioned to the new AdvancED Performance Standards for School Systems; therefore, the team reviewed evidence pertaining to the following Standards:

AdvancED Performance Standards for School Systems (Effective school year 2017-2018)

- Standard 1.4 - The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support institutional effectiveness.
- Standard 1.5 - The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.

Activities of the Special Review Team

In preparation for the onsite review, the Special Review Team conducted various conference calls with each other to gain a deeper understanding of the school system and the complaints previously submitted to AdvancED. In addition to the review of the complaints received, the team reviewed the school system's governance polices, board meeting agendas, board meeting minutes summaries and newspaper articles. The team also reviewed video recorded board meetings from 2015 through January, 2018. Other documentation was provided electronically for review by the Special Review Team.

The Lead Evaluator of the Special Review Team worked with the school system in preparation for the review by engaging in conference calls to finalize the interview schedule. Once on-site, the Special Review Team engaged in the following activities:

- Interviews with the Board of Education, interim superintendent and former superintendent
- Interviews with some district level leaders and staff (These additional interviews were added at the request of the Special Review Team.)
- Artifact review
 - Governance policies
 - Governance handbook
 - Email and text message correspondences
 - LCSS website

- News media articles
- Social media documentation
- School board members' training documentation
- Board meeting minutes summaries
- Board meeting videotaped recordings
- Team deliberations and report preparation

Findings

Based upon the information collected and reviewed, the Special Review Team found sufficient evidence to support a finding that the institution is in violation of AdvancED Standards and Policies.

Results from the Special Review are reported in four ratings represented by colors. These ratings provide guidance and insight into an institution's current performance-level for each of the identified Standards and Policies.

Rating	Description
Needs Improvement	Identifies key areas that need more focused improvement efforts
Emerging	Represents areas to enhance and extend current improvement efforts
Meets Expectations	Pinpoints quality practices that meet the Standards
Exceeds Expectations	Demonstrates noteworthy practices producing clear results that exceed expectations

Performance Level Score:

1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.	Score: Needs Improvement
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Improvement Priority #1:

Comply and document adherence to all board policies with specific focus on policies BD (Policy Development), BH (Board Code of Ethics, Domain IV: Policy Development), BHA (Conflict of Interest) and KG (Use of School Facilities).

Evidence:

Liberty County School System Board Policy BD (Policy Development) states, "Proposals regarding school system policy may originate from employees, parents or other concerned individuals within the community. In all cases, proposed new or amended policies shall be submitted in writing to the superintendent or designee, explicitly stating their potential contribution in furthering the goals of the school system." Additionally, Board Policy BH (Board Code of Ethics, Domain IV: Policy Development) states, "... each member of the Board agrees that he or she will:

1. Work with other board members to establish effective policies for the school system.
2. Make decisions on policy matters only after full discussion at publicly held board meetings.
3. Review and evaluate, periodically, the effectiveness of policies on school system programs and performance."

The 2015 and 2016 board and work session meeting minutes document multiple policy reviews and approvals. There was no evidence in the 2017 board and work session meeting minutes documenting systematic policy reviews and/or approvals.

Policy BHA (Conflict of Interest, Financial Governance section 1.) states that “No Board member shall use or attempt to use his or her official position to secure unwarranted privileges, advantages, employment for himself or herself, any of his or her immediate family members, or others.” Policy KG (Use of School Facilities) provides guidelines, request procedures and rules governing the use of school facilities. Complaints filed with AdvancED as well as interviews revealed that a board member had improper access and use of a school gymnasium without following required procedures as outlined in Policy KG. Additionally, the board member did not file the required application form and did not pay any costs associated with the use of the facility. These actions by the board member are a violation of the State Board of Education Model Code of Ethics, O.C.G.A. § 20-2-63 (2016), LCSS Board Policies BH (Code of Ethics), BHA (Conflict of Interest) and KG (Use of School Facilities). A formal complaint regarding the actions of the board member was filed with the State Board of Education, the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC).

The LCSS board members completed the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) Governance Team Self-Assessment, and its results were compiled in July 2017. Interviews and documentation revealed that the board members received the compiled results that reflected the ratings and comments of each board member. Some ratings and comments indicate that some members feel the Board does not always meet this AdvancED Standard. The table below includes results from Domain I. Governance Structure (C. Standard) and Domain IV. Policy Development (A. Standard) revealed the following:

Domain I. Governance Structure	# Satisfactory	# Needs Improvement	Board Member Comments
C. Standard The board acts as a policy-making body separate from the roles and responsibilities authorized to the superintendent.	4	3	<p>Lines get crossed by Superintendent and board and has caused friction between the two and between Board members. Lack of respect for authority of position is evident.</p> <p>Board failed at this; micro-managed the Superintendent.</p> <p>See comment from Standard A where board members (some) think that they can write the plans of action allowing them to “run the school system.</p>

Domain IV. Policy Development	# Satisfactory	# Needs Improvement	Board Member Comments
A. Standard The board of education adopts, revises, and follows written policies that are clear, up-to-date, and in compliance with the school system’s strategic plan, state constitution, state and federal laws	5	2	<p>Board became lenient to holding Superintendent responsible; actions not consistent with established policies.</p> <p>Numerous violations reported to AdvancED came from governing body instead of trying to work out internal issues.</p>

and state board rules.			Although procedures are in place for reviewing and proposing policies as well as receiving stakeholder input ... has not done due diligence ... This is just one example of the lack of monitoring policy. The Board does not follow local board policy and effective procedures – have violated parliamentary procedures – policy.
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Rationale:

Policy review and development are shared responsibilities between the school board and superintendent. When the school board and the superintendent collaborate to strategically review and develop policies, they can use them as powerful levers to prompt positive change and transformation in their school district.

Directives:

1. Conduct a policy audit to guide the process for regular review of all board policies.
2. Develop a timeline for review of all board policies.
3. Include review and adoption of policies on the regular board and work session meeting agendas.
4. Comply with guidelines for violation of policies by board members as stated in the LCSS Governance Handbook.

Improvement Priority #2:

Conduct board meetings in accordance with the Georgia Open Meetings Act, Board Policies BCAC (Special Board Meetings), BCBI (Public Participation in Board Meetings), BCBK (Executive Sessions) and Robert's Rules of Order.

Evidence:

The Georgia Open Meetings Act § 50-14-1 states “Meetings to be open to public; limitation on action to contest agency action; recording; notice of time and place; access to minutes; telecommunications conferences, etc.”

A complaint letter filed with AdvancED on November 30, 2015, revealed that board members have called each other to share how they will vote on items listed on the agenda. Interviews and documentation revealed that during the January 9, 2018, regular school board meeting, the item 2018-2019 school calendar, was removed from the agenda. Multiple interviews revealed that a board member stated the “calendar did not have enough votes to pass,” a clear indication that some board members discussed their potential vote towards the 2018-2019 school calendar. Interviews also revealed four board members were meeting in private prior to the regular board meeting. When the board members were asked about this action, respondents indicated they were having a meal. This is a violation of Board Policy BCBI (Public Participation in Board Meetings) as well as a violation of the Georgia Open Meetings Act. Some stakeholders also expressed concerns during interviews that some emails and text messages may have been in violation of the Open Meetings Act.

Results from the Liberty County School System board members’ GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment revealed that some board members agree that the Board does not always meet its own standards. The

following are sample results from Domain I. Governance Structure (B. Standard) and Domain IV. Board Meetings (A. Standard):

Domain I. Governance Structure	# Satisfactory	# Needs Improvement	Board Member Comments
B. Standard The governance leadership team executes its duties as defined in the state constitution, state laws, and state board rules consistent with local board policies, accreditation standards, procedures and ethical standards, which govern its conduct.	5	2	constant violations of Open Meeting Act The majority board allows one board member to dictate what policies and procedures the board will follow as far as behavior and ethics are concerned.
Domain V. Board Meetings	# Satisfactory	# Needs Improvement	Board Member Comments
A. Standard The board announces and holds meetings in accordance with local board policy and the Open Meetings Law (O.C.G.A §50-14-1).	4	3	... needs training on Open Meeting Act. Numerous violations have occurred needs training in Roberts Rules and parliamentary procedures ... a policy is set of creating agendas but that seems to change depending on who is griping Glitches of parliamentary procedures at times, Ex. Phone conference, point of order; Legal advice had to be sought out on too many occasions Have violated Open Meeting Laws on numerous occasions; Violates parliamentary procedure; vote not to sanction was voted on by person being sanctioned; many other examples

Rationale:

According to the Georgia Office of the Attorney General, “The Open Records and Open Meetings Acts have the same goal: to allow citizens and the press to observe the function of State and local governmental agencies – their goal is to end closed door governance.” When elected officials, such as the Board of Education, comply with the Open Meetings Act, sanctions and closed-door governance is avoided and public trust restored and strengthened.

Directives:

1. Review and discuss the Georgia Open Meetings Act and Board Policies BCAC (Special Board Meetings), BCBI (Public Participation in Board Meetings), and BCBK (Executive Sessions).
2. Identify meeting scenarios that are within the guidelines of the Georgia Open Meetings Act and Board Policies BCAC (Special Board Meetings), BCBI (Public Participation in Board Meetings) and BCBK (Executive Sessions) and compare to meeting scenarios that could be construed as violations.

3. Establish a process of documenting compliance with the Open Meetings Act and Board Policies BCAC (Special Board Meetings), BCBI (Public Participation in Board Meetings), and BCBK (Executive Sessions).
4. Ensure all board members understand and follow Robert's Rules of Order and parliamentary procedures to guide the smooth and fair execution of all meetings.

Performance Level Score:

1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	Score: Needs Improvement
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Improvement Priority #3:

Develop, implement, and document continuous board governance training and professional development to ensure the effective operation of the Board of Education in their roles and responsibilities.

Evidence:

Board Policy BH Code of Ethics (Conduct as Board Member), identifies the following expectations:

1. Devote sufficient time, thought, and study to the performance of the duties and responsibilities of a member of the Board.
2. Become informed about current educational issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed education and training.
3. Communicate in a respectful professional manner with and about fellow board members.
4. Take no private action that will compromise the Board or school system administration.
5. Participate in all required training programs developed for board members by the Board or the State Board of Education.
6. File annually with the local superintendent and with the State Board of Education a written statement certifying that he or she is in compliance with this Code of Ethics.

As a result of the March 2016 AdvancED External Review, Liberty County School System received four Improvement Priorities. Regarding training, Improvement Priority (1) stated, "Design and implement a continuous program of training and support for the Board of Education, the School Governance Teams (SGT), and district and school administration that ensures the effective operation of the Governing Board and the School Governance Teams at all schools in the newly formed charter school system."

On July 18, 2016, the former superintendent responded to AdvancED indicating this Improvement Priority was In Progress. The response included verification that the BOE and the Governance team as a whole has received training on several key areas specific to effective operations. Additionally, the response stated that other trainings included the following:

- Improving Board Governance Through Self-Assessment
- Media Talk I and II
- Understanding Georgia's College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI)
- Book Study: Five Dysfunctions of a Team

A complaint revealed that one of the GSBA training sessions was conducted as a mediation session instead of a training session, as indicated on the agenda. Interviews revealed that progress has been made on this Improvement Priority as it pertains to the School Governance Teams and school/district staff. The initial Accreditation Progress Report (APR) from LCSS submitted to AdvancED in response to the Improvement Priorities stated the actions that have taken place include the board self-assessment, trainings on Media Talk, GSBA instruction on difficult conversations, board roles and responsibilities, Sanctions and Censure, and School Board Law. A review of GSBA board training documentation revealed that board members have participated in various trainings in recent years which have included workshops such as Finance, Policy, School Law, Board Chair, New Board Member Orientation, Legal Issues, Student Achievement and Superintendent Evaluation (online). Stakeholders stated during interviews that although board members continue to participate in required trainings, internalization of the trainings, and change in behavior and practice does not happen across the entire Board.

A review of the board work session on January 23, 2018, revealed a discussion regarding the topic of the leadership and board development consultant rankings. The lengthy discussion revealed questions and concerns about the authorization of the Request For Proposals (RFP), the rankings of the companies under consideration for training, the need for training, and the specifics of the AdvancED Improvement Priorities. The discussion continued with several board members talking about the need for training by the Board. The video revealed the frustrations board members have with each other. Some of the board members' comments included the following statements:

- “We needed training outside of the norm.”
- “We need to look at a more comprehensive training to develop ...”
- “We’ve had training on governance ... trust ... parliamentary procedures ... The results have been zero.”
- “Some of us have been bullied ... body and clothes shamed ... and all of this is going on and we’ve had training on governance.”
- “I don’t think the tax payers have gotten good results from the training we’ve had ...”
- “I’m appalled that we are sitting here arguing over details ... instead of looking at who can help us fix this problem and get on with educating the children of our county.”

The January 24 - 26, 2018, issue of the Coastal Courier’s article “BoE argues over board training” described board members’ reactions to the discussion regarding additional training required by AdvancED. According to the article, a board member stated that “the board has taken sufficient training classes the past three years that have yielded little to no results.”

Results from the Liberty County School System board members’ GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment revealed the following results from Domain I. Governance Structure (D. Standard), Domain III. Board and Community Relations (A., B., and C. Standards) and Domain VI. Personnel (B. and C. Standards), indicating board members do not agree on the effectiveness of their communication and involvement of stakeholders and a disagreement regarding the current culture of the Board.

Domain I. Governance Structure	# Satisfactory	# Needs Improvement	Board Member Comments
D. Standard The governance leadership team demonstrates a unified approach to governing the school system in	3	4	Proper orientation is lacking as well as individuals seeking info on how to function individually and corporately. Personal agendas seem to be precedent.

order to assure effective fulfillment of roles and responsibilities.			<p>While professional development is provided, members are not dedicated to attend trainings ... Book study held as a priority improvement for AdvancED study... All 7 board members were present for the work session; 2 of 7 members left and did not attend the book study ...</p> <p>Develop a new board members orientation notebook.</p> <p>Training yielded no improvement. Conduct repeatedly the same.</p>
Domain III. Board and Community Relations	# Satisfactory	# Needs Improvement	Board Member Comments
A. Standard The governance leadership team develops a process for creating a culture where input is sought, heard, and valued.	4	3	<p>Continue community forums</p> <p>Good job</p> <p>This has been a disaster for the community and the Board – Facebook Ed. Hotline ... totally destroyed the credibility of the present board</p> <p>The majority of BOE members don't have a concept of the Strategic Plan well enough to know how to create a culture and align actions and decisions to the plan.</p>
B. Standard The board develops policies to ensure effective communication and engagement of all stakeholders' which support the strategic plan, desired culture and continuous improvement of the school system.	4	3	<p>Continue community forums.</p> <p>This has also been a disaster. The communication plan in place with the Superintendent was against all training by GSBA. Actions by Board members are totally unacceptable.</p> <p>There was not a communication plan for 2016-2017 school year between Board and Superintendent that aligned with AdvancED Standards or the Code of Ethics therefore ruling out communication with Board and community.</p>

Domain VI. Personnel	# Satisfactory	# Needs Improvement	Board Member Comments
B. Standard The board of education evaluates the professional performance of the superintendent.	3	4	<p>Even though training was done regarding superintendent evaluation #3 – much was ignored</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – #3. The board receives training in the superintendent's evaluation process and current evaluation instrument, and objectively follows that process for evaluation. (from the GSBA Self-Assessment)

			Board members, although addresses several times, are still asking if the Board can present the evaluation expectations during the superintendent interview so the candidates will know how they will be evaluated. There are board members who still have not internalized that the superintendent is part of the governance team and helps write their evaluation goals.
C. Standard The board adopts personnel policy that is implemented by the superintendent.	4	3	<p>Members repeatedly micromanaged the superintendent to carry out #2 consistently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – #2. The board and individual board members do not engage in the implementation of personnel policy, including the employment, assignment, or dismissal of personnel, except to accept or reject the recommendations of the superintendent.” (from the GSBA Self-Assessment) <p>...The board is at fault for not monitoring the superintendent to assure the following of policies ...</p>

Directives:

1. Use results from GSBA self-assessments and other board assessment tools to determine training needs for the whole board.
2. Develop an annual board training plan of action.
3. Participate in training and development that focuses on board working relationships, teamwork, trust, and respect.
4. Commit to attending training and development sessions without distractions of texting, emailing, and/or handling other business or personal concerns.
5. Document board member participation in all trainings and professional development.
6. Identify and apply qualities and characteristics of a highly effective Board of Education.
7. Ensure the Board of Education understands and adheres to their roles and responsibilities as outlined in LCSS board policies and the Governance Handbook.

Rationale:

Quality training and professional development that meets the needs of individual board members as well as the whole board assist boards of education to improve their knowledge, skill, and understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities.

Improvement Priority #4:

Model appropriate decorum as stipulated in Board Policies BH (Board Code of Ethics), BHA (Conflict of Interest), and the LCSS Governance Handbook (Meeting Decorum, Use of Social Media, and Civility Policy).

Evidence:

Board Policy BH (Board Code of Ethics) states, “The Liberty County Board of Education desires to operate in the most ethical and conscientious manner possible ...” Additionally, Board Policy BH (Domain V: Board

Meetings – statement 3, states that board members will “Work with other board members in a spirit of harmony and cooperation in spite of differences of opinion that may arise during the discussion and resolution of issues at board meetings.” Stakeholder complaint letters sent to AdvancED expressed community displeasure with the behavior of the Board and lack of remorse for behavior and violations of their own standards. In a November 2015, letter to AdvancED, a complainant stated “Every member has admitted to violating the civility policy since its inception”

Additionally, in November 2015, the LCSS Board gave a letter to a fellow board member stating, “It is important that we not only follow the protocol that we set for ourselves, but that we model civility and professionalism for all of our stakeholders. I would ask that you govern yourself accordingly in all future communications with the public and your fellow board members.”

During a May 2016 work session, a board member was to be reprimanded by fellow board members for threatening emails towards the former superintendent, but board members voted to remove the reprimand from the agenda. In a June 2016 letter, a complainant stated that a board member “continues to wreak havoc.” Additionally, a stakeholder complained that the board members ignore negative board behaviors and violation of policies. Multiple documents revealed that board members’ communications with some staff members was unprofessional in the tone of the content therefore confirming why some employees felt intimidated by some board members.

Minutes and video from the February 14, 2017 school board meeting indicated there was discussion between board members regarding the possibility of having an attorney at the board meetings. Following an exchange of statements between a board member and the board chair, the board member was called out of order by the board chair during the meeting. The Board chair repeatedly stated to the board member, “You are out of order.” The board member responded, “No, you are out of order.” The board chair firmly stated, “Either get into order or you will be asked to be removed.” The board chair had to use the gavel to restore order. The board member did not comply with Board Policy BH (Code of Ethics) or LCSS Governance Handbook (Civility Policy) in response to the board president’s parliamentary directives.

Stakeholders in interviews stated there was bullying behavior of a board member towards the former superintendent and that board members ostracized other board members. Interviews also revealed that some staff members feel intimidated by some of the board members. A board member expressed concern stating “... our situation is extreme ... by our repeatedly ignoring these violations and Georgia laws as elected officials we are sending a shameful message to all. We are charged with policing ourselves.” Stakeholder interviews confirmed some board members’ behavior towards other board members and the former superintendent consisted of taunting, harassing, bullying, aggressiveness, rudeness, and disrespect. A police report revealed that a board member filed a simple assault with the Hinesville Police Department against another board member in October 2017.

Stakeholders expressed concerns over the use of social media by board members. In the LCSS Governance Handbook, the Use of Social Media section states,

“The district recognizes the use of online social media networks as a communications, networking and e-learning tool. As a result, the District encourages the Board’s use of innovative social tools for e-learning and collaboration purposes. However, public social media networks should not be used by members of the Board of Education for any reason other than for fulfilling its responsibility for effectively communicating in a timely manner with the general public. Members are discouraged from

expressing personal opinions, sharing personal information, and engaging in less than appropriate exchanges with social media *friends and followers*."

Concerns were specific to the Educational Hotline hosted by a board member. Interviews revealed that although the live Facebook show is to share LCSS information with the community, there have been times in the past when information that was discussed caused friction between board members. A February 2017 article in the local newspaper, *The Coastal Courier*, reported that a "dispute between members of the Liberty County Board of Education has gone to social media and beyond ..." The content of the article centered around a board member's dispute with the board chair and the former superintendent which took place during a broadcast of The Educational Hotline.

Evidence revealed text messaging documentation from August 2017 of communications as the board chair was attempting to establish a common date and time with fellow board members to meet with Dr. Sam King from the Georgia School Board Association (GSBA). While some board members texted their availability for this meeting, one board member texted, "My response," followed by the middle-finger emoji. This response and gesture not only showed disrespect, but it was a clear violation of Board Policy BH (Code of Ethics) and the LCSS Governance Handbook (Code of Civility, Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Pledge). Interviews revealed that the board members did not discuss this incident as a Board nor did they follow their guidelines as stated in the LCSS Governance Handbook, Chapter Four - Process for Addressing Board Member Violations. Interviews revealed that lack of addressing board misconduct has become common practice.

Results from the Liberty County School System board members' GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment revealed that a majority of the Board feels Domain VIII. Ethics (A. Standard) is in need of improvement:

Domain VIII. Ethics	# Satisfactory	# Needs Improvement	Board Member Comments
A. Standard The governance team adheres to, adopts and practices a Code of Ethics, avoids conflicts of interest, and annually reviews ethical standards to ensure and enhance governance structure and organizational effectiveness.	2	5	<p>Violating (elements) #1 and #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Element 1. The board adopts and adheres to an ethics policy that includes, as a minimum, an ethical code of behavior based on the State Model Code of Ethics.– Element 3. The board adopts and adheres to a Conflict of Interest policy that includes state law requirements, as outlined in the State statutory Conflict of Interest Provisions. <i>(from the GSBA Self-Assessment)</i> <p>Develop training affidavits for Board Members.</p> <p>Unethical actions. Board members do not make every effort to attend all training and allow adequate time. Policies need to be reviewed at least annually but more often to ensure adherence.</p> <p>The Code of Ethics is ignored.</p>

Rationale:

Effective school boards are critical to the success of the school system as they set the vision, mission, and goals for the district; adopt policies that provide direction in support of meeting the districts goals, objectives, and strategic plan; adopt and oversee the district's annual budget; and hire and evaluate the superintendent. Boards of education and superintendents that operate in a cohesive manner inclusive of respect, trust, transparency, and clear communication are able to lead as a unified team that focuses on specific goals to reach its vision and mission of the system.

Directives:

1. Document processes to ensure all board members adhere to the integrity and fidelity of Board Policies BH (Board Code of Ethics), BHA (Conflict of Interest), and the LCSS Governance Handbook (Meeting Decorum, Use of Social Media and Civility Policy).
2. Treat each other and LCSS employees with respect.
3. Participate in training and development that focuses on board working relationships, teamwork, trust and respect. Develop and implement a process to hold members accountable for applying their learning to their roles on the Board.
4. Identify and apply qualities and characteristics of a highly effective Board of Education.
5. Identify scenarios that are within the guidelines of the LCSS Governance Handbook (Meeting Decorum, Use of Social Media and Civility Policy) and compare to scenarios that could be construed as violations.
6. Review, discuss, understand and adhere to the process for addressing board member violations.

Accreditation Status

Based on the findings of the Special Review Team and subsequent review and action by the AdvancED Georgia Council and the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, AdvancED concludes that the Liberty County School System is in violation of the following AdvancED Accreditation Standards and/or Policies:

AdvancED Performance Standards for School Systems (Effective school year 2017-2018)

- Standard 1.4: The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.
- Standard 1.5: The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.

In accordance with AdvancED Policies, Liberty County School System continue their accreditation with the status of Under Review pending progress made by the date of a Monitoring Review to be held prior to October 31, 2018. The purpose of the Monitoring Review will be to assess the progress made in complying with the Special Review Team's Improvement Priorities listed in the following section. No less than two weeks prior to the scheduled review, the institution must submit an Institutional Progress Report detailing the steps taken, with supporting evidence, to address the Improvement Priorities. A report template will be provided to the institution.

Improvement Priorities

The institution must address the following Improvement Priorities made by the Special Review Team:

1. Comply with and document adherence to all board policies with specific focus on policies BD (Policy Development), BH (Board Code of Ethics, Domain IV: Policy Development), BHA (Conflict of Interest) and KG (Use of School Facilities).
2. Conduct board meetings in accordance with the Georgia Open Meetings Act, Board Policies BCAC (Special Board Meetings), BCBI (Public Participation in Board Meetings), and BCBK (Executive Sessions) and Robert's Rules of Order.
3. Develop, implement and document continuous board governance training and professional development to ensure the effective operation of the Board of Education in their roles and responsibilities.
4. Model appropriate decorum as stipulated in Board Policies BH (Board Code of Ethics), BHA (Conflict of Interest), and the LCSS Governance Handbook (Meeting Decorum, Use of Social Media, and Civility Policy).

Next Steps: Using and Acting on The Report

A copy of this report is sent to the head of the institution. The institution shall use the report to guide its response to the findings and its improvement efforts. The institution is accountable for addressing the Improvement Priorities identified in this report. Progress is expected to be evident through progress reports and Monitoring Reviews before consideration will be given to a change in accreditation status. AdvancED is available to assist the institution in its improvement efforts.

The Monitoring Review must be scheduled prior to October 31, 2018.

Closing Comments

The AdvancED Special Review Team appreciates the LCSS leadership for their diligence in planning for the onsite review. Although there were circumstances that required the rescheduling of the review, the district staff made the necessary adjustments, secured logistics and modified the interview schedule accordingly.

A stakeholder stated that Liberty County School System district staff, principals, teachers and support staff continue to “move the district forward in spite of the Board’s behavior.” Stakeholder interviews revealed that the interim superintendent brings calm into the district and tries to bring the Board together. There is immense stakeholder pride regarding student achievement, staff commitment, and the financial stability of the system, resources, and community support.

Following a thorough review of interview notes, documentation, policies and complaints sent to AdvancED, consistent themes revealed that the LCSS Board of Education:

- Desires the best for the students and school system
- Does not adhere to all policies
- Lacks unity, respect and trust among each other
- Behaves in a “clique” manner “taking sides” when it suits personal agendas
- Receives professional development yet the information and skills learned do not transfer into improved Board understanding of their roles and responsibilities or improved relationships with and among the board members

Board policies, governance guidelines, trainings and professional development opportunities provide all board members purposeful and targeted guidance as to how best to conduct himself/herself as an elected official. Board members must set a positive example to their community and for the students that each member has committed to serve. Complaints submitted to AdvancED, interviews with board and staff members, and additional evidence provided during the onsite review revealed that the LCSS Board of Education has not fulfilled their roles and responsibilities with integrity and fidelity. Evidence of board members' disrespectfulness and aggression towards one another is a clear violation of Board Policy BH (Code of Ethics) and the LCSS Civility Policy outlined in the Governance Handbook. Board members' negative behavior and actions continues to cause "embarrassment" to the district and to the community of Hinesville.

The decision to become a high functioning, effective and unified board will be determined as each LCSS board member reflects on his/her purpose for serving in this capacity. Board members must make the decision to abide by all of the governing laws and policies in a manner reflective of truth, honesty, integrity, and service on behalf of the students in the Liberty County School System.



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About AdvancED

AdvancED is a non-profit, non-partisan organization serving the largest community of education professionals in the world. Founded on more than 100 years of work in continuous improvement, AdvancED combines the knowledge and expertise of a research institute, the skills of a management consulting firm and the passion of a grassroots movement for educational change to empower Pre-K-12 schools and school systems to ensure that all learners realize their full potential.

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