

***EXCELLENCE BY DESIGN***  
***(SYSTEMS VERSION)***

**A Report of the Visiting Team  
for Accreditation  
by the Middle States Association of  
Colleges and School Systems**

**SOUTHERN LEHIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT  
CENTER VALLEY, PENNSYLVANIA**

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**LEAH CHRISTMAN  
SUPERINTENDENT**

**VALERIE VALENTI, Ph.D.  
CHAIR OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Middle States Association of Colleges and School systems  
Commissions on Elementary and Secondary School systems  
3624 Market Street ♦ 2 West ♦ Philadelphia, PA 19104  
Telephone: (267) 284-5000 FAX: (215) 662-0957

[www.cess-msa.org](http://www.cess-msa.org)

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# INTRODUCTION

The Middle States Association of Colleges and School systems is a non-governmental, nonprofit, peer-administered organization of diverse educational institutions committed to ensuring that students in accredited school systems are receiving the highest quality education. Additionally, the Association seeks to ensure that accredited school systems are engaged in continuous growth and improvement efforts through effective leadership, a comprehensive program of self-study, evaluation by peer educators external to the school system, meeting the requirements for accreditation, exemplary programs, and supportive services. For 125 years, the Association has provided leadership in educational quality and school system improvement for its member school systems, school system systems, and other education institutions in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and in more than 85 countries outside the United States.

The school system that is the subject of this report selected the *Excellence by Design (SV)* (*ExBD (SV)*) self-study and accreditation protocol. *ExBD (SV)* is an accreditation protocol that uses strategic planning as a vehicle for growth and improvement in student performance and in the school system's capacity to effect that growth. The protocol, developed by the Middle States Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSA-CESS) of the Middle States Association of Colleges and School Systems, links various planning and school system growth and improvement efforts. *Excellence by Design (SV)* leads the school system to establish objectives for improving student performance and organizational capacity based on its vision of a preferred future for its students. Therefore, *Excellence by Design (SV)* is a future-oriented and visionary process. In addition, the protocol provides for a *continuous* review of programs and services and of the results of student performance. It also allows diverse constituent groups to participate in charting the future of the institution.

The purpose of *Excellence by Design (SV)* is to provide a framework and process to guide the school system's efforts to achieve excellence in student performance and to achieve accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools—The Gold Standard.

*Excellence by Design (SV)* also provides the framework for formally aligning all the work of the school system to ensure that all of its efforts are coordinated and focused on

achieving the school system's mission. It is expected that this framework will accomplish the following purposes:

- Development of a sense of community and common purpose among the school system's students and staff, and its community of stakeholders.
- A Plan for Growth and Improvement in student performance and the school system's capacity to produce the levels of student performance expected by the school system and its community of stakeholders.
- Greater cooperation between all of the school system's stakeholders in identifying and implementing practices that have been demonstrated to lead to excellence in student performance and the organization's capacity to produce the desired and expected levels of student performance.

Most importantly, this framework intends to develop in the school system's community of stakeholders an understanding that the school system it is part of a larger community of learners and that this community has agreed upon, supports, and accepts responsibility for assisting the school system in achieving its Mission, Profile of Graduates, and Plan for Growth and Improvement in student performance and organizational capacity. This learning community understands that, by working together to articulate and align its efforts, it can achieve higher levels of excellence in student performance.

To be accredited through the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol, the school system first must meet the 12 Middle States Association Standards for Accreditation. Second, the school system, through a planning team of representatives from the school system's community stakeholders, must identify areas of student performance that are the highest priorities for growth and improvement, measurable performance objectives, and a plan for achieving the objectives. The plan must also include the school system's mission and the beliefs or core values that guide its decision making.

## What Is Excellence?

In his book *Good to Great*<sup>1</sup>, author Jim Collins posits that the transformation from being good to being great is a process of buildup followed by breakthrough. This process consists of three broad stages:

- Getting disciplined people into the organization;

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Collins. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't.* (2001). New York: HarperBusiness.

- Getting the disciplined people to use disciplined thought; and
- Getting the disciplined people to take disciplined actions.

Collins goes on to say:

“...[I] believe that it is no harder to build something great than to build something good. It might be statistically more *rare* to reach greatness, but it does not require more suffering than perpetuating mediocrity.”<sup>2</sup>

Collins states that seeking greatness requires passion—“doing something you care that much about, and you believe in its purpose deeply enough, [that] it is impossible to imagine *not* trying to make it great.”<sup>3</sup>

In summary, the purpose of the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol is to assist and provide guidance to those educators who believe passionately in the need to create a better future for their students and seek a framework and a process to make that happen.

In order to change a culture, education leaders must keep the attention of the entire school system community focused on answering the five questions below. In the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol, the Planning Team was guided to develop answers to the following questions:

- #1: By the time they have experienced our full educational program and services, what should our students know, and how should they be able to use what they know? What content, skills, and work habits should be the priorities for learning? What attitudes, qualities or characteristics should our students demonstrate?
- #2: How well should students perform the desired outcomes, and what does excellent performance look like?
- #3: How will we measure and evaluate our students’ performance in multiple ways?
- #4: How well do our students currently perform? What is the actual quality of their work?

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<sup>2</sup> Collins, p. 205

<sup>3</sup> Collins, p. 208

#5: What must we do to improve student performance?

In setting a course for continuous improvement in student and organizational performance, school systems and their communities must study not only what the existing data tell them about their students' present performance, but they must also set clear targets for what they want student performance to be in the future. Maintaining a focus on these five questions is essential to a successful continuous improvement process and is a "habit of mind" that must be cultivated and nurtured by the school system's leaders and those leading the growth and improvement efforts. Too often school systems find themselves working on curriculum and instructional materials and engaging in professional development before they have clearly decided what their students should know, how they should use their content knowledge, process skills, and work habits, and what the quality of their performance should be.

## Requirements for Accreditation

The requirements for accreditation using the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol area;

Number	Requirement
1	The system has conducted a thorough and complete self-study that has involved appropriate stakeholders of the school system [See Chapter 2].
2	The system has and is using foundational documents that govern the manner in which the school system does its work, including a Mission, Core Values, and a Profile of Graduates [See Chapter 4].
3	<p>A Profile of the School System and Its Community, which consists of the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Profile of the School System that describes the system's current organization and staffs [See Chapter 5].</li> <li>• A Profile of Student Performance that describes the levels of performance currently being achieved by the system's students using data from multiple assessments [See Chapter 6]; and</li> <li>▪ The Results of an External Scan that describe the external educational, social, political, economic, and technological factors that are and will be affecting the system's ability to achieve its Mission and its student performance and organizational capacity goals [See Chapter 8].</li> </ul>
4	A Profile of Organizational Capacity that describes the school system's capacity to produce the levels of its student performance and organizational capacity desired by its community of stakeholders and as

Number	Requirement
	expressed in the its Mission and Profile of Graduates [See Chapter 7].
5	Identified priorities for growth and improvement in student performance and the system's capacity to achieve the levels of student performance desired and expected [See Chapter 9].
6	A plan to grow and improve the priorities identified for growth and improvement that includes measurable objectives, multiple assessments to determine achievement of the objectives, and multi-year action plans to achieve the goals [See Chapters 10 and 11].

The Requirements 2, 3, 5, and 6 may be met through a Middle States Validation Audit. Requirements 1 and 4—the Self-Study and the Profile of Organizational Capacity cannot be met through the Validation Audit process.

If the school system that is the subject of this Self-Study Report sought and received validation for any of the requirements for accreditation through a Validation Audit, this fact is recorded in the Self-Study Report and the Visiting Team does not evaluate those requirements during its onsite visit. The Team may, however, include observations about and recommendations for improving the system's plans, programs, and/or operation pre-approved through an audit.

Plans, systems, and/or operations that have been validated are included in this Self-Study Report, as they are integral to the process of developing plans for growing and improving student performance and organizational capacity and must be considered when developing such plans.

## The Middle States Visiting Team

The Middle States Visiting Team is a group of professional educators appointed by the Middle States Association's Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools to conduct an onsite visit to the school system. The purpose of the Team's visit is threefold. First, the Team determines whether the school system meets the 12 Standards for Accreditation. Second, the Team determines if the school system meets the requirements for a planning ethic and planning processes of the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol. Third, the Team reviews the content of the school system's Plan for Growth and Improvement in student performance to determine the validity and clarity of the Plan together with the level of commitment to implementing the Plan and achieving its objectives expressed by the school system's community of stakeholders.



## **NOTE TO THE READERS OF THIS REPORT**

Readers of this report must be aware that, in its report, the Team is responding to the information, data, and self-assessments in school system's self-study. Therefore, the report is only meaningful when it is read in conjunction with the school system's Self-Study Document.

# ORGANIZATION FOR GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

## Introduction

A sound planning ethic and planning process are every bit as critical to achieving an school system's goals for growth in student performance and the school system's capacity to effect that growth as is a plan rich in content. An effective planning ethic and process address the essential question: "Does the school system have the capacity, the will, and the systematic structures required to implement its plan and achieve its goals?" A fine plan full of great activities is only as strong as the ability and willingness of the school system and its stakeholders to implement it.

While successful planning is reflective of an organization's context and culture, it should be visionary in describing what an organization wants to become and pragmatic in specifying the steps to reach that goal. Successful planning for growth and change has been described as a delicate balance between brave steps forward and reassuring steps to the side; between the recognition of the need for growth and a celebration of what already exists that is good, steady, and/or certain; between the bold, frequently scary, visions of future possibilities and the comfort with past and present successes.

When an institution seeks accreditation using the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol, it must commit to working toward establishing and maintaining a planning ethic within the school system. A planning ethic means that planning for growth and improvement becomes part of what the school system and its stakeholders do as much as providing programs, teaching, resources, services, and activities. A planning ethic requires continuous clarification of the school system's unique mission, beliefs, profile of graduates, and student performance objectives. It requires that all of its processes are vision-driven. And it requires that the school system is action-oriented by developing long-term strategic action plans that integrate programs, services, facilities, and support to address the school system's growth needs.

In the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol, the school system also makes a commitment to continuous growth and improvement. The school system and its stakeholders should demonstrate that they are never satisfied with the status quo in terms of student performance, but are striving constantly to improve that performance. The setting and striving to achieve challenging growth goals should become a dynamic process in which the school system develops the flexibility to revise and modify its plans to

achieve its goals based on the results received from implementing those plans. As part of the accreditation process, the school system should review the results of its efforts at least annually and willingly open its processes and results to review by its peers in the Middle States Association.

It is also essential for the school system to commit to involving its stakeholders in meaningful ways in the setting of goals, developing plans to achieve and measure those goals, and the implementation of those plans. In a planning culture, the school system strives to develop broad ownership of the planning process and the plan for growth and improvement by the entire community by ensuring broad based knowledge and understanding of and support for the goals and the plans to achieve them.

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In this section of its report, the Visiting Team provides observations and recommendations regarding the school system's Organization for Growth and Improvement based on what was seen and heard during the Team's visit to the school system.

## **A. Leadership for Growth and Improvement**

The primary role of the leadership and governing body of the school system—those in positions of authority and influence within the school system— in the school system improvement process is to serve as the “champions” for developing a planning ethic and the growth and improvement process. Strategic planning experts have long held that champions are extremely important to the success of planning for growth and improvement in any organization. Because the a major goal of the self-study and accreditation process is to ensure that the school system has a vision and a plan to achieve the vision that is accepted and supported by all, leaders must communicate publicly, clearly, and often that:

- the planning process is important for the future of the school system and its students, and
- they will provide the leadership, resources, and support needed to make the process and the plan successful.

This critical role for leaders also applies to the heads and governing bodies of larger organizations of which the school system may be a part. It is very difficult for an individual school system within a larger system to plan strategically for improving

student performance without the clear support and assistance of its parent organization. They, too, must “champion the cause.”

It is also important for the head of the school system and at least one representative of the governing body to serve, when appropriate, on the Planning Team. However, in this role, the leaders should serve as “equals among equals” by serving on the Team as members with the same authority and influence as all other members of the Team. This is often a difficult role to take, because education organizations are typically organized as hierarchies, and the leaders are often expected to make the decisions in a “top down” manner. However, if the goal is to identify a mission and plan to achieve it that is “owned” by all the stakeholders of the school system, the mission and plan must be developed through a grass roots level—bottom up, rather than top down.

### **A.1. Internal Coordinators**

A required component of the protocol is the appointment of a team of Internal Coordinators. The primary functions of the Internal Coordinators are to:

- Coordinate the school system's planning process and development of the Plan for Growth and Improvement;
- Oversee planning and preparation for the Visiting Team visit;
- Prepare for the Mid-Point Review visit; and
- Provide the energy, enthusiasm, and expertise to move the process forward.

#### **Observations**

The Internal Coordinator was selected for the position as the District entered what would have been a mid-point review. Already functioning as the Assistant to the Superintendent and well-versed in the process, she received training in the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol in Fall 2010. It was also recognized that fulfilling the role of the Internal Coordinator was serendipitous in that it segued well with the requirements of her training as a future school superintendent. Finally, her selection made good sense to the District, insofar as her continued responsibilities would include oversight of the district's strategic plan, as already required by Pennsylvania State Department of Education.

To support her efforts, the District afforded her the time and resources she needed to fulfill her responsibilities as the Interval Coordinator. Information contained in the Self-

Study indicates that there were individuals at each of the component schools who assisted her by serving as the individual schools' Internal Coordinators and participating in gathering information for the completion of that document.

The Team's interviews and observations indicated that the Internal Coordinator has a substantial role in nearly all aspects of the District's functioning. Indeed, we noted that there were no questions to which she could not provide comprehensive answers or areas concerning the District about which she did not demonstrate mastery. Likewise, she was thoroughly grounded in all aspects of the District's planning process, including those in which she may not have been previously involved. She will retain control of the process going forward and will maintain close collaboration and communication with Southern Lehigh's leadership.

## Recommendations

- The Internal Coordinator's responsibilities as Assistant to the Superintendent currently merge well with her responsibilities in the planning process. Again, she has ongoing responsibility for oversight of the strategic plan, which we have seen is inextricably linked to the District's Middle States initiative. However, going forward we would suggest that the District evaluate the extent to which she can continue to serve both these demanding roles. We would suggest that Southern Lehigh once again choose staff in each of the component schools to support the Internal Coordinator's efforts, perhaps delegating responsibility for specific aspects of the Plan to specific individuals, with the expectations that the Internal Coordinator would retain over-arching responsibility.

## A.2. The Planning Team<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that, although the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol calls this stakeholder group a Planning Team, what the school system calls this group is not important. Its purpose, composition, operation, and results are what is key. What the protocol requires for accreditation is that this group meets the letter and spirit of the requirements for a Planning Team without regard to what it is called. In many school systems, an improvement team already exists and includes the required stakeholders, so it makes sense for the school system to continue that organization with any adjustments necessary to meet the requirements of the *ExBD (SV)* protocol. This same principle applies to all requirements of the protocol. It is less important what elements and products of the process are called than it is that the school system meets the intentions and results of the requirements.

A major commitment the school system makes when seeking accreditation is to include a varied spectrum of the school system's stakeholders in the process of continually defining a preferred vision, in developing the means to get closer to that vision, and in implementing the action plans developed by these stakeholders. In summary, it is expected that the Planning Team will be given the authority, resources, and support to:

- Develop a vision for the school system by creating or reaffirming a statement of mission;
- Develop a set of beliefs to serve as the ethical code for the institution;
- Develop a profile of the knowledge, skills, and qualities the institution expects of its graduates;
- Identify the areas of student performance that are the priorities for growth and improvement;
- Identify the areas of organizational capacity that are the priorities for growth and improvement;
- Oversee development of the action plans to achieve the performance objectives;
- Monitor implementation of the action plans; and
- Conduct a periodic review of the progress being made to achieving the objectives.

The protocol requires that the Planning Team reflects the composition and diversity of the school system's community of stakeholders. Because Middle States' accredited institutions are so varied in type and situation, Middle States does not prescribe what groups constitute a school system's stakeholders. This is a local decision. However, the school system's leadership and the Planning Team will be expected to provide a rationale for the composition of the Planning Team.

Insofar as the school system is committing itself to developing a planning ethic and a culture of continuous improvement, the Planning Team should be institutionalized. The institution must find ways to integrate the work of the Planning Team into the culture of the school system and the work of the school system. In most cases, this will require a concerted effort and the opening to examination of how the institution thinks about institutional growth and improvement and who is responsible to lead it.

## Observations

The Southern Lehigh School District Planning Team was comprised of volunteers from the District's school board, administration, and staff. There was also evidence of participation from parents and students. Information in the Self-Study indicates that

the charge of the Planning Team was to develop the Vision, Mission, Values, Goals, Strategies and Activities, and that they had full authority to make recommendations to the School Board. The decision-making process was the result of discussion facilitated by the Internal Coordinator.

The Planning Team underwent changes when the District elected to use the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol. Southern Lehigh achieved accreditation in May 2005 and some of those original members also came together to develop what would have been the plan for the 2008 midpoint review. The composition of the revised Team was also representative of the stakeholder groups, and included administrators teachers, parents, board members and students. However, there have been some variables which have impacted on the continuity of the Team.

When the District was ready for a midpoint review, they were asked by Middle States to consider a new protocol (i.e.; *Excellence by Design (SV)*). They agreed to the change, but encountered a delay in getting started as Middle States continued to refine the new protocol. When they were finally underway (at the end of the 2009-10 school year), a number of the original members were no longer part of the process. We understand that, going forward, the District will re-open membership of the Planning Team every three years, with new membership receiving training by the Internal Coordinator.

The Visiting Team also believes that there may be another factor which could have a bearing on the extent of future stakeholder participation – and the degree to which stakeholders understand the importance of such participation. District leadership explained that some staff had had a less than positive experience with a prior Middle States Vissiting Team Visit. To ensure that negative impressions from that visit did not taint future Middle States work, the District made a decision not to strongly connect the work of the state-required strategic plan and the planning process as defined and required by Middle States. Indeed, they informed us that if staff were asked about the current initiative, they would not appear well-informed and the Visiting Team would be left with the impression that stakeholder involvement had been minimal. However, if asked instead what they know about the “strategic plan”, or in what ways they were involved in the strategic planning process, we were assured that the inclusive nature of the District’s practice would be quickly revealed. In another semantic distinction, the committees usually developed in response to the Middle States process (e.g.; “Steering Committee”, “Planning Committee”, “Action Planning Committee”) are referred to by Southern Lehigh as “task forces”.

The District has done a good job of explaining what *Excellence by Design (SV)* is and why accreditation is important. Absent, however, is specific news to District stakeholders about the Middle States process going forward. To illustrate, prior to the Visit, a review of the District's web page found it did not contain the usual publicity that typically accompanies an impending Visiting Team Visit, other than the dates of the expected visit. The Team Chair revisited the District's web page some time after the conclusion of the visit. She found that there was still no posting about the Validation Team's successful visit, no information about the preliminary findings of the Team (as revealed in the Oral Report to the District) and nothing to indicate to the community what the next steps in the process would be.

The Planning Team has been described as having "been part of making decisions in moving the district forward with its Strategic Plan goals" and that they have "played an integral role in running committee meetings and providing feedback through the Strategic Planning process." We are not clear, however, what their tangible role will be going forward.

District leadership also reported some disappointment in terms of staff participation. While nearly all buildings could point to staff involvement, one building faculty did not substantially participate in the process, despite the invitations they received from leadership to do so. Building staff who do participate are expected to function as the "voice" of the group which they represent and are asked to serve as liaison between the leadership and that group. Without participation in each building across the district, there was concern that this voice might not be fully heard.

## **Recommendations**

1. School leaders can help to attract meaningful participation by ensuring that all stakeholders (internal and external) have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the process and plans. Accordingly, it is recommended that, going forward, Southern Lehigh ensure that information about the Middle States reaccreditation process and the successful Visiting Team Visit is prominent on its website, is regularly updated electronically, as well as in District Newsletters, and receives some degree of attention during building and central office staff meetings. Finally, a clear celebration of the District's success to date could do much to generate enthusiasm for this good work.
2. It is suggested that the Middle States' terminology and parlance be adopted and integrated into all future discussion and correspondence about the process,



especially in as it concerns the results of the Middle States Visit, the recommendations offered, and the plans developed as a result.

3. A renewed effort is needed to encourage full district stakeholder involvement in the planning process going forward. New membership is needed to both ensure that actions needed are completed and to revitalize Team membership. We do not believe that recruitment of participants can be wholly successful unless (a) stakeholders have a full understanding of the far-reaching implication of Middle States accreditation; and (b) there is an ongoing stream of information about the direction in which the District now expects to go.
4. We also note that the District's growing partnerships (which they have consciously developed to ensure that students can explore career paths or have out-of-classroom learning experiences) provide fertile ground for bringing in external stakeholders to inform the entire self-study and planning process.
5. It is expected that the work of the Planning Team post-Visiting Team Visit will be integrated with the work and culture of the District. That cannot effectively happen if the role of the Team going forward is vague. The District needs to clarify the group's responsibility. In so doing, Southern Lehigh fulfills its continuing commitment to planning, increases stakeholder understanding, and improves the likelihood of attracting stakeholder involvement.

### **A.3. Role of the School System's Leadership and Governance**

It is school system's formal leaders—those in positions of authority and influence within the school system—who should serve as the primary “champions” for the process planning for growth and improvement and the Plan for Growth and Improvement. Strategic planning experts have long held that champions are extremely important to the success of planning strategically. Because a goal of the self-study and accreditation process is to develop a vision and a plan to achieve the plan that is accepted and supported by the school system's community of stakeholders, the school system's leaders and governing body must communicate clearly and often that this process and the resulting plan are important for the future of the school system and its students, and that they will provide the leadership, resources, and support needed to make the process and the plan successful.

#### **Observations**

The Visiting Team learned that the Southern Lehigh leadership and staff had seen value in undergoing the Middle States accreditation process, but were increasingly concerned

about the declining economic environment and its potential impact on the district's available resources. Mindful of this, there had been some discussion about reconsidering going forward with the reaccreditation process. The role of the Southern Lehigh Board of Education was noteworthy in ensuring that the District maintained their commitment to the Middle States process.

Board members had come to appreciate the advantage to students graduating from a Middle States accredited high school. They learned that this was something that colleges clearly valued and consequently concluded that it would serve their students well in the college admission process. Accordingly, the Board strongly advocated for maintaining the commitment to reaccreditation and undergoing the new *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol.

The entire District leadership also agrees that the *Excellence by Design (SV)* will ensure the success of important District goals. First, the District students have always been high achievers, readily meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in terms of performance on assessments, attendance, and graduation rate. They also easily meet and typically exceed the targets established by the State of Pennsylvania. Southern Lehigh is committed to maintaining this high level of achievement, but notes the challenges ahead. They believe that participating in Middle States planning will support them in meeting these challenges going forward.

In addition, the state-required strategic plan complements the planning process advocated by Middle States and helps the District capitalize on many of the things they have already been doing – but only in terms of education. The opportunity to use the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol resulted in the District's conscious decision to adopt the process across the District. They subsequently required all departments (Business, Human Resources, Transportation, Buildings and Grounds, Food Service etc.) create data-driven plans. The Visiting Team also heard testimony about the District leadership's hard work to ensure that all staff understands that their work, regardless of its nature, must support and advance the District's overarching goals and objectives. The Board of Education and central office have provided unwavering support for the work being done in each department and in all school buildings.

## **Recommendations**

The Visiting Team believes that the governance and leadership of Southern Lehigh has indeed served well as “the primary ‘champions’” of the District's plans for growth and

improvement. We urge them to maintain this level of support and continue to send the message that the work of the District must be integrated toward common goals.

#### **A.4. The Plan for Institutionalizing a Planning Ethic**

A sound planning ethic is critical to achieving the school system's mission, its objectives for growth and improvement in student performance and organizational capacity, and to its capacity to effect the intended growth and improvement. An effective planning ethic addresses the essential question: "Does the school system and its community of stakeholders have the capacity, the will, and the systematic structures and processes required to develop and implement its plan and achieve its objectives?" A fine plan full of great activities is only as strong as the ability and willingness of the school system and its stakeholders to implement it.

While successful planning is reflective of the school system's context and culture, it should be visionary in describing what the school system and its stakeholder community want for their students and pragmatic in specifying the steps to reach that goal. Successful planning for growth and improvement has been described as a delicate balance between brave steps forward and reassuring steps to the side; between the recognition of the need for growth and a celebration of what already exists that is good, steady, and/or certain; between the bold, frequently scary, visions of future possibilities and the comfort with past and present successes.

When a school system seeks accreditation using the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol, it must commit to working toward establishing and sustaining a planning ethic within the school system. A planning ethic means that planning for growth and improvement becomes part of what the school system and its community of stakeholders do as much as teaching, administering, and providing programs, resources, services, and activities. A planning ethic requires continuous clarification of the community's unique mission, beliefs, profile of graduates, and student and organizational performance goals for the system. It requires that all of its processes are vision-driven. And it requires that the community is action-oriented by developing and implementing long-term, strategic action plans that integrate programs, services, facilities, and support to address the school system's growth objectives.

In the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol, the school system also makes a commitment to continuous growth and improvement. The school system and its stakeholders should demonstrate that they are never satisfied with the status quo in terms of how their

students perform but are striving constantly to improve the levels of performance. The setting of and striving to achieve challenging growth objectives should become a dynamic process in which the school system develops the flexibility to revise and modify its plans to achieve its objectives based on the results received from implementing those plans. As part of the accreditation process, the school system must review the results of its efforts periodically and open its processes and results willingly to review by its peers in the Middle States Association.

A planning ethic also requires the school system to commit to involving its stakeholders in meaningful ways in the setting of objectives, developing plans to achieve and measure those objectives, and the implementation of those plans. In a planning culture, the school system strives to develop broad ownership of both the planning process and the Plan for Growth and Improvement by the entire community by ensuring broad based knowledge and understanding of and support for the objectives and the plans to achieve them.

A planning ethic that provides significant roles for the stakeholders of the school system also has the effect of sharing among the stakeholders responsibility for the success of any planning for growth and improvement. *Excellence by Design (SV)* builds such roles and responsibilities into the self-study and planning processes. Therefore, if implemented faithfully, *Excellence by Design (SV)* can provide the school system with the vehicle it needs to build sustainability into its planning for growth and improvement, because ownership of and responsibility for the success of the planning process and the plan for growth and improvement no longer rest with the head of the school system and the system's staff but with all of the school system's stakeholders.

## Observations

The Visiting Team is confident that the Southern Lehigh School District has embraced and institutionalized an ethic of strategic planning. The strategies they have employed to maintain this ethic have included (a) scheduling a variety of regular data team and administrative meetings; (b) ensuring that monthly reports to the Board provide progress about the strategic plan activities; (c) integrating building plans with district plans; (d) the provision of professional development that supports and helps to achieve the strategic plan's goals; and (e) requiring that all staff establish professional goals that align with the strategic plan.

As previously noted, all departments within the District are required to create data-driven plans. The District has been emphasizing that there is an inter-relationship

between the work of all departments and the success with which the District serves its students. The links between their plans and Southern Lehigh's three over-arching goals must be clearly established before any requests or recommendations are approved. Everything must fit together.

These connections were clear, even intuitive, for teachers and administrators. However, other departments more removed from contact with children did not always see how their work directly impacted student growth. Through a concerted effort, District leadership was able to establish these connections for all staff and, in so doing, ensured that the work of not just teachers and administrators, but also of Buildings and Grounds, Food Services, Transportation, and the Business Department went forward with renewed commitment to serve students. In the District's own words: "Everyone is responsible for knowing and recording their professional activities in terms of our strategic plan goals. It is an integral part of everything that we do." We would agree that Southern Lehigh School District plan for continuous growth and development "is anchored" in the implementation of the strategic plan. This emerges as one of their notable strengths.

The Team agrees that maintaining stakeholder perception and grasp of how things "go together" is vital. We believe that the current level of staff understanding and involvement in strategic plan within a "Pennsylvania State Department of Education" context is high. We also believe that the comprehension of the plan within a "Middle States" context may still in the earliest stages. The District's leadership was wise to discern the ways in which the two processes are not mutually exclusive and that they can strongly enhance one another. Do the internal and, especially, external stakeholders have the same degree of understanding?

## **Recommendations**

1. The Visiting Team takes note of and commends the manner in which Southern Lehigh has consistently promoted a planning ethic that connects the work of all staff to the achievement of the three Goals identified in the District's Plan.
2. Again, we encourage (a) a renewed commitment to broader and revitalized stakeholder participation and (b) braiding the "strategic plan" with the "Middle States plan" and creating a more seamless effort and clearer connection going forward. We expect that developing a deeper understanding of these two highly compatible processes will contribute to increased interest and involvement from Southern Lehigh staff and external stakeholders.

## A.5. The Plan for Communication and Awareness

An important factor in increasing the likelihood that a school system will achieve the goals it has set in its Plan for Growth and Improvement is to ensure broad ownership of the planning process and the Plan for Growth and Improvement across the entire school system and its stakeholder community. This is accomplished by ensuring broad based knowledge and understanding of and support for the school system's performance objectives and the plans to achieve them.

Therefore, an important element of the planning process is communicating regularly with the school system's staff, students, governing board, and other stakeholders to ensure they are aware of the requirements of the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol, the school system's planning process, mission, objectives, action plans and, eventually, its accomplishments as it implements its plan. The communication process should include means for obtaining from the members of the school system's stakeholder community input and feedback regarding to the products of the planning process (i.e., mission, objectives, action plans). Stakeholders cannot support and take ownership in what the school system is doing unless they first know about it and are invited to join in the process.

The primary purpose of communication is to develop a critical mass within the school system's community of stakeholders with knowledge about, understanding of, and support for the planning process and the Plan for Growth and Improvement in student learning and the organization's capacity to produce learning at the level expected.

### Observations

Earlier in the report, we noted that Southern Lehigh's continuation with the Middle States process was a function of several factors. Initially, it was the commitment of the School Board, which strongly advocated for maintaining the relationship with Middle States and undergoing the new *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol. Board members felt strongly that having accreditation was an advantage to students graduating from high school and seeking college entrance. However, all District leadership agreed that the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol would both ensure a well-integrated approach to meeting the District goals and better prepare them to meet the challenge of maintaining the high student achievement for which the District is known.

The District has been successful in communicating to internal stakeholders in a variety of ways. There is a district website, which can be used daily to communicate, as well as an electronic communication system that allows for broadcasted messages via voice, text, and/or email to parents. Southern Lehigh has a monthly district newsletter that celebrates the accomplishments of the district, as well as building newsletters that report on more specific events. Finally, the District maintains a relationship with the local newspaper, which reports on school system activities and events. Those to whom we spoke had good understanding of their role and responsibility in helping move the District toward that “preferred vision of its own future.” Stakeholder participation in the foundational work of strategic planning had been reasonably inclusive, despite aforementioned changes in committee membership and the challenges to increase involvement the District must assume going forward. Again, there has been ongoing emphasis of the ways in which the overarching plan must drive all decisions going forward. These, then, represent some of the District’s strengths and accomplishments since beginning the *Excellence by Design (SV)* accreditation protocol.

As is required by all Middle States accreditation processes, Southern Lehigh engaged in self-study based in part on stakeholder responses to surveys. The surveys were sent out to a broad-based constituency, with 2081 completed and returned.

Now that the plans and overarching goals have been fully adopted, providing teachers, staff, parents, students and community partners with ongoing information about District activities and success is crucial to the future of process. Earlier we commended Southern Lehigh for a fine job of explaining what *Excellence by Design (SV)* is and why accreditation is important, while wondering why specific news to District stakeholders about the Middle States process going forward was not included on the website. To what extent will the District use the web page, Newsletter, “Parent Portal” and other means of communication currently at its disposal to provide this stream of information? We believe that Southern Lehigh has yet to turn its attention to this.

## Recommendations

1. We believe that the Plan for Communication and Awareness can benefit from the same measures as were recommended under prior sections of this report; i.e.: going forward, Southern Lehigh must include information about the Middle States reaccreditation process and future planning efforts on its website, in District Newsletters, and during building and central office staff meetings.
2. In addition to other comments about increasing stakeholder participation, we would add the recommendation that participants from external partnerships be drawn to

Southern Lehigh's future Middle States activities. Indeed, we believe that this could actually motivate previously uninvolved teachers and staff to reconsider their decision to stay on the sidelines.

## **A.6. The Plan for Periodic Reviews of the Plan for Growth and Improvement**

To institutionalize a planning ethic, continuous growth and improvement in student and organizational performance must become a way of life within the school system. It must be an ongoing, dynamic, and "evergreen" process. It is expected and required that the Plan for Growth and Improvement developed and presented for accreditation will be implemented faithfully over the length of the term of accreditation.

Consequently, *it should be anticipated, and it should be expected* that implementing the activities of the action plans and gathering the results of the assessments used to measure the student and organizational performance objectives will indicate there is a need to revise the action plans regularly based on what is working and what is not.

Therefore, the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol includes the requirement that formal reviews of the Plan for Growth and Improvement, including its action plans and progress toward achieving the performance objectives are conducted periodically but, as a minimum, at least once annually.

### **Observations**

The interviews conducted by the Visiting Team during the Visit informed our understanding of how the District's Middle States initiative developed and went forward. We are clear about the creation of the current ethic of strategic planning and the excellent efforts of district leaders to create strong interconnections between the work of all district faculty and staff. The District has indicated that the same strategies employed to establish the current culture of planning will be employed to maintain it. Specifically, Southern Lehigh states:

*As administrators we are constantly reviewing the strategic plan and planning our action plans around those strategies and activities. Likewise at the building level our data teams continually monitor student growth as it relates to our strategic plan goals. We also report to the school board monthly about our*



*activities and how they relate to the strategic plan. All of these mechanisms assist us in monitoring our progress with our strategic plan.*

To further understand Southern Lehigh's intentions for periodic reviews of the "Plan for Growth and Improvement", the Visiting Team reviewed a document on the District's website, known as the "Strategic Plan for Mid-Point Review Activities." It appears to speak, at least in part, to the question of how Southern Lehigh will continue to monitor and assess its plan and progress in the achievement of its goals. The document, which has the heading "With an Eye to the Future...A Journey Toward Excellence," lists several pages of strategies and activities aligned with each of the three over-arching district goals.

We noted that most of these activities speak of planning, promoting, analyzing, investigating, maintaining, and other such "action words" that nevertheless do not operationally define precisely what this would look like when implemented. While the compilation of midpoint activities is extensive in terms of what the District seeks to accomplish, it is devoid of the details to inform how, when and with which staff and resources they would be achieved. There is no information to suggest timelines or process by which the plan would be reviewed or progress assessed. Finally, we wonder who has been designated to have global oversight of the plan and how often will (s)he be providing reports to the Board, faculty and staff, students and parents, and the community at large.

## **Recommendations**

1. The success the District is having in clearly defining how each department plays a part in attaining the goals will be diminished if the planning process going forward remains so vague. The District must provide the needed details which clearly spell out what exactly is to be done, by when, by whom and with what resources. This should be unequivocally identified as a Middle States activity, with staff and community fully understanding that it is a critical component of the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol.
2. It is suggested that the District can begin to address this concern by addressing those previously raised about increasing stakeholder participation and deepening communication about Middle States to internal and external stakeholders. Specifically, an Action Planning Committee comprised of a representative group of school staff and community members needs to be formed and charged to operationalize the plan currently identified as the "Strategic Plan for Mid-Point Review Activities".

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# THE VISITING TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS— ORGANIZATION FOR GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

## A. Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve its Organization for Growth and Improvement. Recommendations are suggestions and ideas of the Visiting Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.

1. Ensure that all stakeholders (internal and external) have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the process and plans by providing prominent information on its website, in District Newsletters, and during building and central office staff meetings.
2. Middle States terminology and parlance should be adopted and integrated into all future discussion and correspondence about the process
3. Encourage broader and revitalized stakeholder participation in the planning process, and include an effort to draw participants from external partnerships.
4. Clarify the Planning Team's future role and responsibility.
5. Going forward, the planning process must include the necessary details which will clearly spell out what exactly is to be done, by when, by whom and with what resources.

## B. Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any aspects of the Requirements for the school system's Organization for Growth and Improvement that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system's accreditation.

Requirement of the Protocol	Recommended Action
None	None

# THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S MISSION, BELIEFS, AND PROFILE OF GRADUATES

The foundation for an effective plan for improving student performance and the organization's capacity to achieve the levels of performance desired and expected is established by the school system's Mission, Beliefs, and Profile of Graduates—its foundational documents. These foundational documents answer the following questions:

- *What is our vision for a better future for the children of our school system?*
- *What beliefs or core values will guide our journey?*
- *What will our students have to know, be able to do, and to demonstrate for us to achieve our mission?*

## A. MISSION

A school system's Mission should reflect the deepest desires of the system's community of stakeholders for what they want the school system to become—its future in terms of what it will do for its students. The mission expresses what the adults in the school system community commit themselves to doing for the benefit of the students.

A mission statement should describe in broad and visionary terms what the school system striving to become for the benefit of its students. A mission should be outcome-based, providing clarity regarding the school system's audience (whom it serves), its action (what it commits to doing for its audience), its aim (the purposes for which it exists) and its means (how, in broad terms, it will its purposes).

It is not appropriate for a Visiting Team to determine whether the school system's Mission is the right or wrong mission for the system or a good or bad mission. Nor is it appropriate for the Team to require changes to the Mission. A Visiting Team will, however, offer an objective perspective regarding whether any elements of the Mission are unclear or seem inconsistent or incomplete or whether the school system and its community of stakeholders support and are "walking the talk" of the Mission. However, it is up to the school system to decide if the Team's comments are legitimate and relevant. It is in this spirit that the following observations on the school system's mission.

**The school system's Mission is:**

Educating today's learner...for tomorrow's opportunities.

**What is the school system's *audience* as identified in the Mission?**

While it is not implicitly stated, Southern Lehigh's Mission seems to be reaching out to most especially to future employers of the students; those future workers the District is preparing to have a productive role in the community. The District's conscious effort to reach out to major universities and corporations for the explicit purpose of creating opportunity for its students speaks directly to this point.

**What is the *unique identity* of the school system as identified in the Mission?**

Once again, the District does not overtly communicate its unique identify. Southern Lehigh is very proud of its regional reputation for being an excellent school district, with a tradition of a high graduation and college attendance rate. To this point it, implied in the mission statement is that Southern Lehigh views itself, and wants to be viewed by others, as a district that has embraced - and is well-prepared to meet - the challenge of preparing a 21<sup>st</sup> century learner and worker.

**What is the *aim or purpose* of the school system as stated in the Mission?**

This element of the Mission statement is the most directly communicated: Southern Lehigh's aim is to prepare students for the challenges that await them in a rapidly transforming world, and an increasingly technological society.

**What the *action* of the school system is as stated in the Mission?**

Appropriately, Southern Lehigh chooses "educating" as the action of the system. Aside from delivering curriculum aligned with standards, the District also honors its Mission by offering students enriching external experiences and opportunities through its partnerships with institutes of higher educational and business and industry.

**What is the *means* the school system will use to accomplish it Mission?**

Southern Lehigh's Mission statement leaves this to be surmised by the reader, as it is not explicitly stated. We know of their efforts through our interviews and review of the

documents presented to us. We believe that teachers, other staff, and parents could also deduce that the means by which the District accomplishes its Mission includes the presentation of broad, standard-based curriculum, delivered by good teachers, and provided with the support of technology and enriching extra-curricular experiences.

**To what extent do the school system’s stakeholders know, understand, and support the school system’s Mission?**

This District has posted the Mission statement prominently in both written and electronic formats. The Visiting Team believes that the Mission is embraced by stakeholders. Furthermore, what we have heard from Southern Lehigh’s leadership, staff and parents suggests that they are confident in their qualifications to deliver on this Mission, and that these qualifications are a point of considerable pride for the District and its community.

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**B. CORE VALUES**

Statements of core values serve as the foundation of a strong strategic plan. They are the formal expression of a school system’s fundamental values and serve as its ethical code. Core values describe the moral character of a school system. In a planning process involving diverse stakeholder groups, they represent the composite of the values held by individual planning team members.

Because core values are a matter of faith, not a matter of fact, they express the school system’s overriding convictions, its inviolate commitments. They outline what members of the school system’s community of stakeholders are willing to “go to the mat” defending. Because core values identify the “line in the sand,” they can be used as a lens through which to examine the worthiness of the school system’s potential decisions or future actions.

Only members of the school system community can identify their deeply held values. A Visiting Team can, however, offer an objective perspective on what is unclear or seems inconsistent or incomplete in the school system’s Core Values. Ultimately, however, it is the school system that has to decide if the Team’s comments are legitimate and relevant. It is in this spirit that the following observations on the school system’s Values made.

The Validation Team found two sets of statements which were identified as “core values” or “beliefs”. Within the self-study, the District responded as follows to the question, *What are the school system’s Core Values?*

**The school system's Core Values are:**

In the pursuit of excellence, the Southern Lehigh School District has created a culture of innovation and creativity empowering students for a brighter future in a global society.

The Southern Lehigh School District vision is one where:

- The District strives to meet the needs of all students.
- Our programs provide challenging, relevant learning experiences for the community of learners.
- Students are actively engaged in learning twenty-first century skills including:
  - Core subjects and 21<sup>st</sup> century themes
  - Learning and innovation skills
  - Information, media and technology skills
  - Life and career skills
- Rigor, relevance, and relationships are the keystones of our competency/ standards-based programs.
- Data-informed decision making guides our path to improvement.
- Communications among our community of learners is open and engaging.
- Students are offered opportunity and choice in learning.
- We collaborate with partners in K-20 institutions, businesses, and community organizations on a local, regional, national, and global level.
- Teachers and administrators are dedicated to high expectations for themselves and their students and model the skills they inspire students to achieve.

In evaluating this statement of core values or beliefs, the Validation Team would have to rate the District as follows

Criterion	Meets the Criterion	Does Not Meet the Criterion
Precise in application		X
Simply formatted and easily understood		X
What the stakeholders believe; not what they think		X
Begin with "We believe that..." not "We believe in..."		X

Criterion	Meets the Criterion	Does Not Meet the Criterion
Not bland platitudes without real value judgment		X
Not prescriptions		X
Not education specific but declarations of universal human values as held by the systems' community of stakeholders; values they would hold no matter where they were or under what conditions they found themselves, or business they were conducting		X
Not trivial	X	
Do not include clichés or jargon		X
Do not include "must" or "should," as those verbs make the statement an imperative, not a belief		X

In this expression of beliefs, we found an unexpected “disconnect” between the expressions of the District’s values and the things which we thought served as working examples of them. We believe that the above statements of core values do not do sufficient justice to the work they do, or goals they are striving to achieve. The above “values” speak to characteristics and aspirations, practices and actions, and ambitions and goals that would be both appropriate and commendable for any school district. However, they do not reveal the heart of the District, those things which are held as a matter of faith, or convey what the District most aspires to be. Rather, they fail to express the District’s over-riding commitments, which the Visiting Team knows exist.

However, when we reviewed the strategic plan, as submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, we found the expected evidence of Southern Lehigh’s strongly held convictions, as expressed in the following set of core values and beliefs:

*We believe:*

- *Education is a fundamental partnership among individuals, home, school, and the community.*
- *All people can learn.*
- *High expectations promote high achievement.*
- *Environment impacts upon learning.*
- *Society benefits when people act responsibly and respectfully.*
- *Continuous improvement is achieved by promoting and managing change effectively.*
- *The commitment of resources to public education provides long-term benefits to society.*

The Visiting Team would rate the above statements of beliefs and core values as follows:

Criterion	Meets the Criterion	Does Not Meet the Criterion
Precise in application	X	
Simply formatted and easily understood	X	
What the stakeholders believe; not what they think	X	
Begin with "We believe that..." not "We believe in..."	X	
Not bland platitudes without real value judgment	X	
Not prescriptions	X	
Not education specific but declarations of universal human values as held by the systems' community of stakeholders; values they would hold no matter where they were or under what conditions they found themselves, or business they were conducting	X	
Not trivial	X	
Do not include clichés or jargon	X	
Do not include "must" or "should," as those verbs make the statement an imperative, not a belief	X	

**Overall, how well do the school system’s Core Values meet the criteria of the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol? If they do not meet the criteria, explain why.**

In the statements found in the strategic plans submitted to Pennsylvania State Department of Education, Southern Lehigh clearly meets the criteria established by the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol.

**How well do the school system’s Core Values represent what the Team heard from the school system’s stakeholders?**

The Team heard many statements from teachers, administrators, parents, students and board members that represented the values and beliefs as stated in the strategic plans submitted to Pennsylvania State Department of Education.

**To what extent do the school system’s stakeholders know, understand, and support the school system’s Core Values?**



The Validation Team believes that there would be consensus and support for the statements offered as the District's Values in the strategic plans submitted to Pennsylvania State Department of Education.

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## C. PROFILE OF GRADUATES

The Profile of Graduates provides the answer to the following question:

When our students have completed our entire educational program and have had the benefit of the services and activities provided by the institution and its community:

- What do we expect them to know?
- What do we expect them to be able to do with what they know?
- What qualities or characteristics do we want them to demonstrate?

A Profile of Graduates:

- Describes the students at the point of exit from the institution.
- States the values, achievement, and readiness that each student will manifest upon graduation.
- Should be considered both as a Bill of Rights and set of corresponding responsibilities for students, faculty, staff, administration, and the institution's community.
- Defines the outcomes each and every student will attain if the mission is operative and appropriately translated into programs and services.

A Profile of Graduates serves to:

- Translate the identity, vision, and values expressed in the beliefs and mission into statements that describe student outcomes.
- Translate and transform concepts from the ideal and global to specific expression in the development of a student in the institution.
- Give expression to what the mission means in the operational life of the institution.
- Define an outline or shape each student is expected to grow into regardless of specific courses taken or post-graduation plans.
- A concrete reference point for faculty, staff, and the institution's community when designing curriculum, instructional experiences, service programs, auxiliary resources, and student and family services.

**The school system's Profile of Graduates is:**

The graduate profile criteria were established based on the mission statement of “Educating Today’s Learners for Tomorrow’s Opportunities”. In the pursuit of excellence, the Southern Lehigh School District has created a culture of innovation and creativity empowering students for a brighter future in a global society. Southern Lehigh is committed to providing rich and varied learning opportunities for students in order to prepare them for an ever-changing world. Graduates will demonstrate the following:

- Effective communication skills including listening, speaking, writing and reading for understanding.
- Use of critical thinking skills, including problem solving and decision-making, both individually and collaboratively.
- Technological and information literacy skills.
- Collaboration with others using creativity and innovation to solve real world issues
- Use of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and attributes.
- Responsible citizenship and ethical behavior.
- Positive self-esteem and respect for others.
- Appreciation for other cultures and global societies.
- Understanding of the importance of being able to adapt to change and continually learn.

Criterion	Meets the Criterion	Does Not Meet the Criterion
States what the school system expects its students to know upon completion of the educational program?	X	
States what the school system expects its students to do with what they know upon completion of the educational program	X	
States what qualities or characteristics the school system wants its students to demonstrate upon completion of the educational program?	X	
Describes the students at the point of exit from the school system.	X	
Defines the outcomes each and every student will attain if the mission is operative and appropriately translated into programs and services.	X	

## **To what extent do the school system’s stakeholders know, understand, and support the school system’s Profile of Graduates?**

The District’s pursuit of its broad goals is well-established and well-accepted by its constituency. All staff and departments understand how their work and plans must integrate to support the three over-arching goals, as well as the work of the other departments. In so doing, the District’s stakeholders are expressing their understanding and support for Southern Lehigh’s Profile of Graduates.

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## **THE VISITING TEAM’S RECOMMENDATIONS—MISSION, BELIEFS, AND PROFILE OF GRADUATES**

### **THE VISITING TEAM’S RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve its Mission, Beliefs, and/or Profile of Graduates. Recommendations are suggestions and ideas of the Visiting Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

The Validation Team agrees that the District’s Mission Statement and Profile of Graduates meet the requirement established by *Excellence by Design (SV)*. While the statement of Core Values does not express the District’s most strongly held beliefs, the statements found in the strategic plans submitted to Pennsylvania State Department of Education, Southern Lehigh clearly meets the criteria established by the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol.

We would also advocate for a deeper look at the Profile of Students. The choice of *Excellence by Design (SV)* creates an opportunity to meaningfully assess the District’s place and role within the community at large. Southern Lehigh acknowledged to us that there is little or no data about students after they leave the District. Gathering such data would allow the school system to confirm that they have achieved the goal of preparing children for adult responsibilities.

### **THE VISITING TEAM’S RECOMMENDED MONITORING ISSUES:**

**In this section, the Team lists any requirements for the Mission, Beliefs, and/or Profile of Graduates that require monitoring. Monitoring issues refer to elements of**

**Mission, Beliefs, and Profile of Graduates** required by the protocol that are not completely absent but are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be corrected by mid-term in the school system's accreditation.

Requirement of the Protocol	Action Recommended
Statement of Core Values	The District is urged to reconcile the statements of core values as they appear in the self-study with those which appear in the strategic plan. In this case, the decision not to use Middle States protocols did not serve the District well. It has resulted in an inconsistent and possibly confusing communication of Southern Lehigh's most strongly held beliefs – a critical feature of the strategic plan.

**THE VISITING TEAM'S RECOMMENDED STIPULATIONS:**

In this section, the Team lists requirements for the foundational documents (Mission, Beliefs, and Profile of Graduates) that are entirely absent and, therefore, the school system does not meet. Such requirements must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

Requirement of the Protocol	Action Recommended
	NONE



## THE PROFILE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Profile of the School System describes the school system and the context in which the system exists and does its work. It presents a portrait of the school system's community(ies) and the "distinctive personality" and unique characteristics of the school system. The Profile presents contextual information that establishes a "developmental snapshot" of where the school system is in its efforts to achieve its Mission and to ensure the highest levels of student performance.

The Profile of the School system includes the following information and data that describe the school system and the context in which the school system exists. This information and these data helped the Visiting Team to understand the school system's Mission and the opportunities for and challenges to the school system as it seeks to achieve its Mission. The Profile includes:

- A brief history of the community, its school system, and its traditions
- Descriptions of the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the community, its constituencies, and the school system
- The climate for teaching and learning in the school system
- The number and qualifications of the professional and support staffs
- The number and characteristics of the student population

The data and information contained in the Profile of the School System are not evaluated by the Visiting Team. Instead, the Profile serves two purposes:

- To ensure that the members of the Planning Team have a common knowledge base about the history and current status of the school system in those areas on which the accreditation of the school system will focus; and
- To "introduce" members of the Visiting Team to the school system, and as such, provide one of the lenses through which Team members will view and evaluate the school system.

Thus, the Profile should provide sufficient information about the school system and its students' performance to build and enhance Team members' awareness and understanding of the total milieu in which the school system exists and operates.

Readers of this report are advised to read it in conjunction with the Self-Study Document prepared by the school system. The Self-Study Document provides the

information and data the Visiting Team used as the starting point for its evaluation of the school system. Therefore, the details included in the Self-Study Document are not repeated in the Team's report.

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## THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – PROFILE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

### Observations

**In this section, the Visiting Teams shares any general observations and/or areas of strength regarding the school system's Profile of the School system and how the Profile defines the school system and its priorities for improving student performance.**

Southern Lehigh School District lies within a developing area of Southeastern Lehigh County, on the southern edge of the Lehigh Valley. Located one hour north of Philadelphia, and two hours west of New York, the Lehigh Valley is situated in the hills of Pennsylvania and is a mixture of urban and rural quality and collegiate excellence.

The focal point of Lehigh Valley is the mid-sized, dual-city complex of Allentown and Bethlehem, having a population of over 100,000. The Allentown/Bethlehem metropolitan area, with its airport, commercial and employment opportunities, is several miles to the North, while Philadelphia and New York City are within what is now considered acceptable commuting distance.

Bethlehem, originally an 18th century Moravian community, still reflects the historic significance of the area's heritage, as shown in its gothic German architecture. Allentown, rapidly becoming known as one of the country's progressive high-tech centers, also is the home of several outstanding private colleges and universities, which is part of a larger consortium including Muhlenberg, Cedar Crest, Lafayette, Moravian, and Lehigh University. DeSales University, a private four-year liberal arts college, is located in the district. There are also four schools in the state university system within 35 miles of Southern Lehigh.

The region boasts of new shopping malls, growing light industry, nationally recognized art museums and cultural programs, and lovely rambling parks. Described as

“unspoiled by modern progress”, the Valley offers both the benefits of living in a naturalistic setting as well as those of urban life, and provides the population with extensive recreational activities.

The largest employers within the District are Lutron Electronics Corporation; Dun and Bradstreet, Southern Lehigh School District; and Olympus America. The Stabler Center, The Promenade Shops at Saucon Valley, two strip malls, and various small businesses make up the majority of commercial resources. Combined with an excellent road system, which includes Interstate Highway 78, and the excellent reputation of the School District, this area is predicted by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission to experience steady and continuous growth for the next 20 years.

Southern Lehigh School District, formed in 1950, is a suburban school district of the third class, organized and existing under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The district encompasses 44.5 square miles, which is below the state average of 89 square miles. Its area includes the borough of Coopersburg (population 2,400) and the rural townships of Upper Saucon and Lower Milford. Coopersburg Borough is an attractive small town with a commercial center and well-maintained homes. Upper Saucon and Lower Milford have moderate to large-scale homes spread over beautiful rolling hills and a pastoral landscape.

The District encompasses grades kindergarten through twelve and is comprised of three elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, and one high school. Southern Lehigh has experienced a modest 2.3% increase in enrollment within the last decade. Seven years ago, 3,014 students were served by the district. Currently, the District serves 3085 students in six schools: three elementary (K-3), one intermediate school (4-6), one middle (7-8), and one senior high (9-12) with an annual budget of \$53.9 million.

Southern Lehigh reports very little diversity. While there are more Hispanic students than in the past, it does not yet represent a major demographic shift. What they have noted is an increase in the number of working poor families. With the very limited availability of low income housing in the district, this is a concern. District officials and principals are also noting that more students enter kindergarten less prepared than those entering in past years. They describe the trend as a “slow tick up over time” and

have not yet found the need for significant changes or additions to educational programs or services in response to this variable.<sup>5</sup>

Students are served by ten administrators and 151 classroom and “special needs” teachers. In addition, the District employs five guidance counselors, six “specialists and consultants”, two technology personnel, five information resources and library staff, and four health services staff. Most professional staff have about six to ten years experience, with the more senior staff (more than ten years) found in the lower grades. Overwhelmingly, staff hold Master’s degrees, with one member holding a Doctorate. Ninety-seven per cent of professional staff is white. Three per cent are Hispanic or Asian/Pacific. Nearly 70% of professional staff is female.

Finally, there are 74 part-time paraprofessionals 48 food service personnel and cafeteria monitors, 12 secretaries/clerks, and 21 custodians also reported. There is very little turnover in staff. Southern Lehigh reports that “new hires” are few because they are not growing as a district as they have in the past and, therefore, are not creating new positions; when an individual retires/resigns it is not assured that they will be replaced. Indeed, there have been multiple administrative changes largely as a function of retirements and the District has seized these transitions as an opportunity to downsize and consolidate their administrative processes, operations, and offices.

The governing body of the School District is a board of nine school directors who are each elected at-large for a four-year term. The daily operation and management of the School District is carried out by the administrative staff of the School District, headed by the Superintendent of Schools who is appointed by the Board of School Directors.

Southern Lehigh School District teachers have recently negotiated a new four year contract, in which they were awarded better-than-average increases in salary. The Board did not offer administrators a similar package, believing that administrative salaries already outpace those of the teachers and therefore do not warrant the same increase. This has been a source of disappointment to principals and other administrators, who are eager for tangible evidence of the Board’s regard for them.

Southern Lehigh School District cited some specific reasons for seeking Middle States Association re-accreditation:

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<sup>5</sup> One of the earlier strategic planning goals was to explore having an “all day” kindergarten program. However, with the down-turn in the economy, this was deemed infeasible.



The District always been able to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), with a review of their student performance data indicating that performance on assessments, attendance, and graduation rate easily meeting and typically exceeding the targets established by the State of Pennsylvania. More recently, the District has wanted to ensure that they remain in this strong position and to proactively address circumstances and changing conditions that could result in a reversal of these trends.

Another reason to seek re-accreditation relates to the Board of Education's conviction that the pursuit of Middle States accreditation is in the best interest of their students who are applying for college admission.

Finally, in addition to these incentives, the District believes that since initiating the Middle States process, they are in a more cohesive place and do not want to "go backwards."

Southern Lehigh used a "brainstorm" process that explored their values and needs. Specifically, all goals and concerns were listed and a purposeful discussion occurred. In so doing, they consolidated their many thoughts into three core ideas: academic performance, high quality staff, and improvement of internal and external communication. These became the foundation of their three Middle States goals. Whereas "rigor and relevance" has always had a high priority for Southern Lehigh, the latter two goals also allowed them to expand beyond the academic arena and to involve all operations and departments within the District, thereby breaking down the "silos" which had formed.

The District is proud of its tradition of strategic planning and believes that their commitment to *Excellence by Design (SV)* will strengthen this practice and move them more rapidly to the accomplishments of their goals.

## Recommendations

**In this section, the Visiting Team lists any recommendations how the school system can capitalize on or respond to the Profile of the School system to improve its efforts to achieve its Mission and to achieve its Plan for Growth and Improvement. Recommendations are suggestions and ideas of the Visiting Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

- NONE

# PROFILE OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The Profile of Student Performance includes the following information and data that describe the levels at which the school system's students are performing on assessments that are most valued and respected by the members of the system's community of stakeholders and staff and/or required by the state or organization of which the system is a part. The Profile includes data for:

- Academic assessments required by a state or other organization of which the system is a part, if applicable;
- Standardized academic assessments;
- School system-based academic assessments;
- Achievement indicators such as graduation rate, college rigorous courses, college acceptance, etc.; and
- Measures of student citizenship such as attendance, promptness, discipline, etc.

Collecting and tracking data that describe how well the school system's students are performing in the areas that are normally used by the school system's community of stakeholders to determine whether the system is accomplishing its Mission and Objectives is important because the system needs these data to:

- Determine if it is making progress toward achieving its mission;
- Determine if its graduates are meeting the expectations expressed in the school system's Profile of Graduates; and
- Help in determining in which areas of student performance there are the largest gaps between what is expected and how student are performing and, therefore, what the focus of the school system's Plan for Growth and Improvement should

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## THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – PROFILE OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

### A. OBSERVATIONS

**In this section, the Visiting Teams shares any general observations and/or areas of strength regarding the school system's Profile of Student Performance and how the**

**Profile defines the school system and its priorities for improving student performance.**

### **A.1. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ON STATE ASSESSMENTS—The School System**

Southern Lehigh School District’s reputation for excellence, established by a continuing trend of academic accomplishment, is illustrated by the achievement of adequate yearly progress (AYP) in Reading and Mathematics for all students in grades 3 through 12, a graduation rate of better than 97%, and a college admissions rate of nearly 86%.

To achieve these results, the District engages in creative programs, the infusion of technology and forging of partnerships that capitalizes on their proximity to several colleges and universities (Lehigh, Pennsylvania State, and DeSales, most notably). These partnerships allow them to offer students exposure to and instruction in the entrepreneurial process. The District is a member of the Southern Lehigh Chamber of Commerce, which sponsors Lehigh students who wish to attend an entrepreneurial camp. These collaborations also resulted in the development of the District’s “Design 21” course, which teaches students about teamwork, problem-solving, and globalization. In addition to these commendable practices, Southern Lehigh has brought in a teacher of Chinese from China and a teacher of Arabic from Egypt. They already offer 15 online courses and are considering more (e.g.: foreign language instruction in Japanese).

### **A.2. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ON STATE ASSESSMENTS—The Component Schools**

Southern Lehigh will be administering the Keystones assessments, Pennsylvania State examinations which are tied to graduation requirement. In preparation for this transition, the 9th Grade Algebra exam was administered to seventh and eighth grade graders to project how students are currently performing in this subject. All 29 seventh graders and 23 of 26 eighth graders were “proficient.”

### **A.3. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ON STATE ASSESSMENTS—Component Schools with Performance That Differs from the Average for Schools at the Same Grade Levels and the System as a Whole**

Component schools perform consistently within the same grades and system.

#### **A.4. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ON SCHOOL SYSTEM ASSESSMENTS—The School System**

Nearly one in three high school juniors and seniors at Southern Lehigh have enrolled in and successfully completed an Advanced Placement (AP) course. Additionally, over 90% of all juniors and seniors who take AP examinations pass them. There are nearly 120 students enrolled in Career and Technical programs, with better than 80% meeting standards for these courses.

#### **A.5. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ON SCHOOL SYSTEM ASSESSMENTS—The Component Schools**

Southern Lehigh is achieving increasing consistency in student performance, likely attributable to the efforts taken to align and articulate curriculum within and across the grade levels. There are common assessments K-12 and detailed pacing guides to ensure that all students are getting same curriculum and that it is being implemented with fidelity. The Kindergarten through Third Grade performances is especially similar across buildings.

Noteworthy is a specialized program at Liberty Bell Elementary School called the Spanish Immersion Program. While it is limited to 29 first graders on a first come-first served basis, any child from any of the elementary schools can go to the program. There are no admission criteria. The teacher is certified in elementary and is a native Spanish speaker. The students travel as a cohort and by sixth grade they are literate in Spanish<sup>6</sup>.

#### **A.6. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ON SCHOOL SYSTEMS ASSESSMENTS—Component Schools with Performance That Differs from the Average for Schools at the Same Grade Levels and the System as a Whole**

Students perform consistently within same grade levels and within the system as a whole

#### **A.7. RETENTION IN GRADE—The School System**

Limited information was provided regarding the number of students District-wide were retained.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this is a very controversial program and, possibly for this reason, this is no intention to expand it.

**A.8. RETENTION IN GRADE—Component Schools with Performance That Differs from the Average for Schools at the Same Grade Levels and the System as a Whole**

Limited information was provided regarding the number of students within component buildings who were retained.

**A.9. GRADUATION RATE—The School System**

As indicated over 97% of all Southern Lehigh seniors graduate high school within four years and only about 15% of graduates do not attend either a two- or four-year college or university.

**A.10. GRADUATION RATE—Component Schools with Performance That Differs from the Average for Schools at the Same Grade Levels and the System as a Whole**

See above.

**A.11. CITIZENSHIP PERFORMANCE—The School System**

A review of the data suggest attendance rates hold steady through most grade levels school years, with an average of 20-25% of students missing 10 or more days of school annually. The rate sharply increases after grade 10, and rises to more than 50% of students in the 12 grade missing 10 or more days of school annually. Minority students, who represent a very small percentage of Southern Lehigh's population, miss more school than their white peers. Total number of students in grades seven through 12 are who were suspended at least once range from 1 to 3% of the schools' populations.

**A.12. CITIZENSHIP PERFORMANCE —Component Schools with Performance That Differs from the Average for Schools at the Same Grade Levels and the System as a Whole**

Citizenship performance is consistent across the component schools.

**B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this section, the Visiting Team lists any recommendations how the school system can capitalize on or respond to the Profile of Student Performance to improve its efforts to achieve its Mission and to achieve its Plan for Growth and Improvement. Recommendations are suggestions and ideas of the Visiting Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.

**B.1. Recommendations for the School System**

- NONE

**B.2. Recommendations for the Component Schools**

- NONE
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# THE PROFILE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

The Profile of Organizational Capacity provides information and data that portray the school system's capacity to produce the levels of student performance the school system and its community of stakeholders desire and expect. The Profile consists of the results of a self-assessment conducted to determine the degree to which the school system meets the Middle States Standards for Accreditation for School Systems.

The twelve Standards for Accreditation reflect research-based best practices for quality in school systems. The Standards also represent the organizational "building blocks" that need to be in place to produce high levels of student performance. The self-assessment of adherence to these Standards leads the system in identifying its strengths and areas in need of improvement.

The Profile also provides those responsible for developing the school system's Plan for Growth and Improvement with a good understanding of the current status of the school system in terms of its capacity to produce the levels of student learning it states it desires in its Mission and Profile of Graduates.

## Standards for Accreditation for School Systems

*Foundational Standards:* Standards addressing best practices in the components of a school system that provide the *foundations* for quality in the education program, services, and results in terms of student learning.

- Philosophy/Mission
- Governance and Leadership
- Planning for Growth and Improvement
- Finances
- Facilities
- System Climate and Organization

*Operational Standards:* Standards addressing best practices in delivering the education program, services, and activities to the students.

- Health and Safety
- Educational Program
- Evidence of School System Effectiveness
- Student Services
- Student Life and Student Activities
- Information Resources and Technology

## PHILOSOPHY/MISSION STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** The school system has a clearly written and actively implemented statement of philosophy/mission that conveys the general and specific purposes of its educational program, expresses expectations for quality, and serves as the basis for daily operational and instructional decision making as well as long-range planning. Stakeholders give input into the development of the school system's philosophy/mission and understand and accept it. This document is aligned with the community served and is reviewed periodically by stakeholder representatives.

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### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
<i>For All School Systems:</i>	
The school system's philosophy/mission	X
Publications that communicate the mission/philosophy to the school system's/schools' communities of stakeholders	X
Marketing, recruitment, and admissions materials that communicate the school system's/school's philosophy/mission	N/A
Evidence that...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school system implements a system to assess its effectiveness in fulfilling its philosophy/ mission.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school system's philosophy/mission is clearly communicated in</li> </ul>	X



its brochures, promotional materials, policy and procedural handbooks, web site, and similar resources.	
Policies related to the system's philosophy/mission, including (but not limited to):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodic review and revision (if warranted) of the school system's philosophy/mission</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A system for evaluating the effectiveness of the school system's philosophy/mission</li> </ul>	X
<i>For Component Schools:</i>	
Results of the schools' self-assessments of compliance with this Standard for Accreditation and its Indicators of Quality	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

Southern Lehigh engaged a comprehensive representation of stakeholders to both create and assess the school's philosophy/mission statement. The committee that presented the final mission statement was comprised of a broad spectrum of elementary, middle and secondary faculty, building and central office administrators, parents, board members, students, and external stakeholders (business owners, community members, etc.). The most recent revision of the mission/philosophy statements occurred in September 2011 and was approved by the Board of Education. The communication of the mission and philosophy is noted on all District literature, on posters displayed in the buildings, and on the website.

The Visiting Team found strong support for the mission, which the District has interpreted as indicating a clear mandate for the school system to adopt the mission and to strive to attain the values expressed in them. Education of students emerges as a fundamental partnership between the school system and the parents and community.

For Southern Lehigh, assessing the effectiveness of and commitment to the mission and philosophy is achieved through the faithful adherence to the strategic plan that guides all activities and drives all decisions. The consistency in this approach is one of the District’s notable strengths.

**C.1.b. Observations for the Component Schools**

Support for the philosophy and mission is strong throughout the district.

**C.2. Recommendations**

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.

**C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System**

- NONE

**C.2.b. Recommendations for the Component Schools**

- NONE

**C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system’s term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

**C.4. Recommended Stipulations:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



# GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** The school system is chartered, licensed, or authorized by a state, nation, or authority that operates in the public interest. The governance and leadership ensure the integrity, effectiveness, and reputation of the school system through the establishment of policy, provision of resources, and assurance of a quality educational program. The governance and leadership act ethically and consistently to assure an atmosphere of mutual respect and purposeful effort on behalf of students and their learning. School system leaders foster a productive environment for teaching and learning, timely and open communication with stakeholders, and the vision necessary for day-to-day operations and long-term planning.

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## A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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## B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
The orientation and training plan for members of the school system's governance.	
The system the school system's governance uses for evaluating its own effectiveness in performing its duties.	
Chart of lines of authority/responsibilities in the school system	X
Job descriptions for the head of the school system and other key members of the central office administrative staff	X
Job descriptions for the heads of the component schools and other key	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
members of component schools' administrative staff	
Appraisal tool and/or description of the process used to appraise the performance of the head of the school system	X
Appraisal tool and/or description of the process used to appraise the performance of the heads of the school system's component schools	X
School system policies pertaining to the governance and leadership, including:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the roles and responsibilities of the governing body</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• educating the members of the governing body regarding the governance's responsibilities and roles</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• selecting the head of the school system</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the governing body's evaluation of its own effectiveness in performing its duties and responsibilities</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appraising the performance of the head of the school system</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adhering to appropriate guidelines for confidentiality in communications</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• selecting the heads of the component schools</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appraising the performance of the heads of the component schools</li> </ul>	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1 Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

Southern Lehigh School District, formed in 1950, is a suburban Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade school district organized and existing under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The governing body of the School District is a board of nine school directors who are each elected at-large for a four-year term. The Board meets twice monthly.

The daily operation and management of the District is carried out by the administrative staff, headed by the Superintendent of Schools who is appointed by the Board of School Directors. The current Superintendent was recently appointed and is supported by the Assistant to the Superintendent, also the Internal Coordinator. In addition, Southern Lehigh has a series of Directors, including the Director of Elementary Education and Instructional Technology and the Director of Secondary Education. There is a Director of Special Education and other administrators and supervisors who manage other district departments (e.g.: Human Resources, Athletics, Food Services, Payroll and Benefits, and Buildings and Grounds).

The District has recently undergone some staff reduction and has elected not to hire new staff. We understand that most of this was a function of retirement and that economic factors were the reasonable basis for the decision not to replace people. Attrition was used to avoid the painful and difficult choices like furloughing teachers and cutting vital programs. Still, the high school has lost one assistant principal. They are now led by a principal and one assistant principal. The middle and intermediate schools are also led by one principal and one assistant principal, while the three elementary schools each have one principal.

The Superintendent is evaluated by the Board of Education and, in turn, supervises and evaluates all central office administrators and all secondary principals. Elementary principals are evaluated by the Assistant to the Superintendent. Assistant principals are evaluated by the principal. The District has adopted Reeves' Ten Dimensions of Leadership, which segues well with the strategic planning ethic so important to Southern Lehigh. Each building must develop a specific number of goals aligned with each of the over-arching goals as well as with Reeves' dimensions. Personal goals must also be based on one of the dimensions of leadership and staff engages in a participatory and collaborative evaluation process.

A strong feeling of support by the Board was experienced by many the Visiting Team interviewed. Staff as well as parents conveyed their appreciation for Board members' understanding of and commitment to doing what is necessary for Southern Lehigh to become and remain a district of distinction. The Board, in turn, has a great deal of confidence in the Superintendent. She is viewed as one who can increase the ethic of accountability for student achievement and excellence, while responsibly managing the resources of the district.

Staff credits leadership for providing them what they need to achieve their goals and deliver good services to students. The Board and central administration are viewed as supportive of teachers and everyone is found to be responsive to the concerns and needs of parents.

### **C.1.b. Observations for the Component Schools**

The Visiting Team heard much about the loss of the assistant principal at the high school. Staff consensus is that the reduction in administrative coverage has stretched the resources of the remaining two administrators, who must now provide the same level of support and supervision to staff and students, but with one less person to assist. The concerns we have heard about this impressed us as reasonable.

## **C.2 Recommendations**

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

### **C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System**

As we noted in the Oral Report, our questions about the impact of reducing administrative and support staff include the following: Does a smaller administrative staff provide the same level of instructional leadership, oversight and guidance? What is the impact on the quality of student support? How long is this sustainable? We have concerns that the leadership of the high school will find that they are increasingly functioning reactively and in “crisis” mode, rather than proactively and in manner required by an ethic of strategic and forward planning. Going forward, it will be important for the District to review its expectations for their building administrative teams and their continuing role in meeting the district’s goals of Academic Proficiency.

### **C.2.b. Recommendations for the Component Schools**

None

## **C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

#### C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	





## PLANNING FOR GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** The school system uses a collaborative process to develop and implement a written strategic or long-range plan to improve its educational program and services. Plans are aligned with the school system's philosophy/mission and its operational plans, and are focused on continuous improvement of student performance, staff professional and organizational growth.

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### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
<i>For All School Systems:</i>	
The school system's strategic and/or long-range plan to improve student performance	X
The school system's long-range finance plan	X
The school system's long-range facilities plan	X
The school system's long-range technology plan	
The school system's development/institutional advancement plan, if applicable	X
The school system's enrollment plan, if applicable	N/A
Evidence of stakeholder input into the system's plans	
Evidence of how the system's plans are communicated to the community of stakeholders	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
The school system's policies related to school improvement planning, including (but limited to):	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School system planning, including planning for improvement in student performance, organizational capacity, finances, facilities, and technology</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Periodic reviews of the school system's plans</li> </ul>	
<i>For the Component Schools:</i>	
Results of the schools' self-assessments of compliance with this Standard for Accreditation and its Indicators of Quality	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1 Observations

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

Southern Lehigh's three goals, as written in their strategic plan, are:

**Academic Proficiency:** *As measured by the PSSA, PASA, Keystone exams, and/or District assessments students will be proficient in core subject areas leading the District to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) each year for all students leading to successful academic transitions, from elementary, to intermediate, middle level, high school and post-secondary.*

**Highly Qualified Teachers:** *All administrators, teachers and staff will be rated 'highly qualified' as measured by maintenance of appropriate certifications (s), engagement in professional development experiences, and demonstrations of continual growth through annual observations/evaluations by supervisors*

**Improved Internal and External Communication:** *Communications with stakeholders will increase 25% by 2014 as measured by web site traffic, use of the electronic communication alert systems, and access to the student information system/community portal.*

The District describes the process by which these plans were developed as a “brainstorming” of a cross section of stakeholders. The brainstorm resulted in a considerable list of possible issues, which were then reduced through ongoing discussion to the above key priority areas. The District has communicated these goals and overall plan with its external constituency largely by maintaining documentation on their website. Internal stakeholders, however, have especially meaningful interaction with the plan and awareness of the goals, which guide all staff discussions and ultimately determine all decisions the District makes. Southern Lehigh will not go forward with an initiative unless they determine that it will support the plan and move them toward the achievement of their goals. Specific evidence of supporting programs and initiatives that were noted during the Validation Team Visit included the following:

- Curriculum revision to ensure alignment to the Common Core; collaborative teaching and common assessments; the use of Response to Intervention and Instruction (RTII) in grades K through six; extensive advanced placement and online course offerings; and data collection and analysis all support the goal to achieve and maintain *Academic Proficiency*.
- Multiple observations and evaluations of teachers, the requirement that all staff develop an individual professional growth plan; monthly meetings and regular staff development days; and a Summer Academy are among the regular practices that support the goal to have *Highly Qualified Teachers*.
- A well-maintained web-site on which is posted the Strategic Plan, board policies, agendas, meeting minutes, announcements, the Community Bulletin Board, etc.; a parent portal; email communication among all staff and between staff and parents; and newspaper articles assist the District in meeting the goal of *Improved Internal and External Communication*

The Validation Team also sought evidence to indicate that there are action plans which will take Southern Lehigh past the Validation Team Visit. Specifically, are the plans going forward clearly defined, provide all the steps, identify the resources, and establish the timelines needed to achieve the three overarching goals? Are there sufficient internal and external action team members who will be responsible for implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of the plans? Will the plans that are now in place designed to guide the District for the next several years? To help us answer these questions, we reviewed the strategic plan submitted to the state. It provided some information for our evaluation, but not all.

Within the plan submitted to Pennsylvania Department of Education, Southern Lehigh identified steering and strategic planning committee members, reflection on the data, and an extensive series of activities designed to fulfill the three goals. A number of those activities had been achieved during the 2010-2011 school year, while others had not been. What emerges as most noteworthy, however, is that few activities were planned beyond the conclusion of the 2010-11 a school year (some activities were planned for the summer of 2011). We could not find evidence of action planning that would begin in the 2011-12 school year and/or which would take the District beyond 2012.

The Validation Team noted our concerns about planning going forward in an earlier section of this report. Specifically we commented on the absence of details regarding the planning activities post-Validation Visit and noted that most of these activities speak of planning, promoting, analyzing, investigating, maintaining, and other such “action words” that nevertheless do not operationally define precisely what this would look like when implemented. These comments applied to what appeared to be more short-term, midpoint activities. We did not find documents which provided details for planning over the longer term. While we acknowledged that the compilation of midpoint activities is extensive in terms of what the District seeks to accomplish we also noted that it is devoid of the details to inform how, when and with which staff and resources they would be achieved. There is no information to suggest timelines or process by which the plan would be reviewed or progress assessed.

We would have expected to find action plans which would have contained the elements noted above, and which would have clearly indicated the direction the District planned to take well beyond the 2011-2012 school year. We did not.

### **C.1.b. Observations for the Component Schools**

The plans for the Component Schools are inextricably linked to the District’s plans.

## **C.2 Recommendations**

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

### **C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System**

Southern Lehigh needs to formalize a planning process that will (a) gather a revitalized team of internal and external stakeholders to serve as the Action Plan Team; (b) create action plans which contain all required components, including actions steps listed in sequential order, person(s) responsible for the step(s), the timeline for completion, resources needed to complete the step(s)/plan(s), criteria against which the step(s)/plan(s) success will be evaluated, and the status of each step.

**C.2.b. Recommendations for the Component Schools**

See above.

**C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system’s term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

**C.4. Recommended Stipulations:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or it Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system’s accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



## FINANCES STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** Financial resources are sufficient to provide the educational opportunities defined in the school system's philosophy/mission. The business practices of the school system are ethical. These practices promote confidence in the school system's ability to manage fiscal and material resources in a responsible manner and follow prescribed budgeting and accounting principles. The majority of resources raised for school system purposes is dedicated to the system's operations.

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### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
<i>For All School Systems:</i>	
The school system's current operating budget	X
Certified external audit letter of the school system's finances conducted within the last two years	
The school system's student tuition and fee schedule (if applicable)	
The school system's long-range financial plan	X
Description of any contingent liabilities or on-going litigations that potentially could affect the system's ability to continue operation	
List of grants and other funding sources obtained in the last calendar year	X
Publications provided to students outlining students' financial obligations	
Summary of the school system's insurance coverages	X
Qualifications of the personnel overseeing and conducting the school	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
system's financial and business operations	
School system policies related to finances, financial aid, and refunds, including (but limited to):	
• Financial operations and controls	X
• The budget process	X
• Tuition and fees and refunds	
• Periodic audits	
• Insurance coverages	X
• Development activities, grants, foundations, and partnerships	

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

Southern Lehigh's current year's operating budget is approximately fifty-five million dollars. Of that amount, approximately 4% is the product of state aid, while the balance comes from local taxes. The per pupil operating cost of approximately \$17,000 (based primarily on relatively high average home assessments of approximately \$93,000 per home and on political support from the community) places the District in a strong position relative to neighboring systems.

The District funds its general operation with a combination of revenues from local, state, and federal sources. Like most districts in Pennsylvania, the majority of revenues come from local sources. However, due to the relative wealth of the community, there is even greater pressure placed on local taxes in Southern Lehigh than in most districts. Real estate tax revenue is, by far, the major source of revenue for the District. It represents 68% of all revenue received in the 2009-10 year, nearly tripling between 1999-

2000 and 2009-2010 due to steady growth in the tax base and regular increases in the millage rate. The total taxable assessed value of the district increased from \$501M to \$790M during that period. Since then, tax assessment appeals filed in the 2009-10 year and a lack of economic development for the past two years contributed to little or no increase in taxable assessed value for the 2010-11 or 2011-12 years.

Salaries and benefits amount to nearly 60% of total District expenditures. With projected increases in health care costs and the certainty of significantly higher employer pension contribution rates, it is likely that compensation will become a higher percentage of the overall budget. Renovations to several schools across the district, a major addition to the high school, a comprehensive energy management/conservation program, and the construction of an intermediate school which houses 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students have been funded by multiple bond issues and a municipal lease over the last 15 years. Annual debt service payments currently average just shy of \$6.5M, or approximately 12% of the General Fund budget. In addition to compensation and debt service – approximately 72% of budget – transportation and busing, operation of facilities, and tuition costs add another 15%, leaving approximately 13% of the budget for all other categories. Total expenditures in the General Fund have more than doubled in the last decade.

Recently Southern Lehigh has been operating with a budget deficit of approximately two million dollars per year. To compensate for this deficit, the district has been drawing from reserves that are in excess of \$16M. This fund balance has the potential to reduce the public's appetite for increased taxes and the state's willingness to materially increase its financial support to the district.

The State of Pennsylvania requires that schools keep their budget increases at 1.7% or less (or slightly more with some permitted exceptions such as special education expenses, construction, and pensions). If budget growth is kept within this cap, then districts do not need to put their budgets to a public vote. The District has been proactive in pursuing efficiencies, such as reducing energy costs, reducing transportation costs, and finding savings through comprehensive supply bids so that it can meet the financial needs of current and future contractual salary increases, maintain and improve educational services, and create budgets annually that grow at 1.7% or less.

The District's annual budget is more than adequate to appropriately meet the needs of the students and staff. Southern Lehigh leadership articulated their appreciation for the availability of financial resources needed to fulfill the vision and achieve the District's



goals. Teachers also expressed their feeling of being supported by the Board with appropriate resources. For nearly twenty years, Southern Lehigh has placed the highest possible emphasis on long-range budgetary planning and has used a five-year budget planning tool as the centerpiece for developing annual budgets, levying taxes, and making all sorts of decisions that have financial implications. Consequently the District's resources are sufficient to provide the educational opportunities defined in their mission. Ethical business practices have promoted confidence in the District's ability to manage fiscal and material resources in a responsible manner and follow prescribed budgeting and accounting principles.

## C.2. Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.

### C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System

- NONE

## C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

## C.4. Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

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## FACILITIES STANDARD

**The Standard:** School system facilities are safe, clean, and well maintained. The physical environment supports delivery of the educational program/services as well as optimal student development and achievement. Facilities are appropriate and adequate to implement the philosophy/mission of the school system. They are regularly inspected for effective operation and meet all applicable laws including health and safety code requirements.

### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
<i>For All School Systems:</i>	
Floor plans of the school system's non-school facilities	X
The school system's long-range facilities plan	X
The system's maintenance/repair plans/schedules	X
The school system's facilities budget	X
The school system's capital improvements budget	X
Plans for any improvements to the system's facilities	X
Policies related to facilities, including (but not limited to):	
• Facilities planning	X
• Facilities maintenance and repair	X
• Cleaning of facilities	X
• Facilities budget	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capital improvements</li> </ul>	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

The Visiting Team was able to visit each building and take detailed tours. We were provided with detailed reports that included, but were not limited to budget reports, capital outlays, floor plans, current project rationale, five year plans, and conducted interviews with all the stakeholders within the district. By so doing, we were able to confirm that Southern Lehigh facilities are regularly inspected, meet all applicable laws, are safe, clean, and well maintained.

Custodial staff was accessible and took part in the welcoming of the Visiting Team and assisting in the tour of each location. Each of the three elementary schools was painted with bright colors, decorated with student work throughout the building, and highlighted with encouraging messages for students. Each building possessed adequate and appropriate lighting that was bright and energy efficient. There were accessible storage areas in each location that properly stored custodial equipment, cleaning supplies, and student learning supplies. Gymnasiums were very spacious and clean; there is also ample space for quality instruction in Art and Music.

Southern Lehigh has FM systems installed in all classrooms throughout the District. All schools are also equipped with HVAC systems, with specific budget line items dedicated to support the maintenance and further implementation of these systems. Climate can be controlled in each building remotely, with special attention given to the interior climate daily to maximize learning for all children. As a result of the training

and professional development provided by manufacturers and vendors, appropriate staff is certified and trained to maintain the all HVAC and other systems in the schools.

Facilities are a source of pride and special recognition for staff and leadership of the District. The School Board has established having outstanding facilities necessary to enhance student achievement as a priority. Southern Lehigh is blessed with an abundance of land which allows the District to be prepared for growth and expansion, should enrollment pick up in any of its schools. The Board of Education has provided resources for numerous projects over the past decade and into the future. Current projects for which there are budgetary allocations include new tennis courts, the Liberty Bell school wall project, multiple paving projects (e.g.: school track), HVAC system installs in auxiliary gym, cardio room, and technology room at Southern Lehigh High School.

Thirty custodians, four maintenance workers, three buildings and grounds staff collaborate to keep all district facilities clean and properly maintained. All work order requests are done through the district “SchoolDude” electronic system, which allows staff to submit orders online. Priorities are based on the degree to which a situation impacts instruction and/or student and staff safety. Sometimes work orders are handled at the building level so that resolution can be achieved more quickly.

The District’s “centerpiece facility” is the Joseph P. Liberati Intermediate School. Built to address overcrowding in the elementary and middle schools, the Intermediate School has been open since 2009 and currently houses 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grades students. However, the District had the foresight to create floor plans flexible enough to be able to shift from an elementary building to a true middle school configuration, if and when needed. Consequently, the building has a home economics classroom, state of the art music rooms, and science labs. Lockers are installed throughout the building. Ever mindful of energy conservation, Southern Lehigh had the building constructed so that it utilizes as much natural light as possible.

Southern Lehigh also provides sufficient resources for the District’s athletic programs. As stated above, there is a current project for the tennis courts and track to be surfaced at the high school. There are also four courts at the middle school that can be utilized for both athletics and physical education classes. The football stadium is outside the middle school, with large bleachers on both sides and an all-weather track. Athletic fields are utilized throughout the “main campus” for seasonal sports.

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## **C.2. Recommendations**

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.

**C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System**

- NONE

**C.2.b. Recommendations for the Component Schools**

- NONE

**C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system’s term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

**C.4. Recommended Stipulations:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system’s accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



## SYSTEM CLIMATE AND ORGANIZATION STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** The school system’s organizational structure and climate facilitate achievement of its core values as expressed in the philosophy/mission. The school system culture supports successful implementation of age- and developmentally appropriate educational programs and services. Roles, responsibilities, expectations, and reporting relationships are clearly defined. Administrative, instructional, and support staff are qualified, competent, and sufficient in number to effectively provide quality educational experiences. The school system regularly conducts staff performance appraisals and offers professional development opportunities informed by its philosophy/mission. Relationships among the staff and leadership are collegial and collaborative.

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### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Resumes of the school system's leadership	X
Table of organization reporting relationships for the school system	X
Job descriptions for the school system's leadership	X
Salary schedules and descriptions of benefits packages for the school system's administrators, teachers, specialists, and support staff	X
Employee contracts (e.g. union, collective bargaining agreements)	X
Results of any climate survey	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
Instruments used for evaluating the performance of the school system's staff	X
The school system's professional development plan	X
Policies related to school climate and organization, including (but not limited to):	
• Development and approval of policies	X
• Compensation of school system employees	X
• Determining reasonable workloads and acceptable working conditions for the school system's employees	X
• Evaluating the school system's staff	X
• Complaints and grievance by school system employees	X
• Orienting and mentoring new members of the school system's staff	X
• School system's employees' membership in professional organizations	X
• Expectations for employee conduct, including (but not limited to) sexual and other forms of harassment	X
• Code of conduct for students	X
• Student-teacher ratios at all levels of the school system	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

The students of the Southern Lehigh School District are served by ten administrators and 151 classroom and "special needs" teachers. In addition, the District employs five guidance counselors, six "specialists and consultants", two technology personnel, five information resources and library staff, four certified nurses and five nurses' assistants.



There are 74 part-time paraprofessionals 48 food service personnel and cafeteria monitors, 12 secretaries/clerks, and 21 custodians also reported.

Most professional staff have about six to ten years of experience, with the more senior staff (more than ten years) found in the lower grades. Overwhelmingly, staff hold Master's degrees, with one member holding a Doctorate. Ninety-seven per cent of professional staff is white. Three per cent are Hispanic or Asian/Pacific. Nearly 70% of professional staff is female.

There is very little staff turnover at Southern Lehigh. There are few "new hires" because the District is not growing as it once was and, therefore, is not creating new positions; when an individual retires/resigns it are not assured that they will be replaced. Indeed, there have been multiple administrative changes largely as a function of retirements and the District has seized these transitions as an opportunity to downsize and consolidate their administrative processes, operations, and offices.

The leadership of Southern Lehigh provides good instructional leadership and has developed structures, systems, and practices that rely heavily on collection of data, regular communication and team building, and encouragement of school improvement through the implementation of research-based practices. Southern Lehigh stresses the development of leadership skills and, accordingly, all central office and building administrators meet and communicate regularly with the staff they supervise.

The District provides and offers extensive professional development opportunities to staff, including the Academy Program and Induction Programs, which offer professional development and mentoring from senior staff. Staff is, in fact, compensated for presenting workshops at the Academy on the effective teaching strategies they have used in their classrooms.

The District understands the importance of providing staff development and pays for members' affiliation with professional organizations. They focus on improving teachers' knowledge and skills in Literacy, Science, Math, and Technology and many staff present at national reading and technological conferences, such as the "Robotics Conference" in San Diego, California. Southern Lehigh also remains quite mindful of the importance of understanding cultural differences and providing a culturally responsive teaching and learning environment. Staff is, therefore, also encouraged to enroll in continuing education courses that promote cultural diversity. Every new hire, whether they are teaching for the first time or returning to the District, is assigned a mentor for a year and/or asked to participate in an "Induction Program" that meets on a

monthly basis. New teachers told Team members that this program has especially enabled them to accumulate resources and improve their skills.

Staff remains well-informed by the Southern Lehigh handbook (all the information employees need to know regarding their employment in the District) that is readily available to all employees on the websites. Paper copies are also provided to staff upon request. The District Superintendent and the Assistant to the Superintendent evaluate school principals and other staff. Principals and Assistant Principals evaluate teachers and other staff. Teachers are evaluated once or twice yearly, depending on their tenure status, and meet yearly with their supervisors to discuss their evaluation.

Parents are an important part of the Southern Lehigh's organization and climate. A handbook provides written policy and procedural information for students and parents, and parents repeatedly acknowledged these and other efforts of Southern Lehigh's staff and administration. Student representatives interviewed by members of the Validation Team also expressed their love of their schools, where they feel supported and validated by teachers and administrators.

Observations and interviews conducted by the Visiting Team have provided evidence of an effective organization, which has created a positive and collaborative school climate. While the Visiting Team judged district and school building morale to be good, we have some questions about the long-term impact of the loss of personnel for the middle and high schools. Specifically, the high school administrative staff has been reduced by one assistant principal and the middle school guidance staff has similarly been reduced. For the Southern Lehigh middle and high school staff who spoke with the Team, this consistently emerged as an area of concern.

The Visiting Team has already made note of our concerns regarding the loss of the assistant principal at the high school, both during the Oral Report and in earlier sections of this report. We posed some questions for the District's reflection, which include our concern that the support and supervision of teachers and students would be compromised by a reduced administrative staff. Instructional excellence and the use of positive behavioral supports may be at stake as the principal and assistant principal grapple with reactive management versus the more preferred proactive leadership.

At the middle school, we note that the current guidance counselor's work load substantially exceeds professional standards. The American School Counselor Association recommends no more than 250 students per guidance counselor caseload to ensure that students receive the best quality of service. The Team understands that the

current ratio at the middle school is over 500 students for one guidance counselor. This is concerning.

## C.2. Recommendations

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

### C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System

The Visiting Team respects the District’s efforts to address their schools’ staffing needs in a difficult fiscal climate. When many districts have had to let staff go, to have avoided additional loss of staff because of budget concerns is no small accomplishment. Still, we have heard a great deal about how prudent financial management and a healthy tax base have allowed Southern Lehigh to accumulate a \$16 million reserve. We urge Southern Lehigh to evaluate whether current administrative staff at the high school and guidance staff at the middle school can meet the needs of students to the degree required by their goals, mission and values.

## C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:

**In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system’s term of accreditation.**

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

## C.4. Recommended Stipulations:

**In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system’s accreditation.**

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



## HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** A safe, orderly, and healthy environment for teaching and learning is provided. The school system adheres to local, state, and federal government health and safety requirements. Health, safety, preventive/emergency procedures, and crisis management policies are clearly written, well documented, implemented, and updated regularly.

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### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
The school system's emergency and crisis plans	X
Records of recent fire, safety, and health inspections of the system's non-school facilities conducted by local authorities	X
Record of emergency drills in the system's central office facilities	X
Documents in which the school system's emergency and crisis plans are published for the students, families, and staff of the system.	X
The school system's professional development plan for ensuring that the staff is kept up-to-date on relevant health, wellness, and safety information and practices, including procedures to deal with individual student needs	X
The components of the school system's educational program that include opportunities for students to develop knowledge, attitudes, and practices necessary for personal wellness and a healthy lifestyle.	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
School system policies pertaining to health and safety, including:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicating within and without the system during fire and other emergencies, to summon assistance, and to evacuate the system's facilities</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>storing and administering student medications</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring adequate health care for students and the staff during the school day and at school system functions away from the system's premises</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>storing equipment and supplies safely</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>accounting for the whereabouts of all students at all times</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintaining current health records for all students and members of the staff</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>conducting and maintaining written records of regular emergency drills</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicating confidential information regarding students' health and/or physical needs with a student's parents/guardians and members of the system's staff with a need to know and in a manner that honors confidentiality about a student's special health or physical needs</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>controlling of access to its schools by visitors and other non-school personnel.</li> </ul>	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

Southern Lehigh employees four certified nurses, five nurses' assistants, and security officer, two athletic trainers, and a resource officer to serve the district's schools.

Students at Southern Lehigh receive physical examinations in kindergarten, 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. Hearing is checked in kindergarten, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades, dental exams occur in kindergarten, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades, and scoliosis exams are completed in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. Vision exams and Body Mass Index checks are done annually. While all buildings are provided with coverage, nurses at the elementary level are responsible for multiple schools and are often required to travel during lunch time hours to dispense prescription medication to students. When a building is unattended by a nurse, there is a CPR- and first-aid certified para-professional on site to respond to student or staff emergencies. Indeed, all new staff is trained in CPR and first-aid by the nurses as part of new employee training.

Student medications are stored in a locked location within a sealed clear bag identified by student last name and organized in alphabetical order. Each school is also equipped with a blue "grab and go" medical bag that carries the first aid essentials and student medications that would be needed in case of an evacuation.

Pennsylvania law also requires public school nurses to service the needs of the students who attend local parochial schools. There are two such elementary schools within the Southern Lehigh School District, which a District nurse visits daily to dispense medication. Aside from duties directly related to health and safety of students, nurses in each of the schools take an active role in the 504 procedures required when a student has a medical issue that has educational implications.

The District has embraced the use of technology for the management of student information by utilizing "Sapphire", a customized Student Information Management System that will allow school system the ability to track and monitor all student data throughout their career at Southern Lehigh. Accordingly, in the 2011-2012 school year, nurses began to input all immunization and medical into this student management system.

The middle and high school nurses are members of their schools' Student Assistance Programs, designed to assist students who may be struggling with issues of mental health or alcohol/substance abuse. Southern Lehigh has responded to mandates of the Federal Government's Child Nutrition Act by implementing a Wellness policy. The middle school nurse and para-professional from Lower Milford elementary school are active members on the District-wide Safety Committee. As a bi-product of this committee, each school has a detailed "Emergency Action Guide for Administrators",

providing protocol and procedure in the event of an emergency in their building. The document also includes emergency telephone numbers to local authorities, information about emergency code situations, evacuation routes for the school, sign out sheets, floor plans of the building, protocol during specific emergency situations, memorandum of agreements with local township authorities, and an operations check list. The Safety Committee has also created an emergency “flip chart” that is in each classroom in each school. This chart provides detailed protocol on what to do in the event of an emergency, providing 21 documented scenarios that teachers can reference during an emergency.

The District presented evidence that fire drills occur monthly. They also conduct regular evacuation drills, playground equipment inspections, elevator inspections, fire alarm system inspections, water supply inspections, and inspections of internal communications systems, all industrial art/art equipment, and athletic equipment.

Visitors entering a Southern Lehigh are monitored by an exterior camera at the entrance, “buzzed in” by staff monitoring the front office, and mandated by policy to sign-in as a visitor. Visitors sign-in on the computer, which generates a pass that is to be worn to properly identify them as they move about the school. Each classroom at every school is equipped with a phone to ensure that staff can quickly and safely seek assistance. All middle and high school teachers are required to be outside their classrooms during transition periods to help monitor student behavior and safety as they move to their next period class. Administration is also present in the hallways and corridors to help maintain behavior and adherence to school policy.

Faculty at the intermediate, middle, and high schools are able to provide referrals regarding student behavior and/or safety issues in a timely manner through the Sapphire system. Assistant Principals receive the message, address the referral, and provide feedback to the staff member in a timely fashion. These same three schools also share the services of the School Resource Officer (SRO) to assist students who may be in need of additional supports.

Finally, students at the middle and high schools are required to have student identification badges with them at all times.

## **C.2. Recommendations**

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard**



and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.

**C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System**

- NONE

**C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system’s term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

**C.4. Recommended Stipulations:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system’s accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



# EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** An effective educational program for a school system consists of both carefully planned and well executed curriculum programs and solid instructional pedagogy. Also fundamental to a successful educational program are the means to assess student performance and growth as well as programmatic evaluation. Thus, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are often considered to be the “heart” of any school system since these three components have such an impact on the total school system experience of students. The curriculum outlines what students should know and be able to do. Instruction identifies effective ways for teachers to ensure student learning takes place. Assessment indicates at what level students are able to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

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## A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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## B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Policies and procedures pertaining to the system's educational program	X
Programs of study or other overviews of the components of the system's educational program	X
Scopes and sequences for each component of the system's educational program	X
Written curriculum guides for each component of the system's educational program	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
The system's process for regular and systematic review and development/revision of components of the system's educational program	X
Evidence that...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The components of the system's educational program are aligned vertically and horizontally</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system's educational program and standards for student performance are aligned with the expectations of institutions of higher education and entry into a career</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system is committed to high levels of student performance in a rigorous curriculum for all students</li> </ul>	X

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## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

Southern Lehigh's elementary and secondary educational programs consist of thoughtful, student-focused, and carefully planned curriculum, with academic standards that are aligned to teaching best practices, state mandates, and the District's strategic action plan. Like other District initiatives and activities, a strong connection between educational programming and the strategic plan is required. Indeed, some variability in programming across schools is considered acceptable, so long as all schools and programs support the overarching plans and District goals. Procedures are in place to continually inform all building administrators about the status of that plan.

The District's educational programs are intermittently reviewed by administrators in charge of curriculum, instruction, and district wide program initiatives. Decisions about curriculum and programming are data-driven, collaboratively determined, and

reviewed by administrators and staff regularly to establish appropriate content standards, effective instructional pedagogy, and assessments to effectively measure students' abilities. Written curriculum guides (which are aligned to the standards and provide program objectives for teachers) can be accessed by administrators and teachers via the district web-site. Pacing guides are in place at the elementary levels, enabling teachers to effectively communicate about "student readiness" and "student needs."

"Cross curricular" meetings are scheduled to ensure Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade articulation. Meetings also provide an opportunity for teachers to meet with other teachers and administrators to review grade level goals and student performance. These non-evaluative, collegial sessions occur on a weekly or monthly basis. At the elementary level, such "collaborative dialogue" specifically occurs around Guided Reading, Read-180, Balanced Literacy Programs, Response to Instruction and Intervention System (RTTI), and student progress monitoring (as indicated by DIBELS scores).

The District was especially proud of its extensive RTII program. It is available to all elementary students, which ensures that struggling learners receive instructional assistance prior to being classified or provided possible academic remedial services in the future. Other elementary programs that ensure a continuum of services include those that support positive behavior in students. One such program is the School Wide Positive Behavior System (SWPBS), in place at every elementary school. The Program's goal is to provide activities connected to larger societal issues and is connected to the Social Studies Curriculum. Still, it is designed to be fun, interactive and emotionally supporting for students.

Secondary programming is notable for the rigor and variety of course content, with students participating in scholastic awards programs beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The middle school runs on a six day cycle which includes an Activity Period. The high school is considering new scheduling possibilities because the current five-day cycle with periods of 40 minutes is too short for the instructional needs of the faculty and students. The intent is to increase academic proficiency and better meet needs of Southern Lehigh's students.

Students may take Algebra I and II as 8<sup>th</sup> graders. In addition to fine arts programs, the middle school offers "Family Consumer Science", STEM coursework and "Design 21" (a thirty-six day cycle of interdisciplinary coursework and design-based thinking). We saw the integration of technology and instruction in the majority of classrooms, with the ability to infuse it in every classroom. Smart boards and projectors are available in

classrooms, as are iPad carts and laptop carts, and secondary staff uses document cameras in science, math, and art classrooms. The administration is considering a leasing opportunity which will result in a laptop for every student in the high school. The middle school has partnered with the "Urban/Suburban Connection", poets and artists in-residence, and have had student work displayed at Lehigh Valley Hospital and gallery openings.

There are 14 advanced placement (AP) courses and honors courses at the high school, which include Calculus and Spanish. The Spanish Immersion program offered at the elementary level (and continuing at the middle school level within Spanish and Social Studies classes) produces Spanish students who are on a collegiate level. Online courses are offered in other World Languages, such as Japanese, Arabic, and Russian. Students are required to take courses in Biology, Chemistry and Physics and are offered electives in Natural Hazards, Energy, Geology and Meteorology. There are 15 co-taught courses in Applied Algebra and Applied Physics, which provide a higher level of support to students when needed.

The English and History Departments are in the process of integrating coursework, focusing on a more thematic approach to instruction. The electives currently offered in English include Yearbook, Newspaper, Public Speaking and Creative Writing. However, the District projects that the expertise of future staff may drive the addition of other new and exciting electives.

There is no service requirement for graduation from Southern Lehigh High School. However, members of National Honor Society are required to log service hours. The requirement is met through clubs, fund raising, and other activities wherein students may choose a charity to support. Recently high school students held a dance to raise funds for the Leukemia Society, in honor of a classmate who has leukemia.

The middle school provides students extra-curricular activities such as sports, and the after-school "PEAK" program, which attracts between 75% and 80% of middle school students. This is a program of educational activities such as horseback riding, making gingerbread houses, bowling, movies and snow tubing. High school students can participate in band, join clubs to play board games or "Ping Pong to Laughter", or participate in the "Student Forum". Participants in the Student Forum meet once a month with other schools and are presented with a common theme (such as "vocational opportunities") for consideration and exploration. The innovative "Emergent Health Program" is a function of the District's partnerships (specifically with Lehigh Career and Technical Institute, Lehigh Valley Hospital, Pennsylvania State University, and a

local nursing) and has offered 11 college-bound students an opportunity to begin a career in nursing early.

Although the District is within an area with very little diversity in the population, students are able to develop greater cultural awareness by participating in the Asian, Spanish, “Key”, “Interact” clubs, and “No Place for Hate.” Teachers have taken students to Washington, DC, China, Western Europe, Costa Rica, Spain and France. There was a book drive for Rwanda involving a donation of books which served as a “global mission” project.

The Validation Team has few questions about the fine educational programs at Southern Lehigh. Southern Lehigh is committed to creating citizens of a global society, and uses course offerings through Design 21 to ensure that all students, beginning in elementary school, can use word processing, spreadsheet software, and presentation software. As a result of these and other efforts, slightly more than 97% of students successfully complete high school and last year almost 87% went on to institutes of higher education.

The Team has already made note of our questions regarding the decrease in administrative staff at the high school and a case load for the middle school guidance counselor which exceed standards established by American School Counselor Association. In addition, we were advised that District leadership would have some building administrators and teachers become “more introspective in how they approached and accomplished district goals.” Finally, several district and building level administrators expressed that they believed that some teachers do not fully utilize the array of instructional materials, technology, and equipment available or allocated to them.

## **C.2. Recommendations**

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

### **C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System**

- NONE

### C.2.b. Recommendations for the Component Schools

- NONE

### C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

### C.4. Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



## EVIDENCE OF SCHOOL SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** The school system systematically collects and rigorously analyzes quantifiable and observable evidence of individual learning and growth from multiple valid and reliable sources. Evidence of student learning is used to evaluate and improve curriculum effectiveness, instructional practices, professional development, and support services. Progress in student learning and performance is expected and is accurately, clearly, and systematically reported to the school system community.

### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Assessment of student learning and performance is aligned with curriculum and instruction in a coherent system consistent with the school system's philosophy/mission	X
Example of a student's transcript	
Example of a student's report card	
The system's policies related to assessment of student learning	X
Evidence that...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment results are analyzed with appropriate frequency and rigor for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. individual students as they move through the school system</li> <li>b. cohorts of students as they move through the school system\</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	X



Evidence	Visiting Team
c. comparable (local, state, and national) groups outside of the school system.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment results are used to make decisions regarding allocation of resources.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The assessment of student learning and performance enables students to monitor their own learning progress and teachers to adapt their instruction to students' specific learning needs.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment methods and content address suitable social, emotional, physical, and cognitive/language goals for students.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessments take into account recent, reliable research findings on child development and growth.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Records of students' learning and performance are maintained. General standards for transcript control and use, including those related to confidentiality, are known and observed.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment results are the basis for making recommendations to families whose children may benefit from further evaluation. Referrals to specialists are made for early identification of possible disabilities and/or health conditions.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members of the system's staff work collaboratively with colleagues and families to review data about learners' progress and to develop appropriate strategies for continued progress.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school system communicates its assessment policies and practices to the total school community (e.g., via parent handbooks, web sites, teacher handbooks, policy manuals).</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communications with families regarding students' progress in learning and performance is regular, productive, and meaningful.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are learning and performing at levels expected, or progress is being made to raise results accordingly.</li> </ul>	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

**In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.**

### **C.1.a. Observations for the School System**

Leadership of Southern Lehigh has conveyed that an important goal for reviewing assessment data is to ensure that they are developing programs that promote high student achievement and student learning. Accordingly, student data are frequently and continually monitored and analyzed. Assessment results are used to evaluate program alignment to state and national standards, to ensure the District is meeting students' social, emotional and cognitive needs, and to make decisions regarding the allocation of funds to support student learning. This process, like others at Southern Lehigh, is a collaborative one across all grade levels. Information reviewed at team meetings are utilized to establish benchmarks for both individual students, as well as clustered groups of students, and to align student learning opportunities to the curriculum. Like all things at Lehigh, it must connect with and support the District's strategic plan and three overarching goals.

Effective use of student data is also an important component in teacher observations and evaluations. Specifically, building principals indicated that teachers' evaluations were connected to their ability to effectively demonstrate that they had reviewed and embedded student data into their practices. Principals are confident that teachers fully understand how the analysis of data, or "data mining" enables them to better review student achievement and meet students' needs. Indeed, teachers agree that a thorough understanding of student data not only better informs their own inquires and discussions, but results in more productive meetings with parents about student achievement.

The District uses multiple assessment measures, such as the Southern Lehigh common or mid-year and year-end assessments, placement tests, "4-Sight", the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), teacher recommendation check-list, and program-specific instruments to identify students and monitor progress. Progress monitoring occurs under the guidelines of the District's Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII) procedures. (The RTII model on which the aforementioned progress monitoring is based is not in place at either the middle or high schools.)

Assessment practices at the elementary programs include progress monitoring three times annually using DIBELS and AimsWeb, with more frequent progress monitoring for students who are struggling. Data are shared with teachers. Both reading fluency and reading comprehension are evaluated and assessment data are used to determine what, if any, intervention would be appropriate for any given student. Assessment of students' needs is based on discussion at collaborative meetings, wherein this data and other information about "at risk" students are shared, teaching strategies are discussed, and a determination is made about what supports are needed.

Professional development has been provided to assist teachers in the assessment of students' writing skills. Teachers are specifically trained in analytical scoring of writing using rubrics. While all teachers use such rubrics to score writing, a specific emphasis is placed on writing in grades 4, 5, 7 and 10, where "anchor papers" are selected and teams of teachers score the writing samples as part of a District assessment initiative. Teachers assist elementary students to maintain writing folders as part of a self-monitoring process.

Teachers will also use informal portfolios of student work, which enable greater focus during conferences between teacher, student and parent at the elementary and middle school levels. The District finds that these portfolios can sometimes provide a strong link between the home and school by offering a more authentic glimpse of student work than do numerical grades.

There is an emphasis on the use of common assessments, particularly at the elementary levels, to ensure that all students within the same grade levels are receiving comparable instruction, the same curriculum, and that it is being implemented with fidelity.

Southern Lehigh will be moving towards Pennsylvania State Keystone Assessments, which are tied to graduation requirement. To ascertain their students' current state of proficiency and readiness for these examinations, the District recently administered the 9th Grade Algebra Exam to 7th and 8th grade students. They reported that all 29 seventh students were proficient, as were 20 of 23 eighth graders. However, the District determined that their curriculum was not strongly aligned to Keystone and are working to accomplish that. Southern Lehigh teachers and administrators are working to determine what is developmentally appropriate for the younger grades and what will be necessary to ensure they are ready for the 9th grade assessments.

Communication with families regarding students' progress is achieved through the parent portal available through the District's student management systems, "Sapphire."

We understand that the Sapphire student management system has replaced Power School and that it was customized to meet the needs of the Southern Lehigh School District. We have been advised by the district and by very appreciative parents that there is full implementation of this system in some schools, but that teacher support is not uniform across all grades and all schools. Elementary staff is somewhat divided about its usefulness as a means of communicating student achievement and progress.

The Visiting Team believes that use of this portal is an extension of the District's efforts to use assessment data to drive instructional and a reflection of Southern Lehigh's belief in partnering with parents to ensure best outcomes for all students. The fact that the portal is not uniformly used emerged as an inconsistency for us.

## **C.2. Recommendations**

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

### **C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System**

- NONE

### **C.2.b. Recommendations for the Component Schools**

The Visiting Team would advocate for use of the parent portal by all teachers, believing that full implementation of this resource in all buildings best serves the district and its students. We believe it would strengthen and better inform the very communication that all teachers value, an outcome that is completely consistent with your stated goal of improving communications.

## **C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:**

**In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system's term of accreditation.**

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

#### **C.4 Recommended Stipulations:**

**In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.**

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



## STUDENT SERVICES STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** The school system implements written policies and procedures, in partnership with families and the community, that provide all students with, or refer them to, services that are age- and developmentally appropriate to optimize opportunities for life-long success. Student services are systematic and integral to the educational program. They are provided by qualified personnel, sufficiently financed, periodically evaluated, and philosophy/mission appropriate.

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### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
Evidence that...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student support services address academic skills development, social skills development, personal growth, and career planning.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school system is sensitive to the critical importance of non-academic needs of students. A process is in place to address students' emotional and social needs.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment data are used to adapt curriculum and teaching methods, provide personalized counseling, and identify appropriate program placement for students.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career awareness activities are provided as appropriate.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student support services extend into and incorporate community services as needed.</li> </ul>	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student data are current, comprehensive, and readily available for use by the staff.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up studies of graduates and other former students are carried out and data are shared with staff to help determine the effectiveness of the school system's educational program and services.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families are provided with information about child development, education, and related topics through personal communications, pamphlets, meetings, and referrals to web sites and other resources.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written policies and procedures are implemented to ensure the safety of students when being picked up, transported, and dropped off by transportation provided by the school system.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate training is provided to transportation providers.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation services provided or contracted by the school system meet the safety requirements of all appropriate legal authorities.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meals provided by the school system meet generally accepted nutritional standards. Information about nutritional values of the foods is available.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate training is provided to food services providers.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food services personnel meet the health requirements of all appropriate authorities.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food service facilities are inspected regularly and meet the health and safety requirements of all appropriate authorities.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school system implements written policies and procedures to identify and address the needs of students with special needs.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school system provides or refers families to appropriate related services and/or accommodations to meet student needs.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As applicable, the school system is in compliance with all local, state, and federal requirements related to students with special needs.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school system implements written admissions policies and procedures.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school system implements written policies and procedures for placement of students in appropriate programs and levels.</li> </ul>	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicants for enrollment and their families are clearly informed of the philosophy/mission of the school system, the nature and extent of the educational program and services available, tuition and fees (if applicable), school system policies, and expectations for satisfactory student performance.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school system accepts students for whom there is a reasonable expectation of success in the educational program as appropriate and interpreted by law.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admissions inquiries are handled in a prompt and thorough manner.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate advisory services are available for students who are having difficulty with their studies as well as for those who are rapid learners.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are actively encouraged to start, continue, and finish the program in which they have enrolled.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The institution implements written policies and procedures to evaluate students' previous academic work and to provide fair and consistent credit for their previous studies or work experience.</li> </ul>	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

The District provides an array of services to address students' academic, social-emotional, and career planning needs. Newly enrolled students at Southern Lehigh and their families are greeted with an orientation program that explains the District's



philosophy/mission, policies, procedures, and expectations, and provides parents with information on student development.

Student Support Services, Guidance, and counseling services are available to all students. An integrated, diagnostic approach is utilized to determine the best interventions and strategies to help each individual student succeed in the school program. Instructional support teachers, classroom teachers, counselors, and principals work as a team to assess data, adapt the curriculum and teaching methods, and identify appropriate program placement for students. Programs include enrichment/gifted, special education, career awareness activities, and referral to additional support systems such as RTII, Student Assistance Program, and community support services. Services include individual and group counseling, and classroom lessons on issues such as conflict resolution, bullying, family problems, social skills, and study skills. All staff share responsibility for providing guidance and support to students.

Some students have participated in work/study programs in the community. While the District does not actively encourage cyber-school, it will consider the request of a student who is not having success in a traditional environment in an effort to provide every reasonable opportunity for the student to fulfill his or her graduation requirements. Southern Lehigh has partnered with neighboring districts in a consortium in which each participant contributes the curriculum for a selection of courses and agrees to accept the curriculum contributed by the partnering schools.

Southern Lehigh contracts with First Student Transit Inc. to provide the bulk of vehicles and drivers for transportation to and from various schools inside and outside the School District. It also uses a number of independent transportation contracts for special transportation needs. Written policies and procedures are implemented to ensure the safety of students when being picked up, transported, and dropped off at the school. Safety rules are enforced by the bus driver and supported by the administration. There is also a procedure in place for the arrival and dismissal of students by car.

The District employs a staff of 36 to prepare and serve meals throughout the system. Menus are planned monthly and are posted in the cafeteria each day to inform students, particularly those who are diabetic or gluten intolerant, of the nutritional values of the foods. There is no specific meal offered for a student with dietary restrictions. There is however, a separate area for a "peanut-free" table. Food service facilities are inspected regularly and to ensure that food preparation and dining areas are clean and meet health and safety requirements. Receptacles are available for recycling.

The District has implemented a wellness policy that encourages proper nutrition, nutrition education, and regular physical activity as part of the total learning experience. The elementary schools have enrolled in the “Healthier US Schools Challenge,” which was created in 2004 by the Federal Department of Agriculture to promote better nutrition and increased physical activity for school students across the nation. Accordingly, cafeteria managers at all three schools tracked their menus and physical activities of students for four weeks and submitted the data to the USDA. Participating Southern Lehigh schools were awarded the Silver Medal status.

The District is in compliance with all local, state, and federal regulations pertaining to students with special needs and has written policies and procedures to identify and meet the needs. Southern Lehigh, in conjunction with the Intermediate Unit, Approved Private Schools, and programs in other districts, offers a continuum of services through the grades. Learning support and programs are available for Kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who are identified as learning disabled, developmentally disabled, other health impaired, autistic, and experience mild emotional disturbances. All levels of intervention are available, from supportive intervention in the regular class to full time support.

Early intervention programs are also provided for three to five year old eligible children. These programs are designed to meet the child’s needs in any of these developmental areas: physical, sensory, cognitive, language and speech, social-emotional, and self-help. The District works with the Intermediate Unit, which provides Early Intervention Services through Project CONNECT.

Approximately 12% of the District’s students qualify for special education services, which are delivered within the general education environment as much as possible. General and special educators collaborate in the development and implementation of lessons that both ensure rigor while meeting individual student needs. Five District psychologists, three speech and language pathologists, and twenty-seven special education teachers meet the needs of its students.

The District has also established relationships with various community agencies and organizations to meet the needs of the students and families. These include mental health agencies, law enforcement, institutions of higher learning, private providers and Career Link. Agencies provide teachers with information on how they can help in the instructional process that can benefit all students.

## C.2. Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.

### C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System

- NONE

## C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

## C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



## STUDENT LIFE AND STUDENT ACTIVITIES STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** A healthy atmosphere exists for all students. At all levels, non-discriminatory, appropriate student activities that supplement classroom experiences or community life are provided. An appropriate student activities program fosters a positive intellectual, cultural, and social climate, promotes growth in student leadership and social interaction skills, and encourages students' special interests.

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### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

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### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
<i>For All School Systems:</i>	
The school system's budget for all athletic activities	X
The school system's budget for all non-athletic activities	X
The school system's policies on academic eligibility to participate in student activities	X
The school system's policies related to student life and student activities	X
Evidence that...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are offered opportunities to build their skills in handling responsibility, taking initiative, leadership competencies, cooperation, and self-direction.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students, members of the system's staff, families, and the community are encouraged to offer input about and participate in</li> </ul>	X

Evidence	Visiting Team
student activities.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff members, parents, and other volunteers who lead or participate in student activities are approved by the school system's leadership, suitably qualified, and provide appropriate supervision to students.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school system recognizes student accomplishments, contributions, and responsibilities in meaningful ways.</li> </ul>	X

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## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

Southern Lehigh encourages student participation in extra-curricular activities by offering a balance of age-appropriate academic, athletic and social activities, as well as providing opportunities for students to engage in service activities.

There are a total of 31 specific clubs or teams for the high school and middle school students, who are also able to start a new club if there are ten students and an advisor interested in an activity. Eligibility criterion is given in the school system's website and there is a copy of the budget used for extracurricular activities. While most activities do not involve cost to families, high school students participating in sports will pay a fee. Elementary schools provide information about town-sponsored sports on the school's website with contacts. The student newspaper, *The Spotlight* contains information about school and District activities.

Dramatic arts activities, instrumental programs, and music lessons are available throughout the District. The high school is staging a performance of the musical "Cats",

while Liberty Bell School has a third grade musical written and directed by a third grade teacher. This particular event involves both community and parents, who help in the teachers with the production. Nearly all of the third graders participate in this yearly pageant.

The middle school is unique for its television station, *Studio 22*, which has both recording and broadcasting capabilities. Students are able to record the morning news each day.

There are active Parent Teacher Organizations in each school. Members share their talents (e.g.: teaching photography to students in one school, volunteer to assist teachers, run and chaperone “homeroom parties” and book fairs, sponsor socials at night (e.g.: Halloween Night), and prepare holiday decorations for the hallways. Parents also run some service clubs.

While the elementary schools have no formal clubs or sports activities, there are special events such as author visits, field and play days, musical performances, themed school-wide events, assemblies, instrumental music programs and parent workshops. One school has a habitat outside the building where teachers, parents and students can plant in one of the plots. Elementary school children also participate in events that provide coats and mittens to those that need them or gather food for the food bank. High school students are also able to participate in fundraisers, homecoming events, and a variety of charitable activities (e.g.: “Jeans for Homeless Teens”). Faculty and parents also participate in these and other charitable fundraising programs.

Fifty high school students have participated in cultural trips to China, Western Europe and Costa Rica and “Language Trips” to Spain and France are underway. In addition, trips that will encourage cultural understanding and sensitivity are planned to Chinatown in Philadelphia and the Embassies in Washington, D.C. School trips and cultural awareness activities are also planned at the elementary schools

## C.2. Recommendations

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

### C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System

- NONE

### C.2.b. Recommendations for the Component Schools

- NONE

### C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

### C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	



## INFORMATION RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

**The Standard:** Information resources, materials, and technology are accessible and of adequate scope, quantity, and quality to facilitate the school system’s pursuit of its total educational program. These resources encourage all students and staff to broaden and extend their knowledge and skills. Access to appropriate information resources and technology is provided for students and staff. Appropriate instruction is offered to develop student and staff inquiry, research, and information literacy skills. Information technology equipment is functional and well maintained.

### A. THE VISITING TEAM'S ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S ADHERENCE TO THIS STANDARD FOR ACCREDITATION

X	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>MEETS</b> this Standard for Accreditation
	It is the Visiting Team's assessment is that the school system <b>DOES NOT MEET</b> this Standard for Accreditation. The evidence that supports this assessment is shown in the Recommended Stipulations shown in Section C, below.

### B. EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE TEAM'S ASSESSMENT

Evidence	Visiting Team
The school system's long-range plan for information resources and technology	X
The school system's information skills curriculum	
The school system's policies related to information resources and technology	X
Evidence that information and technology resources are appropriately supported annually with funding from the school system’s budget.	X
The school system's budget for information resources and technology	X
Evidence that...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The library and/or media center staff is sufficient and appropriately</li> </ul>	X



Evidence	Visiting Team
qualified to provide effective services to students and the staff.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information resources are reviewed periodically to ensure they are age- and developmentally appropriate, current, and reflect the school's social and cultural diversity.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The library and/or media center staff is sufficient and appropriately qualified to provide effective services to students and the staff.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system's staff and students are provided opportunities to offer input into the types, quality, and format of the information resources provided.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The technology resources staff is sufficient and appropriately qualified to provide effective service to students and staff.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate skills training on the use of technology resources and equipment is provided to the staff and students.</li> </ul>	X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school system implements written policies and procedures for acceptable use of information resources and technology.</li> </ul>	X

## C. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### C.1. Observations

In this section, the Team lists 1) any general observations regarding the degree to which the school system meets this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality and 2) any areas in which the school system exceeds the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality.

#### C.1.a. Observations for the School System

With the Southern Lehigh's mission statement referencing "tomorrow's opportunities" district leadership is well aware of what they need to do to prepare students for a future based on existing and emerging technologies. Accordingly, the District has demonstrated a commitment to the instructional technology and the technology infrastructure that will be necessary if it is to achieve this mission for all of its students. Indeed, it is one of the five main focuses of the district's strategic plan for improvement.

The District's Technology Council meets regularly to discuss, among other things, emerging technology needs and professional development for staff.

Southern Lehigh's website serves as one example of the District's commitment to instructional technologies. It provides access to various information relevant to staff, students, and parents. Staff has access to tutorials in the use of a variety of instructional technologies and to a link for assistance. This link allows staff members to submit an inquiry, which will trigger a response from the appropriate technology support staff. The website also includes references to, and information on, various software and hardware available to staff and students such as Glogster, Wiki, iPod Touch carts, iPads, and Blackboard LMS. There are also designated parent and student pages with access to things such as community information and teachers' websites.

The District conducts technology needs assessments and has designated specific staff members as "technology coaches" and "technology facilitators" to meet the needs that are identified. These coaches and facilitators are available to train teachers and help them develop their ideas on how to effectively integrate technology into lessons.

The District allocates two distinct budget line items to technology. A \$900,000 line item is specifically for instructional technology or hardware, such as laptops and projectors. The District also allocates \$350,000 specifically for technology infrastructure, such as the school system's web server. The funds permit Southern Lehigh to centrally coordinate district efforts to improve technology access and effectiveness of use in a manner that is relatively consistent across the schools in the district. Southern Lehigh has also historically received funds through a state grant entitled "Classrooms for the Future." It was used to purchase such things as laptops for teachers and students. While that grant has since ended, the Board and administration has committed to maintain (and in fact, has increased funding) funding for similar purchases. The District is also exploring lease options with computer companies that will permit each student at the high school to have a laptop. (The current ratio of students to laptops is two to one.)

Each of the District's schools is equipped with a library, which include print as well as online resources. However, recent investments in the libraries have shifted away from print resources and toward online resources – especially in the middle and high schools. There are 3.6 FTE librarians for the District's six schools, representing a decrease in library staff from prior school years. Staff members indicated that the libraries could be made available for students during lunch and after school, but that is no formal time allotted for students to engage in supervised library activity after school.

## C.2. Recommendations

In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve the degree to which it meets the requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.

### C.2.a. Recommendations for the School System

The district has made impressive investments in technology resources that have provided students and staff access to quality software, hardware, and a secure and durable network. What is less clear is whether or not comparable investments have been made in professional development to train teachers in the effective use of this technology. Moving forward, Southern Lehigh is encouraged to redouble its focus on professional development to allow the instructional staff to maximize the potential of the technology that is widely available in the District.

## C.3. Recommended Monitoring Issues:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality that require ongoing monitoring. Monitoring Issues refer to requirements that are not completely absent but that are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be addressed satisfactorily by the mid-term of the school system's term of accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

## C.4 Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirement(s) of this Standard and/or its Indicators of Quality the school system does not meet and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Standard or Indicator	Recommended Action
	NONE	

# THE PLAN FOR GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

## Introduction

The purpose of the self-study and accreditation process is first and foremost to establish whether the school system meets the Standards for Accreditation, the fundamental requirement to be accredited. However, establishing that the school system has in place the building blocks for a quality school system is largely an exercise of looking backward to see what has been accomplished.

The *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol is based in the principles and concepts of strategic planning. Therefore, the protocol requires the school system to be forward thinking, not focusing so much on the past and past accomplishments but, instead, focusing on the future—what does the school system have to do differently or do better to further its mission and to ensure that all of its students are able to achieve the knowledge, skills, and characteristics the school system has defined in its Profile of Graduates.

Therefore, the culminating activity of the self-study and accreditation process is the developing of a Plan for Growth and Improvement in Student Performance.

Developing a Plan for Growth and Improvement involves:

- Establishing a vision for the school system by creating or reaffirming a statement of mission.
- Identifying a set of beliefs that will serve as the school system's ethical code.
- Developing a profile of the knowledge, skills, and qualities the school system expects of its graduates.
- Identifying the areas of student performance that are the priorities for growth and improvement.
- Developing action plans to achieve the performance objectives.
- Monitoring implementation of the action plans.
- Conducting periodic reviews of the progress being made toward achievement of its objectives.

Following are the components of the Plan for Growth and Improvement in Student Performance:

- Mission
- Beliefs
- Profile of Graduates

- External Scan
- Measurable student performance objectives
- Action plans to achieve the objectives

**IMPORTANT: The Team's observations and recommendations regarding the Plan for Growth and Improvement must be read in conjunction with the Plan as presented by the school system in its Self-Study Document.**

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## **A. STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY OBJECTIVES**

The centerpiece of the school system's Plan for Growth and Improvement is formed by the three, four, or five areas of measurable objectives the school system has identified as being the highest priorities for growth and improvement if the school system is to move closer to achieving its Mission. At least two of the objectives must focus on areas of student performance that have been determined to be priorities for growth and improvement. The remaining one, two, or three objectives may be either student performance objectives and/or objectives focused on growing and improving the school system's organizational capacity to produce the levels of student performance desired and expected by the school system's community of stakeholders. Space is provided below to evaluate the maximum number of objectives. This limited number of objectives is suggested so the school system can focus on the most critical aspects of student performance without diverting its energies in too many directions.

To identify these priority areas, the Planning Team asked itself:

- *What are the gaps between what we say in our Profile of Graduates regarding what we want our graduates to know, be able to do, and/or what qualities we want them to demonstrate and our students' actual performance in those areas?*
- *Which of these gaps constitute the highest priorities for narrowing if we are to move closer over the next seven years to achieving our mission?*
- *Are there area of our organization's capacity that must be improved in order to improve our students' performance to the levels we desire and expect*

Specifying clear and measurable student performance objectives identifies the school system's commitment to achieve specific end results and thus, is tied directly to accountability. The objectives must be written in such a way that they outline growth in student performance for the next seven years and represent a major focus for growth

and improvement in student performance in the school system. The objectives should be consistent with the mission and should extend and define the *aim* portion of the mission in more specific detail. Objectives explicate in measurable terms the key end results that the school system seeks to realize from its mission, as expresses in its Profile of Graduates. Not only should the objectives be related to the school system's mission, but where there is also a district or system plan, the objectives should be linked to one or more of the district's or system's objectives.

The term "student performance" is intended to be defined in the broadest possible terms. The objectives submitted for accreditation may be focused on *any* of the outcomes expected of students as stated in the Profile of Graduates.

### A.1. School System Objectives/Goals

Objective Goal No.	Statement of Objective/Goal	Focus	
		Student Performance	Organizational Capacity
Objective/Goal #1	<b>Academic Proficiency:</b> As measured by the PSSA, PASA, Keystone exams, and/or District assessments, students will be proficient in core subject areas leading the District to meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) each year for all students leading to successful academic transitions from elementary, to intermediate, middle level, high school, and post secondary.	X	
Objective/Goal #2	<b>Highly Qualified Teachers:</b> All administrators, teachers and staff will be rated 'highly qualified' as measured by maintenance of appropriate certification(s), engagement in professional development experiences, and	X	

Objective Goal No.	Statement of Objective/Goal	Focus	
		Student Performance	Organizational Capacity
	demonstration of continual growth through annual observations and evaluations by supervisors.		
<b>Objective/Goal #3</b>	<b>Improved Internal and External Communications:</b> Communications with stakeholders will increase 25% by 2014 as measured by website traffic, use of the electronic communication alert system, and access to the student information system /community portal.		X

**A.1.a. Are at least two of the objectives/goals focused on growing and improving student performance?**

X	Yes
	No

**A.1.b. What evidence did the Team see and hear that would confirm that these objectives/goals represent the highest priorities for growth and improvement in student performance and organizational capacity in the school system?**

Southern Lehigh School District had secured prior Middle States approval to have the strategic plan, as developed to meet Pennsylvania State Education requirements, to serve as their Plan for Growth and Improvement. The goals and activities embedded in that document were reviewed for this section of the report.

The District’s three overarching goals were identified a “brainstorm” process during which myriad goals and concerns were listed and discussed. This process resulted in a consolidation of the team’s many thoughts into three core ideas: academic performance, high quality staff, and improvement of internal and external communication. Since their initial identification, the three District Goals have guided

virtually all activities which occur within the district.

**A.1.c. What level of understanding of and support for these objectives/goals did the Team see and hear among the school system's community of stakeholders?**

All staff understand the District's commitment to attaining the three identified goals. Moreover, each understands that all the activities in which they and their colleagues engage must serve to support the strategic plan and further achievement of the three goals.

**A.1.d. To what degree are the objectives/goals clearly stated and sharply focused on the intended outcomes and target improvements in student performance and organizational capacity?**

The District's goals are well-aligned with their mission and intended outcomes for their students. The Board of Education's support for the mission, goals, and strategic plan is made tangible by the resources they approve for the purpose of implementing the plan and meeting the student and systems objectives.

The District has identified specific outcome targets for improvement in terms of organizational capacity. Like the goal for student performance, it was identified as part of a collaborative process involving a cross-section of internal and external stakeholders.

**A.1.e. Based on the evidence the Team saw and heard from the school system's community of stakeholders, what is the determination of the Team regarding whether there is sufficient understanding and support for and resources dedicated to the objectives/goals to indicate that the objectives/goals are reasonable and achievable?**

The Team's determination is that the objectives/goals are:				
Reasonable	X	Yes		No
Achievable	X	Yes		No

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## **A.2. THE VISITING TEAM'S OBSERVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**



## **A.2.a. Observations**

**In this section, the Team lists any general observations regarding the school system's objectives/goals for improving the areas of student performance and organizational capacity that were identified through the self-study process as the priorities for growth and improvement.**

### **Observations for the School System**

Southern Lehigh's goals enjoy consistent support from teachers, staff, parents and students. One administrator referred to their capacity to "live the process" and conveyed that all staff understands that each play a critical role in meeting the objectives the District has identified for itself. Staff and parents not only applaud the District's intended outcomes, but seem to view them as a source of pride and distinction for their community.

## **A.2.a. Recommendations**

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve its objectives/goals for growing and improving the areas of student performance and organizational capacity identified by the self-study process as the priorities for growth and improvement. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

### **Recommendations for the School System**

The Visiting Team carefully reviewed the aforementioned approved strategic plan and was able to locate baseline data in selected areas that would give them to have some capacity to measure success on the Academic Proficiency goal; specifically the District has created a chart which provides NCLB data for middle and high school students from 2009 through 2011, and projects targets until the end of school year 2013-14. With this exception, there was no other baseline data provided for the Academic Proficiency goal, and baseline data of any kind available for either the Teacher Proficiency or Communication goals. Technical Reviews completed by the Middle States indicate that the absence of baseline data was also noted in December 2011.

The Team does not question whether or not such data exists, or the District's capacity to gather, organize, and communicate it in a way that would be meaningful for both the

Team and Southern Lehigh stakeholders. We are, however, concerned about this significant missing piece and identify it as a priority for Southern Lehigh going forward. Without it, we can see no way for the District to assess its rate or degree of progress in meeting its goals. Moreover, it would be difficult at best for Middle States to assess the District's progress in subsequent reviews that will occur as an ongoing requirement for Middle States accreditation.

One of the things we have noted in other sections of this report is Southern Lehigh's use of protocols and structures other than those provided and recommended by Middle States. For instance, the District avoids Middle States terms when discussing the strategic planning process it has undertaken. In that instance we advocated for an alignment of District and Middle States parlance to ensure that all stakeholders fully understand the specific protocols Southern Lehigh is using, and which of many requirements it is striving to meet. We believe that adopting Middle States structures may also be helpful here and will ensuring that the District provides all the required components of a well-conceived plan.

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## **B. ACTION PLANS**

Action plans describe the methods the school system will use to accomplish its mission/philosophy and its performance/capacity objectives. Action plans provide detailed descriptions of the specific actions required to achieve desired results outlined in the student performance improvement and organizational capacity objectives. This is the "doing" part of the plan. Action plans can and should include multiple activities that will engage the school system in improvement activities for the next seven years. Action plans should be specific and tell in detail how the school system will accomplish its objectives. Action plans should relate directly to the objectives, but they also should be related to the mission/philosophy.

The Visiting Team examined the action plan(s) for the performance/capacity objectives in the school system's Plan for Growth and Improvement according to the criteria for effective action plans.

### **B.1.a. What level of understanding of and support for the action plans did the Team see and hear among the school system's community of stakeholders?**

All staff is aware of the activities the District has identified and put in place in order to

achieve the three goals of “Academic Proficiency,” “Highly Qualified Teachers,” and “Communication.”

**B.1.b. To what degree are the action plans clearly stated and sharply focused on the actions to be taken to achieve the intended outcomes and targeted improvements in student performance and organizational capacity?**

The Validation Team found the action plans to be vague and lacking in clarifying detail. Overwhelmingly, the activities described in the Action Plans have already occurred. They do not indicate how the District plans to ensure that it will achieve or sustain its goals going forward.

## **B.2. THE VISITING TEAM’S OBSERVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **B.2.a. Observations**

**In this section, the Team lists any general observations regarding the school system's action plans for improving the areas of student performance and organizational capacity that were identified through the self-study process as the priorities for growth and improvement.**

#### **Observations for the School System**

The Validation Team reviewed the criteria for the Action Plans and found that certain recommended features appear lacking. Specifically, we do not believe that Southern Lehigh has (a) clearly outlined and in detailed the action steps to be taken in the first two to three years of the plan; (b) identified the resources required to implement the action steps; (c) varied the groups/individuals responsible so that the burden for implementation does not fall on just one or two individuals; (d) established timelines for implementing the action steps; or (e) identified clear indicators of success for each action step so the institution knows what action steps have been implemented and with what result.

We also previously noted that action statements are vague and that most of the activities speak of “planning,” “promoting,” “analyzing,” “investigating,” “maintaining,” and other such “action words” that nevertheless do not operationally

define precisely what this would look like when implemented. While the compilation of midpoint activities is extensive in terms of what the District seeks to accomplish, it is devoid of the details to inform how, when and with which staff and resources they would be achieved. There is no information to suggest timelines or process by which the plan would be reviewed or progress assessed. We wonder who has been designated to have global oversight of the plan and how often will (s)he be providing reports to the Board, faculty and staff, students and parents, and the community at large. Finally, and importantly, we could find no activities that are proposed to take place going forward – only those which have already occurred.

## **B.2.b. Recommendations**

**In this section, the Team lists any recommendations to the school system regarding how it can improve its action plans for growing and improving the areas of student performance and organizational capacity identified by the self-study process as the priorities for growth and improvement. Recommendations are suggestions by the Team, but the school system is not required to accept or act on them.**

### **Recommendations for the School System**

The District must provide the needed details which clearly spell out what exactly is to be done, by when, by whom and with what resources. The details must also include what will occur over the course of the next three to five years, and should not just indicate what steps have already taken place. Action planning should be unequivocally identified as a Middle States activity, with staff and community fully understanding that it is a critical component of the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol.

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## **THE VISITING TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS—STUDENT PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLANS**

**In this section, the Team lists its recommendations regarding the degree to which the school system's student performance and organizational capacity objectives/goals and action plans meet the Requirements of the Protocol for Objectives and Action Plans.**

### **Recommended Monitoring Issues:**

In this section, the Team lists any requirements for Student Performance Objectives and Action Plans that require monitoring. Monitoring issues refer to elements of Student Performance Objectives and Action Plans required by the protocol that are not completely absent but are met only partially and are either in need of completion or improvement. Monitoring issues must be corrected by mid-term in the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Protocol	Action Recommended
	NONE	

### Recommended Stipulations:

In this section, the Team lists any requirements for the Student Performance Objectives and Action Plans the school system that are totally absent and, therefore, must be added as a stipulation to the school system's accreditation.

No.	Requirement of the Protocol	Action Recommended
	NONE	



## ACCREDITATION RECOMMENDATION

**A**fter its visit to the school system has been completed, and after considering the evidence seen and heard during the visit., the Middle States Association's Visiting Team is charged with making a recommendation to the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools regarding the accreditation action the Commissions should take.

Based on the evidence presented by the school system in its Self-Study Document and supporting documentation, and based on the evidence seen and heard by members of the Team from the school system's community of stakeholders, the Team recommends to the Middle States Commission(s) that it takes the following accreditation action:

### ACCREDITATION

## NEXT STEPS

**A**s Southern Lehigh School District proceeds with the implementation of its Plan for Growth and Improvement, there are a number of “next steps” the school system will be expected to **take in order to maintain accredited status**. **These include the following:**

- **Maintain Adherence to the Middle States Standards for Accreditation.**

The twelve Standards for Accreditation reflect research-based best practices for quality in school systems. The Standards also represent the organizational “building blocks” that need to be in place to produce high levels of student performance. An accredited school system is required to maintain its adherence to the Standards for Accreditation throughout its term of accreditation.

- **Implement the Plan for Growth and Improvement.**

When the Middle States Association grants accreditation to a school system using the *Excellence by Design (SV)* protocol, it does so with the understanding that the school system will make a good faith effort to implement the Plan for Growth and Improvement that served as one of the bases for accreditation.

- **Submit an Annual Profile and Nominations to Serve on Visiting Team.**

As a requirement to maintain its accreditation, the school system is required to submit an Annual Profile in which it either confirms or revises basic data about the school system. A second requirement is that the school system nominates members of its staff to serve on Visiting Teams to other school systems.

- **Conduct Periodic Reviews of the Plan for Growth and Improvement**

While Middle States does not “collect” evidence of the school system’s annual review, the school system is expected to conduct periodic reviews of its Plan. The purpose of the periodic reviews is to ensure that progress is being made in implementing the Plan, to update and revise the Plan as needed, and to pause to celebrate successes. The school system should keep records of what transpired during each review such as meeting agendas, minutes, documented changes to the Plan, and summaries of results of the assessments being used to measure progress toward achieving the objectives. Documentation will be required for the Mid-Term Report and by the next Visiting Team.

- **Complete a Mid-Term Report**

At the beginning of the third year in the accreditation term, the school system will be required to submit a Mid-Term Report in which it will provide evidence of its implementing its Plan for Growth and Improvement and of progress being made toward achieving its objectives. The Report will be reviewed by the Middle States staff, which may determine that an on-site visit should be conducted to examine any areas of concern.

- **Prepare for Reaccreditation**

At the beginning of the sixth year of the school system's accreditation term, begin a new self-study in preparation for the visit of the next Visiting Team. It should be noted, however, that if the school system has implemented a planning ethic and the *Excellence by Design (SV)* school system improvement process has been ongoing as expected, preparing for the next team visit should be an extension of work already underway.



## CONCLUSION

The Southern Lehigh School District is unique for being the first in Pennsylvania to undergo the accreditation process using the *Excellence by Design* (SV) protocol. It is simply one of the ways in which this fine school system has distinguished itself.

There are dedicated and qualified teachers, led by an energetic and determined superintendent, have embraced a culture of strategic planning designed to ensure academic opportunity and excellence for all students. In the District's own words: "Everyone is responsible for knowing and recording their professional activities in terms of our strategic plan goals. It is an integral part of everything that we do." We would agree that Southern Lehigh School District plan for continuous growth and development "is anchored" in the implementation of the strategic. This emerges as one of their notable strengths.

We have taken note of the ways in which Southern Lehigh offers students scholastic opportunity, including its external partnerships and extensive advanced placement courses, and its commitment to creating citizens of a global society. We have been extremely impressed with the availability and integration of technology into the classroom –tangible evidence of Southern Lehigh's commitment to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner.

The Visiting Team has encouraged the District to consider several things we believe will be to its benefit. Prominent among them were two suggestions that have overarching implications (most critically to the Plan for Growth and Improvement): (a) the alignment of current strategic planning efforts to the Middle States protocols and structures, and (b) the broadening of internal and external stakeholder involvement in the planning process. There are some specific recommendations as well, which apply to (1) increasing awareness of diversity; (2) addressing loss of personnel; (3) full utilization of the student data management system; and (d) developing a more comprehensive profile of your students.

We conclude by reassuring you that our comments are made as "critical friends" and restating that we have every confidence in your success.

# VISITING TEAM ROSTER

**CHAIR:** **Dr. Valerie Valenti**  
**Program Administer**  
Eastern Suffolk BOCES  
Holbrook, New York

**CO-CHAIR:** **Mr. Carmine Bonnani**  
**Retired Superintendent**  
Ventnor Public Schools  
Margate, New Jersey

**TEAM MEMBERS:** **Mr. David Bleakley**  
**Assistant Principal**  
Freehold High School  
Freehold, New Jersey

**Mrs. Theresa M. Chanko**  
**Teacher**  
Our Mother of Perpetual Help School  
Ephrata, Pennsylvania

**Dr. Jorge Delgado, Ed.D.**  
**Assistant Principal**  
Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School  
Washington, D.C.

**Ms. Maureen Gibbs**  
**Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant**  
Ridgefield Park Special Services  
Ridgefield Park, New Jersey

**Dr. David Roman**  
**Assistant Superintendent**  
Hazlet Township Public Schools  
Hazlet, New Jersey

**Ms. Judith Ladd Teoli**

**Principal**

Ursuline Academy

Wilmington, Delaware

**Mr. Craig Vogt**

**Director of Art, Music, and Alternative Programs**

Bergenfield Public Schools

Bergenfield, New Jersey