



## **Monitoring Review Report**

**Savannah-Chatham County Public School System**

**208 Bull Street**

**Savannah, GA. 31401**

**United States of America**

**March 26 – 28, 2019**

# Monitoring Review Report

## Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the Monitoring Review held on March 26–28, 2019 for Savannah-Chatham County Public School System (SCCPSS). The purpose of the Monitoring Review was to review the institution’s progress toward addressing Improvement Priorities from the Special Review held on November 13-16, 2017.

## Activities of the Monitoring Review Team

In preparation for the Monitoring Review, the team reviewed the institution’s progress report and related documentation. Once on site, the team engaged in the following activities:

- Meetings with the superintendent, governing body, cabinet, system leadership team, principals and support staff.
- Interviews with stakeholders representing community/business partnerships, consultants and parents.
- Evidence review
- Team deliberations and report preparation.

The Monitoring Review Team used the findings from these activities and evidence to assess the progress the institution has made toward addressing the Improvement Priorities determined by the Special Review Team.

## Findings

The Monitoring Review Team's findings are organized by each Improvement Priority made by the Special Review Team on November 16, 2017. For each cited Standard, the Monitoring Review Team provides a rating followed by a summary of findings and recommendations for each Improvement Priority to guide next steps and for sustaining progress made. Results are reported within four ranges identified by the colors.

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

Leadership Capacity Domain		Score
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.	Meets Expectations

**Improvement Priority 1** – Adhere to all established policies regarding the roles and responsibilities of governing board members and ensure ethical behaviors are pervasively displayed.

**Improvement Priority 2** – Determine, implement and analyze the results of a regularly scheduled board assessment process.

**Improvement Priority 3** – Identify, develop, and implement policies and/or guidelines regarding the appropriate use of social media by board members in support of their roles and responsibilities to demonstrate ethical behavior with the highest degree of integrity and fidelity.

**Improvement Priority 1** – Adhere to all established policies regarding the roles and responsibilities of governing board members and ensure ethical behaviors are pervasively displayed.

**Findings:** Upon receipt of the Special Review Report following the November, 2017 review, the SCCPSS superintendent and Board set into motion a plan to systematically address the two standards, including the six improvement priorities outlined to guide them in their improvement efforts. Initial activities included a commitment to establish an ad hoc committee, the AdvancED Compliance Sub-committee, whose charge was to focus on the report recommendations in detail, creating a “cooperative mechanism for the Board to work with the superintendent as a partner,” as reported in the Progress Report. The sub-committee, including the superintendent, one Board member, and a cabinet member who acted as the chair, met a total of 27 times over the course of a year in meetings and work sessions. Artifacts revealed the subcommittee met weekly in the beginning and reported back to the Board frequently to update and seek input to determine steps and potential solutions along the way. The Board in its entirety made decisions as recommended by the subcommittee.

One of the first tasks the Board completed was to sign a pledge in March 2018 to meet the requirements cited in the Special Review Report, and to operate in a professional manner. Prior Board meeting observations depicted incivility in members’ conduct while conducting the business of the SCCPSS. The decision of the Board to accept the results of the Special Review and focus on moving forward was deemed paramount to progress toward meeting these Improvement Priorities. The system engaged a well-respected attorney to conduct trainings on August 2018 and January 2019. During these sessions he offered practical solutions and fielded

Board member questions and provided clarifications regarding the roles of Board members and those of the district's administrators and staff. Board conduct addressed under Improvement Priority 1 included a blurring of the lines of responsibility between the Board and the superintendent. An activity that supported the Board in addressing this component began in August 2018, and continued throughout the year, through systematic review of every governance policy in order to ensure clear understanding and to revise as needed

**Recommendation:** Continue systematic review, updating and revision of board policies to ensure common understandings and conduct an annual review of board members' roles and responsibilities. Institute processes to monitor adherence to board policies.

**Improvement Priority 2** –Determine, implement and analyze the results of a regularly scheduled board assessment process.

**Findings:** The team reviewed the institution's Progress Report and artifacts, conducted interviews and found that the Board had taken initial steps to establish board assessment processes. The system administered the Georgia School Board Association's (GSBA) self-assessment tool, which had been previously utilized by the district on an irregular basis. Improvement Priority 2 includes the directives to implement and analyze the results of board assessments on a routine basis. The Board acknowledged, in retreat notes from January, 2019, that while they had completed the GSBA self-assessment, they needed to process and review those results as well as other stakeholder survey results.

The Board has also provided members with a monthly individual self-reflection tool, referred to as the "the Blue Sheet." With this tool, board members can self-assess their meeting-related preparation and conduct. Prompts on the tool included: "Was I prepared? Did I contribute positively? What does that contribute to this forum?" At the time of the Monitoring Review, the Blue Sheet reflections were not shared or discussed in board forums.

**Recommendation:** Implement formal, systematic activities to review, analyze and monitor the results of all available and appropriate feedback data to ensure efficacy of school board policies and practices.

**Improvement Priority 3** - Identify, develop, and implement policies and/or guidelines regarding the appropriate use of social media by Board members in support of their roles and responsibilities to demonstrate ethical conduct with fidelity.

**Findings:** The team reviewed evidence presented in the Progress Report, and conducted interviews during the review that demonstrated the steps the Board had taken to move forward in the implementation of corrective actions regarding appropriate use of social media by members of the Board. The Board has adopted ethical social media use policies that have been implemented with fidelity. The team heard testimonials from Board members and district stakeholders who acknowledged that the successful implementation of social media use

policies, as well as a new focus on communicating positively about the school system, had resulted in improvements in the culture, encompassing the Board, superintendent, and system staff.

**Recommendation:** Continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Board’s use of social media to ensure consistency of the public’s positive perception of the district’s schools and leadership.

Based on documented evidence from the institution’s Progress Report and further information gained through stakeholder interviews, the Monitoring Review Team determined that Standard 1.4 has been met.

Leadership Capacity Domain		Score
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.	Needs Improvement

**Improvement Priority 4** – Develop and implement a communication protocol that details appropriate and inappropriate use of communications, is aligned with Board Policies BH, BBD, and BBI, generally accepted best practices and is consistent with present-day communication realities.

**Improvement Priority 5** – Develop, implement and evaluate a comprehensive board professional development plan that encompasses both individual as well as whole group learning to support the needs identified from the self-assessment, internal, and external stakeholder feedback and other emerging topics relevant to enhance board performance and organizational effectiveness.

**Improvement Priority 6** – Participate in board professional development training that encompasses building trust and demonstrating respectful behavior between board members.

**Improvement Priority 4** – Develop and implement a communication protocol that details appropriate and inappropriate use of communications, is aligned with Board Policies BH, BBD, and BBI, generally accepted best practices and is consistent with present-day communication realities.

**Findings:** The team received evidence from the Progress Report, as well as during the review, that supported an understanding of the steps the Board had taken to move forward in the implementation of a communication protocol detailing appropriate and inappropriate communication use aligned with generally accepted best practices and consistent with present-day communication realities. These efforts included consultant support at retreat sessions and

review of existing communication activities in School Board practices in order to revise and update the Board's communication policies.

Concurrent to the communication policy expansion and revision was appropriate recognition of the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and the Board in terms of who actually is charged with leading the school system's communications. While prior practice included instances of inappropriate communications by Board members who overstepped their advisory responsibilities, a new Board, Board chair, and clearly defined communication protocol have provided a clear path toward complimentary advisory and leadership for the system. The guiding principle of the new protocol is: "All communication between Board members and the Superintendent should be respectful, timely, and accurate." This adopted protocol has outlined clear directive actions to sustain positive relationships on behalf of the students of the system.

**Directive:** Institute systematic evaluation of the district's use of social media to ensure the success of the communication protocol.

**Improvement Priority 5** – Develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive board professional development plan that encompasses both individual as well as whole group learning to support the needs identified from the self-assessment, internal, and external stakeholder feedback and other emerging topics relevant to enhancing board performance and organizational effectiveness.

**Findings:** The team reviewed evidence from the Progress Report, and gathered additional evidence during the review that supported an understanding of the beginning steps the Board had taken toward participation in professional development activities to support identified needs. The team reviewed a timeline and several artifacts, conducted interviews, and reviewed presentations which included information such as the use of the GSBA self-assessment tool and stakeholder feedback results. The team determined that the district has made initial steps, but has yet to meet the intent of this priority.

While movement had occurred to transform Board practices prior to the start of the new Board's term in January, 2019, solid and sustained improvements were clearly in their infancy at the time of the Monitoring Review. While retreats and training had occurred, formal evaluations for organizational effectiveness and professional development planning for the Board in alignment with system priorities had not yet occurred.

Although Board members have been encouraged to engage in self-reflection using the "Blue Sheet" tool, and the Board has administered the Georgia School Boards Association's Self-Assessment Tool, analysis of data to determine needs for professional development had not occurred. Board members consistently reported during interviews that the Board has access to assessment data and survey results but hasn't had an opportunity to review the data and results for planning purposes. The Superintendent's interview related that "We will use Citizen's Forum three times a year," to inform overall decision-making, which could provide an additional form of stakeholder input for the Board to consider. Analysis of various forms of data

will provide the Board essential information to consider as they work collaboratively with the superintendent to align training and retreat agendas to meet the needs to increase members' effectiveness.

**Directive:** Implement thoughtfully developed, analysis-based, comprehensive professional development for the school board that can be routinely evaluated for effectiveness.

**Improvement Priority 6** - Participate in board professional development training that encompasses building trust and demonstrating respectful conduct between board members.

**Findings for Improvement Priority 6:** The team determined that the lack of a comprehensive professional learning plan for the Board made it difficult for this improvement priority to be achieved. As the system develops and implements a professional learning plan for the Board, expectations will need to include the building of trust and cultivation and maintenance of respectful conduct between and among Board members. The team strongly urges the system to set expectations for a comprehensive approach to implementing and sustaining data-informed professional learning for all Board members through the development of a school board development plan that is transparent to all stakeholders.

**Directive:** Include and implement exercises and activities that are designed to address climate and conduct of board practices in the development of the Board's comprehensive professional learning plan. Continue to monitor the conduct and climate of the district's governing body.

### **Insights from the Monitoring Review**

There has been significant progress within the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System over the past several months. Stakeholders agreed that the culture has improved. Changes in the makeup of the Board, along with a collaborative leadership team, have created an environment in which the identified improvement priorities can be effectively addressed effectively. One new Board member summarized it in this way, "This Board has been beaten up in the past two years, but the past three months have been the best professional experiences of my life."

The district's cooperative approach to improvement in board relations and communications began with the acknowledgement of the need to accept the Special Review's findings and to focus on improvement. The district's AdvancED Compliance Sub-committee led initial activities to plan the Board's response to the findings of the Special Review. An election transpired in May, 2018 which replaced three Board members, including the president. However, the new Board did not take office until January, 2019, deferring several decisions until the new Board assumed office.

Social media guidelines and the establishment of communications policy were Improvement Priorities that have been addressed, with the guidance and training of consultants. These had been areas of significant misuse, but have been contained by the Board's adoption of clear and updated policy. Tied to the clarification of roles, social media had provided an inappropriate

outlet for decisions to be communicated and miscommunicated without regard to appropriate responsibilities. The AdvancED Compliance Sub-committee prioritized the revision and clarification of roles and communication policy to be completed before the new Board took over. However, other Improvement Priorities identified by the Special Review, including analysis from the GSBA Assessment and Board members' professional development planning remained to be addressed at the time of this Monitoring Review.

The evidence provided to the Monitoring Review Team included plans to address the Improvement Priorities of the Special Review, and there appeared to be a significant degree of optimism surrounding those plans. Further accomplishments within the Improvement Priorities, Directives and Recommendations were welcomed and expected by the Superintendent, Cabinet, and Board, and the district's collaborative teams were aligned in commitment "to ignite a passion for learning and teaching at high levels" as stated in the system's mission statement.

Monitoring Review deliberations led the team to recognize the progress made in addressing Standards, Improvement Priorities and Directives, and that further progress is expected. The system is encouraged to integrate policies, practices and procedures to sustain the evolving culture that is contributing to the noted improvements.

### **Accreditation Recommendation**

Based on the findings of the Monitoring Review Team and subsequent review by the AdvancED Global Commission, AdvancED concludes that Savannah-Chatham County School System has met the AdvancED Performance Standard 1.4. Additionally, AdvancED concludes that the school district remains in violation of the following Performance Standard:

*AdvancED Performance Standards for Schools* (Effective school year 2017-18)

- Standard 1.5: The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.

In accordance with AdvancED Policies, the high schools in the district will continue with their accreditation status of *Accredited* pending the district's progress made by the date of a Monitoring Review to be held prior to January 31, 2020. The purpose of the follow-up Monitoring Review will be to assess the progress made toward meeting Standard 1.5 as identified in this report. The district will be provided with a template to report progress and detailed steps taken, with supporting evidence, to address Standard 1.5. The progress report should be submitted to AdvancED by two-weeks prior to the scheduled Monitoring Review.

### **Next Steps**

The Special Review and subsequently this Monitoring Review have provided feedback to SCCPSS as they continue their improvement journey. Analysis of the district's GSBA assessment results, along with additional constituent feedback results, will provide valuable information as the Board plans for meaningful, progressive professional development and sustained continued

learning. Creation and implementation of systemic and systematic monitoring and assessment of the Board's climate, effectiveness and public perception will provide valuable feedback to the Board as it continues to build efficacy and trust between and among its members and those whom they serve and represent.