



# **Monitoring Review Report**

**Birmingham City Schools  
Birmingham, Alabama**

**Dates of Review:**

**March 3-5, 2014**

# Monitoring Review Report

## Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the Monitoring Review held on March 3-5, 2014 to Birmingham City Schools. The purpose of the Monitoring Review is to review the institution's progress toward addressing Required Actions from the Special Review held on May 13-15, 2013.

## 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;
- Interviews with 28 stakeholders representing board members, central office staff, principals and community members;
- Artifact review;
- Team deliberations and report preparation.

The Monitoring Review Team used the findings from these activities and evidence reviewed to assess the progress the institution has made toward addressing the Required Actions made by the Special Review Team.

## Findings

The Monitoring Review Team's findings are organized by each of the Required Actions made by the May 13-15, 2013 Special Review Team. For each Required Action, the Monitoring Review Team provides a Performance Level score, summary of findings, and directives to guide next steps or recommendations for sustaining progress made.

### REQUIRED ACTION 1:

Develop, adopt, implement and monitor a written, comprehensive plan to ensure that board members act in compliance with the roles and responsibilities specified in all policies, procedures, laws and regulations and function as a cohesive unit with a focus on serving the needs of the school system for the benefit of effective system operation and student learning.

#### Performance Level score:

2.2	The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.	<b>Rating 2</b>
Level 4	The governing body has implemented a process to evaluate its decisions and actions to ensure they are in accordance with defined roles and responsibilities, a formally adopted code of ethics and free of conflict of interest. Governing body members are required to participate in a systematic, formal professional development process regarding the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and its individual members. The professional development curriculum also includes conflict resolution, decision-making, supervision and evaluation and fiscal responsibility. Members comply with all policies, procedures, laws and regulations and function as a cohesive unit for the benefit of student learning.	

Level 3	The governing body has a process to ensure that its decisions and actions are in accordance with defined roles and responsibilities, a code of ethics and free of conflict of interest. Governing body members participate in a systematic, formal professional development process regarding the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and its individual members. The governing body complies with all policies, procedures, laws and regulations and functions as a cohesive unit.
Level 2	The governing body ensures that its decisions and actions are in accordance with defined roles and responsibilities, are ethical and free of conflict of interest. Governing body members participate in professional development regarding the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and its individual members. The governing body complies with all policies, procedures, laws and regulations.
Level 1	The governing body has no method for or does not ensure that decisions and actions are free of conflict of interest, are ethical and in accordance with defined roles and responsibilities. Governing body members rarely or never participate in professional development regarding the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and its individual members. Evidence indicates the governing body does not always comply with policies, procedures, laws and regulations.

**Summary of Findings:**

Evidence in the form of artifacts and interviews revealed that the Board and system administration have worked collectively to ensure clarity of roles, responsibilities and functions. The Board has developed and/or revised many documents and policies that clearly delineate duties, assignments and performance criteria for board members’ roles. For example, evidence contained a revised policy manual adopted on January 14, 2014 that included an update of Board Policy 2.1-2.8 related to school board operations. Further, the Board and administration developed *Board and Superintendent Operating Procedures* that were also adopted on January 14, 2014 to define board protocol and sanctions. Additionally, the Board, administration and key partners developed a series of professional development events. In compliance with state statute, board members participated in training sessions on October 20-21, 2013 that focused on their roles and responsibilities. On November 7, 2013, the Board attended an AdvancED work session. On December 4-5, 2013, board members participated in two workshops conducted by the Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB): Roles and Responsibilities Workshop and Effective Boards and Relationships Orientation, respectively.

In addition to adopting revised policies and newly developed operating procedures, the Board signed and publicly affirmed certain tenets from the School Board Governance Improvement Act of 2012 entitled *Certificate of Affirmation of School Board Member*. The Board’s swearing-in ceremony featured board members declaring allegiance to their appropriate roles and responsibilities using a collaborative governance style. Evidence from interviews and documents demonstrated that the Board is complying with revised policies including those related to school board operations, and board members are on track to produce positive results related to board governance. Board members have demonstrated their intentions by fulfilling requirements of the School Board Governance Improvement Act of 2012, discussing their positions and views during interviews, displaying public commitment to the tenants of the law, participating in focused professional development, and adhering to policies and practices of effective governance such as the *Board and Superintendent Operating Procedures*. Board member interviews revealed that as a result of conforming to the new or revised governance practices, relationships between the Board and Superintendent “went from night to day...a complete turnaround.” New board members’ understanding of the bifurcation between governance and administration has been confirmed by their performance since taking office and their responses during interviews.

Members now focus on “improving performance” of the school system and not on self-serving interests, which interfered with the previous Board’s efforts to promote progress. One board member described the Board as “a collective voice, not individual voices.” In addition, board members commented that, “Our (the Board and Superintendent) leadership style is one where we are trying to work together. It is not about the district (local member areas) we serve, it is about Birmingham City Schools.” Both board members and administrators stated that monumental improvements in the working environment, professional relationships and trust have occurred over the past five months. Parents as well as other stakeholders stated emphatically that while much work must be done, changes in governance have begun to transform the perception of the quality of education in Birmingham City Schools. Parents and other stakeholders also recognized the reduction in negative media and the concentration on telling the school system’s story. Employees stated that they are now proud to be considered employees of the system.

Although components of change have transpired, developing and monitoring a single, comprehensive plan has not occurred. While the school system has initiated certain plans, policies and practices, developing those components into a comprehensive plan and creating procedures for monitoring and reporting the results have not been formalized. Evidence verified the lack of a plan and fragmented monitoring of various policies, processes and plans. The team recognized that with the timing of the Monitoring Review and the new board members’ induction process, there may not have been sufficient time to focus on formalizing and implementing a plan, monitoring protocol and reporting results. A board member recognized this when stating, “We have not had the time to evaluate ourselves because we inherited so many problems. We have been focused on required actions...building relationships, and prioritizing (actions) first, then (we) evaluate ourselves.” Therefore, while progress has been made, this Required Action has not been completed.

**Directive:**

Develop, adopt, implement and monitor a written, comprehensive plan that includes policy review, board member training, and board practices/protocols as well as procedures for monitoring and reporting the results of this board activity.

**REQUIRED ACTION 2:**

Implement a formal, board-adopted process for the Board to systematically evaluate its decisions and actions to ensure that they are in accord with defined roles and responsibilities, a formally adopted code of ethics and free of conflict of interest.

**Performance Level score:**

Indicator 2.2: Performance Level 2

*(See Required Action 1)*

**Summary of Findings:**

The Board has adopted a code of conduct as described in Board Policy Section 1.1. Board members signed and affirmed requirements of the School Board Governance Act of 2012, which also references board conduct, ethics and conflict of interest. Further, the governing body implemented *Board and Superintendent Operating Procedures*, which were adopted on January 14, 2014. The Board also participated in formal training related to governance and conduct and established meeting norms. These documents that include the code of conduct and operating procedures and actions of board members verify the efforts of the Board to adopt and implement processes that define its roles, responsibilities and demeanor.

Because the Board’s priorities have focused on adopting and implementing processes as well as attending training sessions, self-evaluations of board decisions remain to be fully accomplished. Both Board Policy Sections 1.1 and 2.4.3 and *Board and Superintendent Operating Procedures* establish the parameters for an annual board self-evaluation. Evidence confirmed that the Board conducted a self-evaluation in April 2013.

Averages from the evaluation ranged from a 2.5-3.1 on a 0-5 scale. However, significant changes have occurred since the spring of 2013. With the induction of six new board members, a comprehensive review of programs and practices is ongoing and indicative of a need for an operational blueprint including the board’s self-evaluation process.

In response to questions, board members and administrators could not define a single, formal systematic process, instrument, timeframe or priority to evaluate board decisions and actions. Evidence from interviews and a lack of supporting artifacts resulted in several different opinions about the basis for the board evaluation. One board member stated that the board’s evaluation would be based on progress made in relation to the Strategic Plan. Another interviewee discussed having a board evaluation based on the achievement of the Superintendent’s three goals. A third interviewee stated that the criteria have yet to be defined.

The team recognized that board members are aware that self-evaluation is an important aspect of their governance role. However, the team also acknowledges that the timing of events including the Monitoring Review, new board members’ induction and implementing new processes has made developing and utilizing a formal board evaluation system challenging. Understandably, the Board has placed more pressing matters ahead of reviewing and formalizing a board evaluation process.

**Directive:**

Develop and implement a systematic board evaluation that contains a written, well-developed process, related board training, defined evaluation instrument, timeline and priorities for evaluation, including but not limited to board decisions and actions in accordance with the boards’ defined roles and responsibilities.

**REQUIRED ACTION 3:**

Develop a board-adopted process for systematic, formal professional development to ensure that the Superintendent and leadership at all levels of the school system have the autonomy to manage the day-to-day operations according to Board Policy and state guidelines. Professional development should include but not be limited to:

- a) Roles and responsibilities of the governing body and its individual members;
- b) Board and Superintendent relations;
- c) Conflict resolution, decision-making, supervision and evaluation, and fiscal responsibility;
- d) Board evaluation of its decisions and actions to ensure they are in accordance with defined roles and responsibilities, a formally adopted code of ethics and free of conflict of interest;
- e) Board policy review to maintain current knowledge about the content of board policies;
- f) Chain of command and board responsibility to function as a cohesive unit to serve the needs of the whole system.

**Performance Level score:**

<b>2.3</b>	The governing body ensures that the school leadership has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.	<b>Rating</b> <b>3</b>
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Level 4	The governing body consistently protects, supports and respects the autonomy of school leadership to accomplish goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations of the school. The governing body maintains a clear distinction between its roles and responsibilities and those of school leadership.
Level 3	The governing body protects, supports and respects the autonomy of school leadership to accomplish goals for improvement in student learning and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations of the school. The governing body maintains a distinction between its roles and responsibilities and those of school leadership.
Level 2	The governing body generally protects, supports and respects the autonomy of school leadership to accomplish goals for improvement in student learning and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations of the school. The governing body usually maintains a distinction between its roles and responsibilities and those of school leadership.
Level 1	The governing body rarely or never protects, supports and respects the autonomy of school leadership to accomplish goals for improvement in student learning and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations of the school. The governing body does not distinguish between its roles and responsibilities and those of school leadership or frequently usurps the autonomy of school leadership.

**Summary of Findings:**

Evidence from interviews, observations and artifacts confirmed that significant changes have occurred in the school system. From all indications, the governing body consistently protects, supports and respects the autonomy of the Superintendent to accomplish goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations of the school system. Various forms of documentation corroborate the participation of the governing body in workshops that differentiate the expectations in the roles and responsibilities of board members and the Superintendent. Each board member explained distinctly the nature of his or her roles and responsibilities. According to information received during interviews, the newly elected board members, with one exception, participated in training prior to the election to become acclimated to their prospective positions. Further, interviews and artifacts validated that the governing body maintains a clear distinction between its roles and responsibilities and those of school leadership.

Shortly after assuming their offices on October 14, 2013, board members began their collective involvement in a series of events to contribute to the effective quality of their performance. The governing body participated on October 20-21, 2013 in a two-day Board Retreat conducted by the AASB to familiarize themselves with the various aspects of serving as board members. Areas of focus were roles and responsibilities, current school system updates, conflict of interest, ethics guidelines and state statute requirements. The current Birmingham Board of Education was sworn in on October 22, 2013 at Parker High School, and the Board elected its officers in a Special Called Board Meeting on October 23, 2013.

A news article entitled *A New Era: Birmingham Board of Education Members Sworn In* (UPDATED) captured the sentiment that the team concluded existed among stakeholders. The article aptly described the ceremony as coming “after a tumultuous 18 months that included the school district being taken over by the state and the system's accreditation being placed on probation because of a micromanaging school board.” The article continued noting that “Voters spoke loud and clear in the August general election and then again earlier this month during the runoff elections by keeping just three incumbents - those who are generally supportive of

Witherspoon's initiatives and recommendations.” According to the article, new board members “campaigned on easing hostilities between the superintendent and school board.” Almost without exception, interviewees indicated that the climate change in the school system is “like a breath of fresh air.”

On November 12, 2013, a few weeks after the Board Retreat, board members traveled to Atlanta for an AdvancED work session. Among the topics covered in the session were 1) meeting norms, 2) ground rules, 3) habits/behaviors, and 4) AdvancED School System Accreditation overview. Board members were proud that each of them participated in the training. They indicated that initially AdvancED had invited the board's officers, but members wanted to attend as a group to receive the charge for their roles. Each member interviewed seemed especially proud of this accomplishment to show his or her seriousness of purpose and effort to function as a unified board. Evidence showed that the State-Appointed Chief Financial Officer (CFO) also participated in the session.

According to artifacts, board members participated in the AASB Roles and Responsibilities Workshop and Effective Boards and Relationships Orientation on December 4 and 5, 2013, respectively. AASB describes the Roles and Responsibilities Workshop as an “orientation for rookie school board members...” The workshop is “the nuts and bolts of education law, ethics, finance, effective board meetings, board member expectations and other key topics to help new school board members succeed.” A description of the Effective Boards and Relationships Orientation focuses on “how members of the school board relate with one another and how the board establishes and maintains relationships with its attorney, community, policymakers and others to improve student learning.” These workshops count toward fulfilling the state's orientation requirement. The October 8, 2013 Board meeting minutes indicated that several board members received recognition by being awarded AASB's School Board Member Academy Achievement Certificates.

On November 6, 2013, each board member signed a *Certificate of Affirmation of School Board Member*. The School Board Governance Improvement Act of 2012 requires board members to affirm their compliance with seven principles of educational governance. For example, one principle is: That each decision, action and vote I take or make shall be based on the educational interest of the Birmingham City school system as a whole. Another significant action was the development and adoption on January 14, 2013 of the *Board and Superintendent Operating Procedures* that have been included as an introductory section in the policy manual. Board policies such as Section 1.1 Code of Conduct, Section 2.4.1 Board Member Training and Section 2.4.3 Board Self-Evaluation provide specific guidelines to regulate board governance.

From all indications, the composite Board as well as each individual board member is in the initial stages of integrating information from professional learning sessions into their daily manner of operation, including respecting the boundaries of their positions. In addition to board members, system and school level staff validated that the governing body complies with the chain of command and avoids any interference in the day-to-day operations of the school system. Board members and staff described the process for communicating with the governing body, and each group indicated that the other is adhering to guidelines. Specific timelines exist for the Superintendent to provide information such as the board packet to board members prior to board meetings. Additionally, the Superintendent designates a specific timeframe for board members to plan to discuss any questions and concerns with him by telephone, e-mail or in person prior to each board meeting. Staff were pleased that board members have not visited their offices. They also were relieved to no longer have both visits and calls from board members with requests for specific actions related to their positions. Currently, staff provide information for the governing body by making presentations during board meetings as requested by the Superintendent.

The Board has a process for self-evaluation. However, the current status of the instrument was unclear to the Monitoring Review Team. Therefore, the team could not make any explicit determination about the process, instrument and timeline. The self-evaluation instrument is a critical component of the Board's

regulatory procedures. The instrument and guidelines for its usage must be clear and concise with provisions that clarify a timeframe for its completion that permits the Board to regularly monitor its adherence to procedures. Having a specific course of action for the self-evaluation also will set parameters for subsequent boards and promote a systemic process for continuity over time.

Overall, the Board has participated in professional development that includes each of the topics set forth with one possible exception. Board policy review to maintain current knowledge about the content of board policies appears to neither have been a topic covered in any of the training sessions nor an activity in which the Board has participated during its meetings.

**Directive:**

Design a board-adopted process to conduct a board policy review at least annually that includes goals; measurable objectives; activities; timeline; persons responsible; resources; and monitoring procedures, evaluation tools and results. The purpose of the board policy review is to maintain current knowledge about the content of board policies.

**REQUIRED ACTION 4:**

Develop a current Strategic Plan to guide the direction of the system including procedures for implementing, monitoring, evaluation and communication of results as well as develop a process to ensure that the Board and administrative leaders align their decisions and actions with the system's purpose and direction.

**Performance Level score:**

2.4	Leadership and staff foster a culture consistent with the school’s purpose and direction.	<b>Rating 2</b>
Level 4	Leaders and staff deliberately and consistently align their decisions and actions toward continuous improvement to achieve the school’s purpose. They encourage, support and expect all students to be held to high Standards in all courses of study. All stakeholders are collectively accountable for student learning. School leaders actively and consistently support and encourage innovation, collaboration, shared leadership and rigorous professional growth. The culture is characterized by collaboration and a sense of community among all stakeholders.	
Level 3	Leaders and staff align their decisions and actions toward continuous improvement to achieve the school’s purpose. They expect all students to be held to high Standards in all courses of study. All leaders and staff are collectively accountable for student learning. School leaders support innovation, collaboration, shared leadership and professional growth. The culture is characterized by collaboration and a sense of community.	
Level 2	Leaders and staff make some decisions and take some actions toward continuous improvement. They expect all students to be held to Standards. Leaders and staff express a desire for collective accountability for student learning. School leaders sometimes support innovation, collaboration, shared leadership and professional growth. The culture is characterized by a minimal degree of collaboration and limited sense of community.	

Level 1	Decisions and actions seldom or never support continuous improvement. School leaders and staff may or may not expect students to learn. There is no evidence of or desire for collective accountability for student learning. School leaders seldom or never support innovation, collaboration, shared leadership and professional growth. The culture is characterized by a minimal degree of collaboration and little or no sense of community.
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**Summary of Findings:**

A document review showed that preliminary activity began in 2007 and has subsequently evolved into the current Strategic Plan 2013-2018, developed with the services of a local consulting firm. Initially, the Council of the Great City Schools conducted what was described as a high-level review to examine administrative structures and the impact of resource allocation on results. The following year in 2008, members of Yes We Can! Birmingham spearheaded an initiative to interview stakeholders throughout the city to identify their visions for the school system. The school system engaged the same consulting firm and used the results of the Yes We Can! Birmingham process to construct the Strategic Plan 2009-2012, which was underway when the tenure of the current superintendent began.

One section of the plan was entitled Frequently Asked Questions and included the following question: How will the next superintendent use the plan? The explanation was that the plan would serve as a tool for communicating with prospective candidates, assist in the selection process and facilitate a smooth transition in leadership by having a clear purpose and direction. From the school system’s perspective, the plan resulted in setting a direction for the school system through the Board’s vision and mission and identified five major areas: academic achievement, finance, human capital, communication and partnership, and safe and nurturing environment. During the interim in 2011, the school system published its accomplishments in a Status and Vision Report - A Report on Birmingham City Schools’ Progress.

The school system has consistently engaged a consulting firm to spearhead the development of a Strategic Plan and guide its educational initiatives, which has resulted in some continuity in refining the plan. In 2013, the school system began an initiative to update the Strategic Plan to cover the timeframe from 2013-2017 with five key areas: teaching and learning, human capital, climate and culture, strategic partnerships and community engagement, and systems and processes. The vision presented in the plan is: Birmingham City Schools will be a recognized leader in public education, meeting the needs of a diverse student population prepared to succeed in a global society. The Strategic Plan 2013-2017 has been expanded with the assistance of the same consulting firm into the current five-year Strategic Plan 2013-2018. However, the vision and mission were not evident in the newly developed plan.

A document entitled Birmingham City Schools Strategic Planning Update 2013-2018: *Stakeholder Engagement Executive Summary* provides a detailed description of the development of the updated Strategic Plan. More specifically, the document states, “Over the months of March through June 2013, nine different stakeholder groups were identified and included in this process through focus groups and community conversations.” Specific stakeholder groups included the following: parents, students, teachers, principals, business community, representatives from higher education, elected officials, board members and general public. The report described the process used to solicit input from various stakeholder groups about the Strategic Plan update, including posting an online survey on the school system’s website with space for general comments and suggestions. Further, the report indicated that three themes emerged from the data collection process: teaching and learning, human capital, and climate and culture. Also noted was that the school system’s leadership outlined three related goals that were included in the budget for teaching and learning. The report also specified that “Part of the communication and messaging around the Strategic Plan roll out will include

strategies to focus partner and stakeholder support to further advocate the following goals: Improve the Graduation Rate, Strengthen Special Education, and Develop a More Effective Middle School Model.”

Following completion of data collection, analysis and reporting results, the consulting firm developed the roll out of the Strategic Plan, described in six-steps. One of its steps was to “Develop and implement a robust and on-going strategic communication plan in order to obtain community ownership and support of the Strategic Plan as well as provide transparency around the progress of the District.” Other documentation revealed that the school system designed a structure for unveiling the strategic plan. A document entitled the *Birmingham Board of Education Communications Proposal for Community Rollout of Strategic Plan* presented implementation guidelines that included a component to measure the success of the presentation of the plan.

A review of the plan shows that the school system has maintained five key areas: teaching and learning, human capital, climate and culture, strategic partnerships and community engagement, and systems and processes. For each of the five key areas, the plan sets forth goals, focus areas, strategies and performance measures, a category yet to be fully developed. Specific goals based on data to support measurable outcomes were not evident. Clearly, the school system used a collaborative approach during the developmental phase of the Strategic Plan. Repeatedly during interviews, the Superintendent and board members in particular voiced the need to align their actions and decisions with the Strategic Plan. Staff also discussed their initiatives and their connection to the plan. Other stakeholders were aware of the plan and its function as a tool to guide school system programs and operations. To create relatively easy access, the school system has posted the Strategic Plan on its website.

The document indicates that department heads would develop action plans to implement components in the strategic plan. Several departments have begun the process. The team also observed that the Strategic Plan is still being developed. Reference is made within the plan for the need to identify baseline data, resources, and methods of monitoring and evaluating results.

**Directive:**

Complete the Strategic Plan process including development of department action plans, identification of baseline data and resources, and implementation of methods to monitor, evaluate and communicate results.

**REQUIRED ACTION 5:**

As part of the Strategic Plan, develop a comprehensive communications plan to build a culture with a collaborative community of stakeholders who have opportunities for meaningful two-way interaction to support the purpose and direction of the school system.

**Performance Level score:**

Indicator 2.4: Performance Level 2

*(See Required Action 4)*

**Summary of Findings:**

In the Strategic Plan, “strategic partnerships and community engagement” is a focal area. The school system has made a significant investment in improving various aspects of providing information to a broader segment of the community by using a wide range of media. Apparent are efforts to expand communication options that include a vast redesign of the website that is even more user-friendly in addition to a weekly electronic newsletter, submission of op-ed articles, and communication and engagement opportunities with various stakeholder advisory groups. Overall, the school system has created numerous vehicles and venues

for consistent, on-going communication to inform the community about the system as well as receive and respond to input from stakeholders.

The goal of strategic partnerships and community engagement is that Birmingham City Schools fosters partnerships and engages the community to support schools, parents and families of the school system. The plan includes two areas of focus: 1) school and system strategic partnership development and 2) community engagement and outreach. Two strategies listed for implementation include the following: 1) Develop and sustain short and long-term strategic partnerships that support student achievement and 2) Fully utilize internal/external tools and resources available to maximize communication and engagement opportunities with all stakeholders.

The school system has developed a comprehensive Public Relations/Communication Plan to support an evolving culture characterized by collaboration and a sense of community among stakeholders. Creating a framework for providing opportunities for meaningful, two-way communication encourages innovation, collaboration and shared leadership. The plan presents an extensive, widespread array of events to inform the broader community about facts, figures, initiatives and programs in the school system. Further, various communiqués provide avenues to involve stakeholders in numerous ways to advance the purpose and direction of the school system.

The Superintendent has been described as having significant expertise in working with community agencies, organizations and businesses to tell the school system's story as well as appeal for their support of innovative initiatives to promote teaching and learning. Evidence stated, "Throughout his tenure, these forums continue to be held periodically for the purpose of direct communication and engagement with the community." Forums, councils and other events provide opportunities for stakeholders to receive information as well as have input in and share feedback about various concerns and issues. A review of artifacts confirmed details about the operation of several advisory committees for teachers and students.

More specifically, the communication plan included an overview, objectives, meeting dates and times, and a meeting agenda format for the advisory committees. The document listed the Lincoln Professional Development Center as the location for meetings with teachers and the location for students to be determined. Two of the three meetings planned for each group this school year occurred during the first semester. The schedule showed that the third meeting was slated to take place in late March. Results of the first two meetings were not available among the evidence presented. Posted were Teacher Advisory Committee meeting notes dated April 18, 2012. The plan also states that the Superintendent will meet quarterly with parent, teacher, student and ministerial advisory boards to provide updates and respond to questions and concerns.

In addition to forums, evidence showed that the school system is partnering with the Birmingham Education Foundation to offer Parent University, which focuses on five areas: parental growth and awareness, health and wellness, learning at home, volunteer training and collaborating with the community. Parent University provides ways for parents to become integrally involved in their children's education including providing information for the school system. Additionally, the school system has developed an attractive and informative brochure that is also a resource for the Birmingham community. The newsletter link offers another medium for conveying information about the school system. It seems to provide a convenient tool for presenting accomplishments about which the system can be proud, along with announcements that may not be included in other avenues for community broadcasting.

According to artifacts, the school system had a communication plan prior to May 2013. The plan incorporated features such as the redesign of the Birmingham City Schools website, weekly electronic newsletter, submitting op-ed articles and forming various stakeholder advisory groups as well as social

media, developing an e-mail database for widespread distribution of information and acquiring a telecommunications system for rapid notification. The blueprint included use of the Birmingham City Schools Instructional Broadcast facility as a vehicle for broadcasting news, delivering widespread broadcast messaging to staff, and reaching the larger Birmingham community by using the studio's broadcast of programming through the local cable provider's public access channel.

During the summer of 2013, the school system modified the plan to include specific characteristics of target groups and communications results for each group. The detailed expectations provide guidance for tailoring key messages to appeal to the interests, preferences and choices of various stakeholder groups. With a focus on results, the guide for disseminating information provides a structure for systematic communication by prioritizing and defining the content of messaging that serves various stakeholder groups. Also in 2013, the school system published its first Annual Report, which is a visually appealing 12-page, user-friendly booklet that presents a succinct and informative overview of the system. One section of the report captures Strategic Plan Highlights 2009-2013 with a listing of each of the five focal areas along with major accomplishments in each segment. An in-depth analysis of the Monitoring Team's findings indicated that the school system has met this Required Action.

**Recommendation:**

Refine the communications process by adding a component to regularly monitor the plan and evaluate its effectiveness in advancing the purpose and direction of the school system.

**REQUIRED ACTION 6:**

Implement an annual evaluation structure for the Board to evaluate the Superintendent in writing taking into account the Superintendent's written contract, performance or priorities set by the Board during the previous year, and performance of the Birmingham City Schools as measured by state reports.

**Performance Level score:**

2.6	Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice and student success.	<b>Rating</b> <b>2</b>
Level 4	The primary focus of the criteria and processes of supervision and evaluation is improving professional practice and ensuring student success. Supervision and evaluation processes are consistently and regularly implemented. The results of the supervision and evaluation processes are analyzed carefully and used to monitor and effectively adjust professional practice and ensure student learning.	
Level 3	The focus of the criteria and processes of supervision and evaluation is improving professional practice and improving student success. Supervision and evaluation processes are regularly implemented. The results of the supervision and evaluation processes are used to monitor and effectively adjust professional practice and improve student learning.	
Level 2	The criteria and processes of supervision and evaluation include references to professional practice and student success. Supervision and evaluation processes are implemented at minimal levels. The results of the supervision and evaluation processes are used sometimes to monitor and effectively adjust professional practice and improve student learning.	
Level 1	The criteria and processes of supervision and evaluation have little or no focus on improving professional practice or student success. Supervision and evaluation processes are randomly implemented, if at all. Results of the supervision and evaluation processes, if any, are used rarely or never.	

## Summary of Findings

Artifacts such as self-evaluations completed by former board members indicated that a structure was in place to review the Superintendent's performance before current board members assumed their roles. The Superintendent's written contract provided opportunities to discuss his performance with board members, along with an annual review based on goals and objectives. Moreover, the former board used an instrument to complete the evaluation process and summarize the performance of the Superintendent. With a focus on the management style and personal characteristics of the system's leader, the evaluation instrument listed nine performance indicators: Leadership and District Culture, Policy and Governance, Communications and Community Relations, Organizational Management, Curriculum Planning Development, Instructional Leadership, Human Resource Management, Values and Ethics of Leadership, and Management of Professional and Personal Responsibilities. Board members used these standards to rate the performance of the Superintendent on a scale of 1-5.

The Superintendent completed a self-assessment on April 22, 2013, and the previous board completed its evaluation of the Superintendent in June 2013. During an interview with the Superintendent, he expressed an interest in having his evaluation in alignment with the Strategic Plan. Other interviewees confirmed that the Superintendent developed goals for the 2013-2014 school year; goals that current board members support. The primary goals that the Superintendent reiterates are 1) Improve the graduation rate, 2) Strengthen special education, and 3) Develop a more effective middle school model (impacts graduation rates). The Strategic Planning Update 2013-2018 *Stakeholder Engagement Executive Summary* noted that budgetary allocations for Teaching and Learning cover these three goal areas. As part of the evaluation process, the Superintendent also should be encouraged to seek out his own professional development and/or mentoring that will provide support as he sets a new, exceedingly more progressive course for the school system.

Although board members in particular were in agreement with aligning the Superintendent's evaluation with the Strategic Plan, a self-assessment for the Superintendent was not evident for the current school year. Board members were aware of the expectation that they would evaluate the Superintendent on a summative basis annually, and they realized the value of having periodic checkpoints throughout the year to ensure that he is on track toward reaching his goals. However, board members were not aware of a timeline to evaluate the Superintendent this year, and interviews confirmed that the Superintendent had not been evaluated at the time of the Monitoring Review. Interviews with board members revealed that they have prioritized their actions since October 2013 to comply with immediate mandates such as policy development and professional learning, and they fully intend to evaluate the Superintendent. Board members have sought to consistently execute actions within the bounds of their authority, thus presenting a united, professional front to the public. The Board has focused on the Required Actions, particularly the achievement of a one-month operating reserve as required by the state of Alabama, but based on evidence, has not yet developed a structure for the Superintendent's evaluation.

Board members are to be commended for their fierce commitment to prioritizing student achievement, to understanding their role as leaders in the school system and to abiding by their code of ethics. However, evidence supports the need for board members to create, maintain and institutionalize a structure for systematically evaluating the performance of the Superintendent. This structure should address both the execution of goals developed in concert with the school system's Strategic Plan and the evaluation of the Superintendent's performance related to administrative functions. In addition, to ensure the sustainability of the plan, the task of evaluating the Superintendent should be added to the list of board member responsibilities and included in their orientation and professional development sessions. If needed, board members should utilize resources at their disposal such as the Alabama Association of School Boards to develop and preserve a comprehensive evaluation schedule. In this way, board members will support the positive culture of accountability that appears to have begun as a result of their leadership.

**Directive:**

Create, maintain and institutionalize a structure for systematically evaluating the performance of the Superintendent. This structure should address both the execution of goals developed in concert with the school system's Strategic Plan, the school system's performance and the evaluation of the Superintendent's performance related to administrative functions.

**REQUIRED ACTION 7:**

Develop, implement and monitor systematically a comprehensive performance evaluation protocol for administrators, teachers and other staff determined by state-initiated personnel evaluation systems such as EDUCATEAlabama and LEADAlabama used for teachers and administrators to provide data to facilitate professional growth to improve student achievement.

**Performance Level score:**

Indicator 2.6: Performance Level 2

*(See Required Action 6)*

**Summary of Findings:**

Artifacts revealed the existence of evaluation instruments for classified and certified staff; the school system uses a tool unique to its system for classified staff and tools developed by the state of Alabama, namely EDUCATEAlabama and LEADAlabama, for certified staff. Interviews confirmed the school system's desire to consider a different evaluation instrument for their certified teachers. The protocol used by many other school systems, EDUCATEAlabama, is formative in nature, and school system administrators, including principals and system staff, indicated a need to contemplate using a summative tool.

Interviewees reported that evaluations have not been completed consistently with fidelity. However, data supported a potential reversal of that trend. The Human Capital/Human Resources Strategic Plan (HRSP) described the value placed on employees or human capital and listed goals for supporting staff members' growth while holding them accountable to the school system's overall focus on teaching and learning. A chart in the Human Capital/Human Resources Strategic Plan illustrated the decrease in teaching positions from the 2005-2006 school year through the 2012-2013 school year. Section 4 of the HRSP directly addressed the evaluation process, stating that the goal of the school system was to ensure "that there is a system for effectively measuring employee work performance; that this review is transparent, provides feedback to employees and results in higher employee satisfaction and commitment."

Furthermore, according to interviews, the school system has implemented a professional development plan to orient administrators to accurate evaluation procedures. School administrators received training in evaluation procedures during an administrative retreat in the summer of 2013. Those administrators who did not attend the sessions were provided training on evaluation processes at a later date prior to the beginning of school. A clear procedure for addressing and providing recourse for disagreements about the evaluation process was explained during interviews. Principals confirmed their knowledge of and dedication to the use of evaluative data to address professional practice and improve student achievement. Moreover, principals have received support and direction from central office administrators regarding the evaluation process.

Support for new administrators in the implementation of their chosen evaluation system is available through a mentoring program. New principals are paired with an experienced administrator in the school system. While no formal program exists, information shared during interviews with principals pointed toward an expectation that new administrators contact their mentor regularly through phone calls, e-mail messages or

visits. The HRSP provided evidence of expectations for professional growth for both certified and classified employees. The Alabama Quality Teaching Standards served as the foundation for teacher professional development through methods such as book studies, the new teacher induction program, mentoring and professional learning communities. Additionally, the school system proactively sought to encourage teachers to consider administrative roles and to support current administrators through their leadership program. The HRSP also delineated professional development options for support professionals such as legal issues, health and wellness, first aid, conflict resolution and diversity. The HRSP proved to be a valuable document that articulated expectations for employee performance and described avenues for support. Central office and school administrators seemed to have clear goals for the evaluation process and appeared to have the support to implement procedures with fidelity.

**Directive:**

Ensure consistency of implementation of the comprehensive performance evaluation protocol for administrators, teachers and other staff to provide data to facilitate professional growth to improve student achievement.

**REQUIRED ACTION 8:**

Develop a comprehensive strategic resource management process including long-range planning to implement significant initiatives such as strategic planning, evaluation systems, curriculum implementation and instructional programs with a structure for systemic, sustainable operation; guaranteed follow-through; and monitoring, evaluation and communication of results to school and community stakeholders.

**Performance Level score:**

4.2	Instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the school.	<b>Rating 3</b>
Level 4	Instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources are focused solely on supporting the purpose and direction of the school. Instructional time is fiercely protected in policy and practice. School leaders exhaust every option to secure material and fiscal resources to meet the needs of all students. School leaders measurably demonstrate that instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources are allocated so that all students have equitable opportunities to attain challenging learning expectations. Efforts toward the continuous improvement of instruction and operations concentrate on achieving the school’s purpose and direction.	
Level 3	Instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources are focused on supporting the purpose and direction of the school. Instructional time is protected in policy and practice. School leaders work to secure material and fiscal resources to meet the needs of all students. School leaders demonstrate that instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources are allocated so that all students have equitable opportunities to attain challenging learning expectations. Efforts toward the continuous improvement of instruction and operations include achieving the school’s purpose and direction.	
Level 2	Instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources are sometimes focused on supporting the purpose and direction of the school. Instructional time is usually protected. School leaders attempt to secure material and fiscal resources to meet the needs of all students. School leaders express a desire to allocate instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources so that all students have equitable opportunities to attain challenging learning expectations. Efforts toward the continuous improvement of instruction and operations sometimes include achieving the school’s purpose and direction.	

Level 1	Little or no link exists between the purpose of the school and instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources. Protection of instructional time is not a priority. School leaders use available material and fiscal resources to meet the needs of students. School leaders spend little or no effort allocating instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources so that all students have equitable opportunities to attain challenging learning expectations. Efforts toward the continuous improvement of instruction and operations rarely or never include achievement of the school's purpose and direction.
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**Summary of Findings:**

The school system has taken significant steps to address the need for a comprehensive strategic resource management process. Document review and interviews with the Superintendent, board members, Chief Business and Financial Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Operations Officer and Chief of Staff clearly indicated that the school system has developed a Capital Improvement Program; Human Capital/Human Resources Strategic Plan; Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Department Action Plan; and Public Relations Plan. Furthermore, the school system has identified metrics to measure progress, specific timelines and personnel responsible. The school system is in the beginning stages of implementing these plans.

School system personnel presented the results of the Capital Improvement Program during the February 11, 2014 Board of Education Work Session. The system identified a strategic intent to “provide learning environments where all students feel safe and valued; and environments where employees work collaboratively with parents, students and stakeholders.” Document review and interviews confirm that the system recently conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of the 44 school buildings currently in use. In addition, the school system has conducted assessments focused on review of the current status of the Capital Improvement Program including the proposed deferred maintenance and capital projects for Year 1. Additionally, the system is working to 1) develop and execute a plan to quickly address the backlog of general and deferred maintenance items impacting the expected facility standards and the students’ educational environment and 2) establish a baseline metric of improvement to measure facility quality and the service required to ensure that each facility provides a superior education environment. Further, the school system has developed a comprehensive draft of the Deferred Maintenance/Facility Assessment Needs Plan dated January 24, 2014, which includes the results of the needs assessment conducted in each of the 44 school buildings currently in use and identifies deferred facility maintenance and capital needs projections over a five-year timeframe.

Evidence pointed toward overstaffing as a persistent issue in the school system. This concern seemed especially frustrating to interviewees due to declining student enrollment in recent years. The school system has developed an aggressive and comprehensive Human Capital/Human Resources Strategic Plan to guide its work to improve human resources functions and services from 2014-2017. The system conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, and then used the results to identify objectives and strategies related to its commitment “to provide quality services and critical workforce data to influence process improvements and increased effectiveness and efficiency.” The focus of the plan is to support the achievement of the system’s Strategic Priority 2: Birmingham City Schools recruits, develops and retains the highest quality employees who have student success as their highest priority. The plan recognizes the need to “ensure our staff resources are deployed effectively in support of our mission.” To that end, the system has identified four Strategic Human Capital goals along with corresponding strategies, persons responsible and metrics to measure results. The goals include leadership development; meaningful and effective performance evaluation systems; recruit, employ, induct and retain highly effective employees; and meaningful and aligned professional development systems. The system further recognizes that its goals are “ambitious and that implementation of our first Human Capital/Human Resources Strategic Plan may

be met with apprehension, discomfort and other short-term obstacles” but further reinforces that it is motivated to achieve its human capital goals, because it is in the best interest of its approximately 25,000 students.

The school system is committed to the implementation of a zero-based budgeting process and the implementation of a viable financial recovery plan. Interviews and document review indicate the system developed and is adhering to a financial plan that will enable it to meet/and or exceed having the state-required one-month reserve fund of \$17 million. Interviews with the Superintendent, board members, Chief Business and Financial Officer, school system leadership, and State Appointed Chief Financial Officer, consistently identified that reaching a reserve fund of \$20 million is a distinct possibility. Having an overage will position the school system to handle unexpected financial needs and maintain its financial solvency.

The school system administered an Organizational Health Survey, analyzed the results and identified “big picture strengths and areas of growth.” As an outcome of the survey, the system is implementing a check-in protocol that principals will use with the Chief Academic Officer to promote professional growth, and principals will be expected to train their “direct reports” on how to use the check-in process at the building level. The system has recently implemented the Principal Thursday Call to provide principals current information from central office leadership. Monthly face-to-face principals’ meetings are conducted to provide collaborative interaction. The Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Department purchased a copy of the book, *Death by Meeting*, for principals and central office staff, and the system is working to implement the *Death by Meeting* protocols and practices at the central office and building levels to promote consistency in leadership practices.

The school system developed the Birmingham City Schools Staff Development Cycle Seamless Alignment to LEADAlabama. The purpose of the Staff Development Cycle is to align the system’s evaluation systems with those of LEADAlabama to support the professional growth of building-level leaders in all schools. Significantly, it includes the identification of the Birmingham City Schools goal-setting component to ensure that goals in the schools’ continuous improvement plans directly align with system goals. If implemented with fidelity, the Staff Development Cycle has the potential to significantly build and strengthen leadership capacity across the school system to improve teaching and learning.

The newly hired Chief Academic Officer has shepherded the development of a comprehensive and ambitious Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Department Action Plan. The Plan includes the following components: short- and long-term action planning goals from January-August 2014; identification of alignment to ongoing work; constituents; deliverables; due dates; and measures of success. An analysis of three-year student achievement data by objective was conducted, and the results revealed five overarching, interdisciplinary deficiencies. These deficiencies include the following: Students’ lack of mastery related to the lowest strand on Bloom’s Taxonomy; reading and writing across all subject and grade levels; problem solving involving the use of real-life application, hands-on inquiry-based learning and manipulatives; lack of implementation of scope and sequence; and fractions and basic calculations as a whole. To address the issue of “unfair and unequal” resource allocation, system leaders conducted a comprehensive audit of level of use and results of currently implemented programs related to instruction and professional learning. As a result, the leadership made strategic decisions to discontinue programs showing low levels of use and less than satisfactory results. Interviews support that the development of the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Department Action Plan has been a collaborative and transparent process between the Chief Academic Officer and other key members of the system’s leadership. Interviews indicated next steps are to develop and implement a system-wide data dashboard to guide data-based decision-making. However, this process is in the very formative stages of development.

Interviews and document review reveal the school system is committed to building rapport with its

stakeholders through open and honest two-way communication. The Birmingham City Schools Public Relations Plan was developed in 2013 to “nurture positive, supportive relationships built on trust with all internal and external stakeholders with the goal of supporting teaching and learning as we prepare students for the 21st century world of college, careers, and the workforce.” The plan articulates Public Relations outcomes by target audiences. It further identifies four communication objectives with corresponding activities and timelines to (1) Maximize communications and engagement opportunities with all stakeholders...; (2) Develop a network of key communicators...; (3) Improve the image and perceptions of Birmingham City Schools...; and (4) Engender public trust by disseminating information and responding to public query in a manner that is accurate, honest and timely about policies, decisions, programs, evaluations, assessments, achievements and critical issues-good or bad. Significantly, the school system developed and disseminated the first ever Birmingham City Schools Annual Report 2013. The comprehensive scope of the report transparently informed the community of the system’s mission, vision, core values, strategic plan highlights 2009-13, demographic profile, budgeted revenues, operating expenses, academic achievement, and information related to strategic instructional and support initiatives.

The school system is at the very beginning stages of implementation of plans related to strategic resource management. Its organizational development is at a fragile but critical juncture. The system has the structures in place; the challenge is to implement the plans with fidelity. School system leaders must provide consistent, coordinated direction for the systemic and systematic review, oversight and evaluation of the results to ensure sustainability of results.

**Directive:**

Continue implementation of all plans in support of the comprehensive strategic resource management process. Monitor progress, evaluate plans and adjust them as needed to ensure a structure for systemic, sustainable operation; guaranteed follow-through; and monitoring, evaluation and communication of results to school and community stakeholders.

**REQUIRED ACTION 9:**

Review policies and practices related to fiscal management to determine that they provide a structure with clear requirements, direction for and oversight at all levels of the system including procedures for budget management and to ensure that the system maintains the required one-month reserve fund.

**Performance Level score:**

Indicator 4.2: Performance Level 3

*(See Required Action 8)*

**Summary of Findings:**

A review of documentation and corroborating interviews with the Superintendent, current board members, Chief Business and Financial Officer, central office department heads, and the State Appointed Chief Financial Officer clearly indicate that the school system has conducted a review of policies and practices related to fiscal management and is in the beginning stages of systemically and systematically implementing the policies and practices to ensure that the school system achieves and maintains the state required one-month reserve fund.

The school system has made a commitment to implement a transparent budget process that is “interactive and inclusive.” The system identified the expectation that department heads and school leaders prepare their respective budgets based upon what is needed to support the system’s strategic focus goals and contextual school needs in collaboration with the Chief Business and Financial Officer and members of his staff. To that end, the school system has implemented a zero-based budgeting process. Documentation review and interviews with the Chief Business and Financial Officer confirm that department heads and principals

received budget worksheets related to preparing zero-based budgets for FY 2013-14. They were specifically instructed that in the zero-based budgeting process, all expenditures must be reviewed and approved. In addition, supporting narratives must be provided and include “detailed justification for each line item.” This is a significant departure from past practice wherein administrators were given a baseline budget, and their only level of accountability was to account for variances from previous years. The Chief Financial Officer and the Comptroller met with administrators for the purpose of reviewing the submitted proposed budgets and corresponding narrative justification.

In addition, the current budget process appears to be focused on allocating financial resources to support student learning and the achievement of the school system’s strategic focus goals.

In support of the budget development process, the system identified and implemented a Budget Calendar for Fiscal Year 2014. During April and May 2013, meetings were held with the Directors of Operations and Curriculum and Instruction for the purpose of budget development. Later in May 2013, the school system began working with schools to develop their budgets. The month of June 2013 provided opportunities for further input regarding non-personnel related budget items. The Finance Department met with administrators in July 2013 to review, discuss and finalize their budgets. The proposed Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2014 was presented to the Budget Committee in August 2013. In addition, the system hosted the two required public meetings on August 20 and August 22, 2013 prior to the Board’s approval of the Birmingham City Schools’ Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2014 on September 10, 2013.

The school system recognizes the need to closely monitor revenues and expenditures to ensure that it will have the required \$17 million fund balance by September 2014. Documentation review and interviews corroborate that the system has implemented procedures related to ongoing financial monitoring. Currently, the Chief Financial Officer presents monthly financial statements and regular financial updates and projections to the Board related to the most recent status of the school system’s financial health. Board members recognized this practice during interviews. The system acknowledged that it is implementing a month-to-date and year-to-date budget analysis relative to its progress to ensure student achievement goals and strategic focus goals are met.

In addition, there is evidence of support and oversight of school budgeting practices. Following a Review of Schools with Audit Findings, 10 schools with audit exceptions received a memorandum from the Superintendent on March 20, 2013 about FY 2011 results stating that Finance Department staff would monitor and review their financial records on a monthly basis until the schools demonstrated consistent adherence to proper procedures. A review of documentation and interviews identified and supported that the system is proactively addressing the longstanding perception of school administrators that procuring the material and human resources necessary to achieve the schools’ continuous improvement goals is dependent upon Title I status. To address this issue, the Chief of Staff organized and conducted meetings on October 16, 2013. The purpose of the meetings was to clarify with principals the funding requirements of Title I, which stipulate that the school system allocate a comparable level of resources to both Title I and non-Title I schools. Further, Title I funds cannot supplant school system funding. Significantly, the system leadership explained that with the fund balance requirement projected to be met in September 2014, the system would be in a position to begin providing all schools with a local allocation beginning in fiscal year 2015. The documentation related to the results of the October 16, 2013 informational meeting indicated that principals “understood and did not have questions.”

In addition, the system conducted a Title I Budget Training with bookkeepers and principals’ designees on January 22 and 23, 2014. The agenda included opening remarks by the Chief Financial and Business Officer, which included a reminder of the upcoming Local School Financial Management Certificate training on March 3-4, 2014 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The remainder of the meeting dedicated time to review the Title I

budget sheet, general ledger miscellaneous reports and summary expenditure report and journal entry detail report. Participants received written instructions to guide their work on site. In addition, members of the Federal Programs staff presented information related to Time and Effort Forms. While the system is committed to funding schools at the level needed to support the attainment of their goals, its capacity to achieve the projected funding will become evident with the implementation of the FY 2015 Operating Budget.

Perhaps most significant is the recognition provided by the State-Appointed Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in his “Final Report – State-Appointed CFO to the Birmingham Board of Education” presented on December 10, 2013. He acknowledged that the approval of the FY 2014 budget “meets and exceeds state requirements,” expressed his confidence that the Board and Superintendent will “closely monitor revenues and expenditures, so in September 2014, the expected general fund balance will be confirmed and a request for removal from financial intervention can be prepared.” The State-Appointed Chief Financial Officer no longer monitors the school system’s financial efforts on a day-to-day basis. However, the school system still is responsible for submitting reports to the State Department of Education. The state continues to monitor the progress of the system through monthly financial reports and other reports related to areas such as special education, federal programs and transportation. Highly significant to the future of Birmingham City Schools will be the results of the financial recovery plan due to the state in April 2014.

**Directive:**

Continue to implement effective budget management to ensure proper oversight of the school system’s resources and to meet the school system’s stated goal of meeting the state-required reserve fund by September 2014, thus also demonstrating that the school system has the capacity to lead without the State Intervention Team. Review policies and practices related to fiscal management to determine that they provide a structure with clear requirements, direction for and oversight at all levels of the system including procedures for budget management and to ensure that the system maintains the required one-month reserve fund.

**REQUIRED ACTION 10:**

Adhere to directions from the state intervention team and implement recommended changes to comply with state law that school systems maintain a one-month reserve fund.

**Performance Level score:**

Indicator 4.2: Performance Level 3

*(See Required Action 8)*

**Summary of Findings:**

Document review and interviews with the Superintendent, board members, and the Chief Business and Financial Officer confirm that as of October 2014, the school system began the fiscal year with \$10 million of the required \$17 million in reserve funding. The projection is that the school system will exceed the minimum reserve fund requirement by amassing a total of \$20 million. This is attributed to the school system’s efforts to faithfully implement the Financial Recovery Plan, which includes plans for Reduction in Force (RIF), consolidation of schools and administrative sites, closure of seven schools and six administrative sites, and changes in grade configurations in schools. During the interview process, the team consistently heard that having a reserve fund balance of \$20 million is realistic. Further documentation provided in the “Final Report of the State-Appointed CFO to the Birmingham Board of Education” on December 10, 2013 and a corroborating interview conducted with the State-Appointed CFO during the Monitoring Review clearly indicated that the system has adhered to directions from the State Intervention Team and continues to take the necessary actions to achieve the required one-month reserve fund. In his report, the CFO acknowledged the approval of the FY 2014 budget, and he indicated that the budget

“meets and exceeds state requirements,” expressed his confidence that the Board and Superintendent will “closely monitor revenues and expenditures, so in September 2014, the expected general fund balance will be confirmed and a request for removal from financial intervention can be prepared.”

The State-Appointed Chief Financial Officer no longer monitors the school system’s financial efforts on a day-to-day basis. The system is, however, responsible for submitting reports to the State Department of Education. The state continues to monitor the progress of the school system through monthly financial reports as well as through reports related to special education, federal programs and transportation. The system will submit its financial recovery plan in April.

The day-to-day operations of the school system are a mammoth undertaking that require structures to support monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure quality assurance. Eliminating the perception that the school system has an impeccable track record for initiating projects with a dim view for their survival through focused and sustained leadership is critical for this school system that has begun to demonstrate its strengths in providing the operational framework to improve its performance in relation to student learning and organizational effectiveness. This Required Action has been met.

**Recommendations:**

1. Implement the remaining Phases of the Financial Recovery Plan with fidelity.
2. Initiate procedures to demonstrate that the school system implements its financial policies and procedures effectively and to sustain the state-required minimum reserve fund.

**Conclusion**

The Monitoring Review Team recognized areas wherein the school system has made significant progress in working to complete the Required Actions set forth by the Special Review Team. The Monitoring Review Team has designed the directives and recommendations in this report to help the system persist in maintaining its focus on all of the Required Actions. The school system may discuss these directives with AdvancED to gain assistance and support in directing their efforts to meet the Required Actions. For Required Actions that have been completed, the team has included Recommendations to support the institution’s continued progress in this area.

The school system did a commendable job in its initial response to the Required Actions. The overall effort appeared to be collaborative with shared leadership, and central office staff accepted the challenge. The leadership appears to be creating a capable senior administrative team that exhibits quality practices and work that high-performing school systems manifest to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. Examples of programs that are developing a framework for effective system operation include: Capital Improvement Program; Human Capital/Human Resources Strategic Plan; Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Department Action Plan; and Public Relations Plan. These structures are in their infancy with a need for additional time to become fully operational for quality assurance. Plans for gathering, analyzing and reporting data for monitoring and evaluation, along with investing in capacity building, are critical components to each plan’s success. Maintaining a cyclical process to direct results from monitoring and evaluation into decision making to promote student learning and organization effectiveness will permit the systemic and systematic operation of system structures.

For instance, the HRSP proved to be an invaluable document for articulating expectations for employee performance and describing avenues of support. System- and school-level administrators seemed to have clear goals for the evaluation process, and they appeared to have the support to implement procedures with

fidelity. It is important for system leaders to provide data-based professional development on a regular, systematic basis for the central office leaders and school administrators guided by a system-wide professional learning plan. Additionally, school administrators should continue to communicate with teachers and support professionals about their performance expectations in accord with the HRSP and Strategic Plan. Open lines of communication are vital so the school system's goal for effective evaluations can be met, and the overall process can remain transparent.

According to the State-Appointed CFO and the leader of the State Intervention Team who has a broad historical perspective, the school system is better positioned to move forward in an effective manner than it has been in years. Taking advantage of every opportunity to advance its purpose and direction will strengthen the system's accomplishments. In a draft of a document entitled Design for Sustaining Continuous Progress for the Birmingham City Schools dated May 7, 2014, the State-Appointed CFO stated in Item II that "To further ensure that continuous progress is sustained, oversight by the State Department of Education and AdvancED/SACS is recommended until the conclusion of the FY 15."

Upon completion of the Monitoring Review, the team determined that the school system has made progress toward meeting the Required Actions. The school system has completed Required Actions 5 and 10 with considerable work remaining to complete Required Actions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 as indicated by the directives in this report. Completion of Required Actions is an incremental process that occurs over time to permit optimum growth.

After a thorough review of the Birmingham City Schools' Institutional Progress Report and evidence presented by the system, coupled with information from interviews, the Monitoring Review Team recommended that Birmingham City Schools be moved to the status of Accredited Warned. This recommendation was confirmed by the AdvancED Alabama Council. A Monitoring Review Team will review the institution in September 2014 to assess its progress on the remaining Required Actions. An Institutional Progress Report will be due from the Birmingham City Schools at least two weeks prior to the review.

# About AdvancED®

## Background

Dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 30,000 institutions in more than 70 countries. AdvancED provides accreditation under the seals of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI).

## The Accreditation Process

To earn and maintain accreditation, an institution must:

### 1. Meet the AdvancED Standards and accreditation policies.

Institutions demonstrate adherence to the AdvancED Standards/Indicators and accreditation policies, which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for educational institutions to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.

### 2. Engage in continuous improvement.

Institutions implement a process of continuous improvement focused on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

### 3. Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.

Institutions engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, institutions host an External Review team at least once every five years. The team evaluates the institution's adherence to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies, assesses the efficacy of the institution's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and identifies Powerful Practices and provides Required Actions to help the institution improve. The institution acts on the team's Required Actions and submits an Accreditation Progress Report at prescribed intervals following the External Review. Monitoring Reviews may be conducted during this time to ensure that the institution is making progress toward the Required Actions.

## Special Reviews

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

## A Process of Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED accreditation process engages institutions in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help institutions be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.