

# Report of the Quality Assurance Review Team for Tennessee School for the Blind

Jim A. Oldham, Superintendent

---

---

Review Dates: 03/04/2008 - 03/05/2008



*AdvancED is the unified organization of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), and National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE).*

# Quality Assurance Review Report

## Contents

About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI .....	3
Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review .....	4
Summary of Findings .....	5
Commendations .....	5
Recommendations .....	7
Next Steps .....	8
Standards for Accreditation .....	9
Standard 1. Vision and Purpose .....	9
Standard 2. Governance and Leadership .....	10
Standard 3. Teaching and Learning .....	12
Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results .....	14
Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems .....	16
Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships .....	19
Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement .....	21
Conclusion .....	23
Appendix .....	24
Quality Assurance Review Team Members .....	24
AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools .....	24

## About AdvancED and NCA CASI/SACS CASI

**Background.** Founded in 1895, the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) accredit public and private schools and districts in 30 states, the Navajo Nation, Latin America, and the Department of Defense Schools worldwide.

In 2006, NCA CASI, SACS CASI, and the research and development arm of the accrediting associations, the National Study of School Evaluation, unified to form AdvancED. Dedicated to advancing excellence in education, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 23,000 schools in 65 countries, serving 15 million students.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI serve as accreditation divisions of AdvancED. Through AdvancED, NCA CASI and SACS CASI have defined shared, research-based accreditation standards that cross state, regional, and national boundaries. Accompanying these standards is a unified accreditation process designed to help schools continuously improve.

**The Accreditation Process.** To earn and maintain accreditation from NCA CASI or SACS CASI, schools must:

**1) Meet the AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools.** Schools demonstrate adherence to the seven AdvancED standards which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.

**2) Engage in continuous improvement.** Schools implement a continuous improvement process that articulates the vision and purpose the school is pursuing (vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, school effectiveness, and the school community (profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (plan); and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next (results).

**3) Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.** Schools engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, schools host an external quality assurance review team once every five years. The team evaluates the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards, assesses the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and recommendations to help the school improve. The team provides an oral exit report to the school and a written report detailing the team's recommendations. The school acts on the team's recommendations and submits a progress report two years following the review.

NCA CASI and SACS CASI accreditation engages the entire school community in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help schools be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.

# Introduction to the Quality Assurance Review

**Purpose.** The purpose of the Quality Assurance Review is to:

1. Evaluate the school's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards.
2. Assess the efficacy of the school's improvement process and methods for quality assurance.
3. Identify commendations and recommendations to improve the school.
4. Make an accreditation recommendation for review by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission.

A key aim of the quality assurance review is to verify that the school is operating with institutional integrity - that it is fulfilling its vision and mission for its students.

**School Preparation.** To prepare for the Quality Assurance Review, the school community engages in an in-depth self assessment of each of the seven AdvancED standards. The school identifies and describes the evidence that demonstrates that it is meeting each standard. Through this internal review, the school examines how its systems and processes contribute to student performance and school effectiveness.

**Summary of Team Activities.** The Quality Assurance Review team is led by an AdvancED certified team chair and comprised of professionals from outside the school. The team reviews the findings of the school's internal self-assessment, conducts interviews with representative groups of stakeholders, reviews student performance data and other documentation provided by the school, and observes practices and daily operations. The team engages in professional deliberations to reach consensus on the school's adherence to the standards for accreditation. The team provides an oral exit report and prepares a written Quality Assurance Review Team Report designed to help the school improve.

**The Quality Assurance Review Team Report.** Following the visit, the review team completes the Quality Assurance Review report. After review by a nationally-trained reader, the report is submitted to the school. The report contains commendations and recommendations for improvement.

**Using the Report - Acting on the Recommendations.** The school uses the report to guide its improvement efforts. The school is held accountable for addressing the recommendations identified in the report. The NCA CASI/SACS CASI State Office is available to assist schools in addressing the recommendations. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review team visit, the school must submit a progress report detailing the actions and progress the school has made on the team's recommendations. The report is reviewed at the state and national level to ensure the school is addressing the recommendations.

**Accreditation Recommendation.** The Quality Assurance Review team uses the findings from the onsite visit to make an accreditation recommendation that is reviewed at the state level and by the national AdvancED Accreditation Commission. Accreditation is granted by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission and communicated to the school following action from the commission.

# Summary of Findings

A Quality Assurance Review Team representing the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), a division of AdvancED, visited the Tennessee School for the Blind in Nashville, Tennessee on 03/04/2008 - 03/05/2008.

During the visit, members of the Quality Assurance Review Team interviewed the Superintendent, 3 members of the administrative team, 12 students, 4 parents, and 23 teachers. In addition, team members of Friends of Tennessee School for the Blind were interviewed. The team also reviewed documents, student performance data, and other artifacts provided by the school. Specifically, the team examined the school's systems and processes in relation to the seven AdvancED standards:

- Vision and Purpose
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Documenting and Using Results
- Resource and Support Systems
- Stakeholder Communications and Relationships
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED standards focus on systems within a school and systematic methods of attaining high student performance and organizational effectiveness. The power of the standards lies in the connections and linkages between and among the standards. The Quality Assurance Review team used the AdvancED standards to guide its review of the school, looking not only for adherence to individual standards, but also for how the school functions as a whole and embodies the practices and characteristics of a quality school.

Through its examination of the school's adherence to the standards, the Quality Assurance Review team identified the following commendations and recommendations.

## Commendations

The Quality Assurance Review team commends the school for the following strengths and accomplishments. While additional strengths are noted in the detailed review of each standard that appears later in this report, the commendations listed below are the strengths that the team believes are most deserving of being highlighted.

- **The Life Skills Teachers developed their own curriculum using research-based and universal design concepts, and aligned the expectations with approved Tennessee Alternative Performance Standards.**

Through a review of documentation and from stakeholder interviews, the Quality Assurance Review Team (QART) noted that the Life Skills Teachers met daily with the lead teacher to review evaluation results, plan the lessons and curriculum, discuss student progress, and study research-based designs in order to meet the needs of students.

The focus on providing a curriculum for students with the most significant cognitive delays provides a tool needed to conduct a longitudinal study for students and generates data unavailable from mandated assessments.

- **TSB provides cutting edge technology to its students and staff with vision challenges to have accessibility to email, word processing and the internet. Four computer labs with specialized equipment are available to students, teachers, parents, and employees as needed.**

During interviews with stakeholders and through observations made in the classrooms, the QART noted a strong satisfaction with the availability and implementation of the technology being provided to the staff and students of Tennessee School for the Blind.

The focus on securing the latest technology available for the vision impaired has been a positive force in student engagement and achievement as well as preparing students for postsecondary education, the workforce, and independent living. It also provides an opportunity for schools across the state to try these assistive technology devices before purchasing to see if the device fits the need of the student. The expertise of the Tennessee School for the Blind technology staff is evident in that they have been selected to train vision teachers for the state of Tennessee and asked to make presentations across the United States on the uses of assistive technology.

- **Tennessee School for the Blind offers a strong, inclusive Outreach Program which includes a variety of services to children with visual impairments in school districts across the state of Tennessee. Outreach services are provided by three specialists who all are dually certified in vision, orientation and mobility.**

Interviews with stakeholders and the examination of artifacts revealed that many vision impaired children were provided services at Tennessee School for the Blind and in their LEA through the outreach program.

The availability of the outreach program has impacted the number of students in need of both assessment and direct educational services. It has increased the communication between the local school district, the parent, and the trained specialists who are available to provide the resources the student needs to be more independent.

- **Tennessee School for the Blind is to be commended for the many opportunities available for students to express their talents and interests.**

The examination of DVD recordings, pictures displayed in the hallway, newspaper articles, and interviews with stakeholders, revealed a high-level of participation in school activities.

As a result of student participation in school activities, the QART noted a rich culture that engages students in the ownership and process of their own learning and moves them closer to the goal of becoming independent mobile adults.

- **TBS is to be commended for having a supportive stakeholder community that actively engages and participates in school events and activities.**

During interviews, parents and community stakeholders expressed their appreciation for the

commitment that the school demonstrates in providing a safe and successful learning environment for their children.

The focus on the impact of parent and community involvement has resulted in multiple opportunities for TSB students to engage in extra curricular activities, opportunities for surrounding post secondary institutions to share in the training of their students, and businesses to sponsor work-based learning.

## Recommendations

In addition to the commendations, the Quality Assurance Review team identified the following recommendations for improvement. The team focused its recommendations on those areas that, if addressed, will have the greatest impact on improving student performance and overall school effectiveness. The school will be held accountable for making progress on each of the recommendations noted in this section. Two years following this review, the school will be asked to submit a progress report on these recommendations.

- **Review the common mission and shared vision of Tennessee School for the Blind on an annual basis and revise as needed with the assistance of all stakeholders.**

The QART determined through stakeholder interviews and review of documentation, that even though there is a prevailing spirit of unity and purpose among all stakeholders, the vision, mission, and beliefs should be the anchor that provides direction and purpose in all decision making.

The refocusing on the mission and vision of Tennessee School for the blind ensures a continuous process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations of student learning.

- **Develop a systematic process to ensure that Tennessee School for the Blind is recognized for the support and commitment the school provides to its students, parents, and community as well as school districts across the state of Tennessee. By recognizing the contributions of the professionals at TSB the school will broaden its expertise and availability of services to school districts, local colleges and universities, and the community as a whole.**

During interviews, observations, and review of documentation the team noted many positive contributions made by the faculty and staff to the development of each student, the professional development of teachers, and support for the visually impaired community state-wide.

By recognizing the contributions of the professionals at Tennessee School for the Blind the school will broaden its expertise and availability of services to school districts, local colleges and universities, and the community as a whole.

**Review of AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools:** The team reviewed the school's adherence to

each of the AdvancED standards. The findings from this review are provided in the next section of this report.

## Next Steps

The school should:

1. Review and discuss the findings from this report with all stakeholders.
2. Ensure that plans are in place to embed and sustain the strengths noted in the commendations section to maximize their impact on the school.
3. Develop action plans to address the recommendations made by the team. Include methods for monitoring progress toward the recommendations.
4. Use the report to guide and strengthen the school's efforts to improve student performance and school effectiveness.
5. Two years following the Quality Assurance Review, submit the Accreditation Progress Report detailing progress made toward addressing the team's recommendations. The report will be reviewed at the state and national level to ensure that significant progress is being made toward the recommendations. Lack of progress can result in a change in accreditation status.
6. Continue to meet the AdvancED accreditation standards, submit required reports, engage in continuous improvement, and document results.

## Resources

AdvancED offers a range of resources to support your school as it acts on the findings in this report. The AdvancED Resource Network, available at [www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork](http://www.advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork), provides an online network of peer-to-peer practices, best practices, and resources and tools designed to help schools with their improvement efforts. Available any where, any time, the network can be queried for information on a variety of school improvement subjects. The AdvancED Research and Development division provides research, handbooks, and tools to assist schools with continuous improvement. In addition, your state office provides hands-on professional development and ongoing technical assistance. Contact your state office for more information on the range of resources available to you.

## Celebrating Accreditation

Following the visit, the Quality Assurance Review team submits an accreditation recommendation to AdvancED for state review and for action at the national level by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, which confers accreditation and communicates it to the school. Upon receiving its accreditation, the school should celebrate its achievement with the school community. The SACS CASI logo is available through the SACS CASI website for schools to post on their website and in school communications. Flags, door decals, diploma seals, and more can be ordered from the website to help you share your accomplishment with your community.

## Summary

The accreditation process engages the school in an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. The next steps in this journey are to build on the strengths and address the recommendations noted in this report. Doing so will enable the school to advance in its quest for excellence and deepen the fulfillment of its mission for all students.



# Standards for Accreditation

The primary requirement for accreditation is that the Tennessee School for the Blind demonstrates that it meets the seven standards for accreditation. The findings of the Quality Assurance Review Team regarding the standards for accreditation are summarized on the following pages.

## Standard 1. Vision and Purpose

**Standard:** The school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

Tennessee School for the Blind (TSB) is a unit school that serves all eligible visually impaired and legally blind students across the state of Tennessee. During interviews with stakeholders, the Team found a strong commitment among the faculty and staff in providing a high quality educational experience to all students. The word “family” was used repeatedly by parents who expressed that it felt like family at TSB. One teacher stated, “Our number one goal is to see our students walk across the stage at graduation.” The former TBS Superintendent described the vision of the school as “bigger than just this school.” The faculty is empowered to reach out to help all students with vision impairment, maximize their full potential, and to live successfully and independently in a sighted world. Each new faculty member completes a final interview with the superintendent to be advised of the school’s vision and is urged to keep the vision in mind as he/she pursues the duties of the school.

Survey results, interviews, and comments from parents and advocates during IEP meetings guide the modification of views, beliefs, mission and future goals for TSB. The vision document is printed, Brailled, and posted in each classroom as a means to build understanding and provide focus throughout the building and campus. The school maintains a rich profile of its school, students and community. The profile data is available on the Easy Individual Education Plan (IEP)/Easy Census to help the faculty and staff understand the unique demographics of the TSB student body. Additionally, each student has a “quick student reference” card which is used extensively by the Youth Service Workers (YSW) in the cottages.

The vision and mission documents of TSB were originally created in 1988 under the leadership of former superintendent, Mr. Ralph Brewer. While the essence of these documents are clearly evident, modifications adapted, and used as a focus for the school, the team believes that attention should be given annually to updating the beliefs, vision and mission in order to give all stakeholder ownership and true articulation to the school’s focus and purpose. Additionally, this process will provide affirmation and continue to foster the passion of the superintendent and the highly committed faculty and staff.

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

- There is a strong sense of family held by TSB stakeholders.
- The faculty and staff are committed to providing a high quality of instruction and life experiences for all students.
- The school’s superintendent actively models the school’s vision, mission and values to all

stakeholders by sharing continually his passion for the students and school of TSB.

- Stakeholders are empowered to participate in collaborative efforts to meet specific learning as well as orientation and mobility goals for all students.

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

- Review the common mission and shared vision of TSB on an annual basis and revise as needed with the assistance of all stakeholders. The QART determined through stakeholder interviews and review of documentation, that even though there is a prevailing spirit of unity and purpose among all stakeholders, the vision, mission, and beliefs should be the anchor that provides direction and purpose in all decision making. Refocusing on the mission and vision of TSB ensures a continuous process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations of student learning.
- It is important that all stakeholders can clearly articulate the vision and mission of the school. Since the website is available for all stakeholders, display the vision and mission clearly on the home page of the website to help stakeholders become familiar and have easy access. Additionally, provide multiple opportunities for students to hear and discuss the vision/mission of the school in various classrooms and group settings to ensure the articulation of the TSB student body.

**Finding:** Tennessee School for the Blind has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational" and has met this standard for accreditation.

## Standard 2. Governance and Leadership

**Standard:** The school provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

The administration, program directors and lead teachers of the Tennessee School for the Blind (TSB), provide strong governance and leadership for the faculty and staff in meeting appropriate indicators and goals that foster student growth and achievement. In interviews with a representative cross-section of stakeholders, this group articulated the same passion for the school's mission and programs as administrators and school personnel. Parents and Friends of the Tennessee School for the Blind, a support organization for the school, identified the extraordinary dedication of faculty and staff in their commitment of educating and caring for all K through 12 students as exemplary. This commitment inspires the Friends of TSB to work diligently to provide monetary support for whatever the faculty and staff need in meeting the specific needs for the visually impaired student population. In discussion with faculty and in viewing the support documentation for this standard, the Team found numerous examples of creative teaching and learning. Classroom visitation confirmed that pedagogy used was appropriate and vital for the students' continued improvement and progress.

Opportunities for professional development activities are frequently offered and faculty are encouraged to attend those activities which best enhance the faculty member's area of expertise.

TSB complies with local state and federal mandates. These are incorporated into the school's parent and student policy and procedures handbook, in the TSB crisis plan, and in other policies and procedure-referenced material for faculty and staff. Faculty and program directors collaborate on student instruction and on formal/informal assessment weekly. Parents and students are kept updated as to the progress made by a student through a weekly report. This progress report reviews academic progress made and evaluates life skills areas, such as orientation and mobility (O&M) and the level of student's use of visual assistive technology, if needed, and other appropriate materials. Additional updates are generated by the use of email, the school's website and newsletter. Students housed on campus are allowed a weekly phone call home as part of their cottage environment routine.

The administration encourages and assists teachers in decision-making processes that utilize all available student data. Student successes, as witnessed during the on-site visit, are celebrated, valued and acknowledged by the entire school community.

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

- The leadership and governance exhibited at TSB promote a vital cohesiveness among faculty, staff, students, and community. Student awareness of this cohesive support appears to encourage them in reaching their goals and potential.
- Students and parents state that security policies and procedures developed and continually reexamined by the school personnel make students feel safe and secure.
- TSB provides students with an extensive variety of curricular and extracurricular activities that extend needed involvement with the sighted community.
- Personnel in each program and department from Outreach, Life Skills, technology, curricular, and extracurricular activities support students in meeting the requirements for graduation and successful entry into the real world.

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

- Recognize and promote opportunities for faculty to be acknowledged and acclaimed as professional advocates in the education of the visually impaired.
- Market TSB to local, regional and national forums using the diversified talents and abilities of faculty, programs and successes of TSB's student population to encourage more utilization of the school's services.

**Finding:** Tennessee School for the Blind has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

## **Standard 3. Teaching and Learning**

---

**Standard:** The school provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

TSB is a unit school which houses grades K through 12 and offers a diverse curriculum for its unique population of students. Each student is served by an Individual Education Plan (IEP) which is developed with the parent, Local Education Agency (LEA), and TSB personnel. The IEP is updated annually or as needed to ensure the academic success of the student. TSB also serves infants, toddlers, and pre-school children in need of vision services.

Students do not enroll in TSB. Instead, each student is referred to the school by the LEA for services with priority given to those school districts that do not have a certified vision teacher on staff. The Outreach Team visits the LEA and works with the home school to determine whether the student can stay in their school with services provided for orientation and mobility (O&M), accommodation of assistive technology and materials, or whether the student needs to attend TSB as a residential or bused-in student. An Outreach Team is available in East, Middle, and West Tennessee. The outreach director and the outreach teachers meet bi-monthly to discuss referrals and case management issues. TSB provides Braille, large print, text, assistive technology, and audio materials to schools, students, parents, and employees as needed.

A modified curriculum has been established to meet IEP goals and objectives; however, all Tennessee state curriculum standards are addressed in each grade, content area, and elective. A syllabus has been developed and approved for each course and is printed in a course notebook and provided to faculty and students. In addition to the core curriculum required for graduation, students at TSB have many electives to choose from which meets their academic and extra-curricular needs and interests. Some electives include Chorus, Band, Family Consumer Science, Piano, Voice, Forensics, Diversified Technology, Document Creation Design, and Work-based Learning. Teachers collaborate each Friday to share ideas and strategies to use in the classroom.

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is specialized instruction provided to children and youth with visual impairments or deaf blindness related to their assessed needs. The ECC addresses the skills needed by all infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school aged students using both functional and academic curricula in the following areas: compensatory/access skills, career skills, independent living skills, orientation and mobility skills, recreation/leisure skills, self-determination skills, sensory efficiency skills, social skills, and assistive technology skills.

TSB has added three special courses that have been approved by the State Department of Education. These courses provide the specialized learning and access to literacy necessary for blind students and adults. Literacy Braille, Nemeth Code (Math and Scientific Code), and Adaptive Technology specific to students with a visual impairment are in the third year of approval from the state.

A residential curriculum is in place for the cottage students. Young students who are multi-handicapped are trained in dressing, social, pre-vocational, and bathroom skills. Older students are placed in the care of the Dean of Students and the Youth Service Workers (YSW) who maintain current information on all cottage students. Scheduled meetings are used to ensure the continuation of the expanded core curriculum for these students.

Graduating seniors have the opportunity to experience semi-independent living on campus. These students live on campus in an efficiency apartment the second semester of their senior year. The first semester focuses on a comprehensive program designed to help seniors prepare for the "real world". This class focuses on meal planning and preparation, responsibility for self, managing time, money and energy, as well as caring for an apartment.

The Life Skills Teachers developed their own curriculum using research-based and universal design concepts. This curriculum is aligned with approved Tennessee Alternative Performance Standards. This tool provides a longitudinal study for students with the most significant cognitive delays. TSB places all elementary students in two periods of language arts and two periods of math each day. A study skills program was designed and implemented for students in middle grades and high school.

Students have access to three highly qualified teachers each night to provide homework help for all middle grades and high school students. A general session lab, computer lab, and math lab are open Monday through Thursday nights. TSB provides morning and after school tutoring in all content areas, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, and adaptive daily living skills. Each spring a needs assessment is used to identify what areas need support. Parents, YSW's, and students are provided teacher email addresses and use it for homework support. This program has proven to be highly successful with empirical data to support its effectiveness. Students are provided with multiple opportunities to receive additional learning assistance to improve their learning beyond initial classroom instruction.

Of the 161 students enrolled at TSB, 102 are enrolled in a Career Technical Education (CTE) Program. Program areas include Agriculture, Business Technology, Contextual Academics, Family Consumer Sciences, and Technology Engineering. Six middle level students are enrolled in a Career and Technical Education class.

TSB teachers are highly qualified with content area knowledge as well as a vision endorsement. Three O&M and six vision teachers are currently on staff. Assistive technology is available in all classrooms and enables students and staff with vision challenges to have accessibility to email, word processing and the internet. The school also has four computer labs with specialized equipment; one in the elementary area, one in the high school area, one in the business occupations area, and one in the diversified technology area. These computers are equipped with JAWs (Job Access With Speech) and Zoom-Text software. Each classroom has a closed circuit TV (CCTV) to provide access to printed materials. Specialized scanners (SARA) provide a speech program to read and save printed materials. The Pac Mate and Braille Plus Managers allow printed text to be translated into refreshable Braille and speech out-put. These devices also help provide access to the Internet.

Title I provides funds for staff development, equipment, and specialized training for the staff at TSB. Two books were purchased for the staff: *The Art and Science of Teaching*; *A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction*, and *Classroom Management that Works; Research-Based Strategies for Every Teacher*. Each teacher has a computer with access to the internet in order to research journal articles. An area on campus has been designated for a professional development library and will serve as a resource for all teachers, educational assistants, and YSW's. TSB teachers have been designated as the official trainer of teachers in Tennessee seeking an endorsement in vision, O&M, and assistive technology.

The media center provides a wide array of books, videos, laser disks, and other informational media. TSB continues to add to the number of Braille and large print books available to students, parents, and staff. Most of the students are certified to use the State Library for the Blind and

Physically Impaired. The TSB library media specialist, a certified vision specialist, works closely with the State Librarian to provide appropriate materials for students. The TSB library provides an open check out time throughout the school day and provides students with many language-based activities during library time in coordination with the classroom teachers. The TSB web site lists all books and materials contained in the library and their check- out status.

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

- TSB provides cutting edge technology to its students and staff with vision challenges to have accessibility to email, word processing and the internet. Four computer labs with specialized equipment are available to students, teachers, parents, and employees as needed.
- TSB offers a strong, inclusive Outreach Program which includes a variety of services to children with visual impairments in school districts across the state of Tennessee. Outreach services are provided by three specialists who all are dually certified in vision and orientation and mobility.
- TSB is to be commended for the many opportunities available for students to express their talents and interests.
- Graduating seniors have the opportunity to experience semi-independent living on campus.

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

- Request additional outreach personnel to serve vision impaired students across in the state of Tennessee. With only three people, travel time can take up a significant portion of the day as they travel across the state to meet with students referred by the LEA.
- Make the State Textbook Adoption Commission aware that Braille materials from the adoptions take up to two years to be available to students.

**Finding:** Tennessee School for the Blind has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

## Standard 4. Documenting and Using Results

**Standard:** The school enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

Each TSB student is served by an individual education plan (IEP) which is developed with the parent, local education agency (LEA), and TSB personnel. The IEP is updated annually or as needed to ensure the academic success of the student. Assessments are administered to students with any modification and/or accommodation allowed by the state and designated in the IEP.

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) and the Stanford Achievement Test are administered annually to elementary and middle school level students. The scores are compared to previous scores to compare progress in reading, mathematics, language, and



listening. Students enrolled in courses requiring the administration of the Gateway or End-of-Course (EOC) tests are administered the tests three times each year. If a student does not score in the proficient range, his/her scores are monitored to assure progress toward proficiency. For students with significant cognitive delays, the support score of the Scales of Independent Behavior (SIB) is compared from one evaluation to the next to assure an increase in adaptive behavior functioning. The Adaptive Living Skills Curriculum is utilized to document annual progress in skill acquisition.

The TCAP Writing Assessment is administered to students in the 5th, 8th, and 11th grades. Fifth grade students at TSB scored a 3.2 in 2006 and in 2007. Eighth grade students scored 4.1 in 2006 and 4.2 in 2007 which was equal to the state. Eleventh grade students moved from 3.8 in 2006 to score higher than the state in 2007.

All students receive a comprehensive psycho-educational evaluation for certification purposes and to determine progress over a period of three years in all academic areas. Since all 161 students at TSB have special needs, these results are used to identify any positive or detrimental influences on school performance.

All assessments are given in the student's primary reading medium with state approved accommodations. Data from these tests are stored in a data base and used to plan the IEP. Longitudinal studies are completed each year to evaluate progress of each student. Students are evaluated each year to determine if their visual needs have changed. An updated Functional Vision Assessment is completed every three years or as needed to determine how well a student uses his/her remaining vision. It is administered by a certified teacher of the visually impaired. Educational implications, medical information, and recommendations are documented. The teachers at TSB are trained to read and interpret these reports to establish appropriate goals and objectives for students.

TCAP, Gateway, and End Of Course (EOC) data are released to teachers, students, LEA's, and parents as soon as TSB receives them. The psychologist, special education director, and life skills lead teacher analyze the reports and train teachers how to interpret them. Teachers review the scores and place copies in each IEP folder. Relevant goals and objectives are developed during the IEP meeting utilizing these results.

The TSB Assessment Team (comprised of the psychologist, speech/language specialists, occupational and physical therapists, academic assessment specialist, certified vision teacher, and school counselor) in conjunction with the special education director and life skills lead teacher review and identify instruments appropriate for assessment. The psychological examiner maintains a data base on assessment and student behaviors, and is able to share individual trends, rates of progress, and comparisons with the faculty during collaboration sessions, IEP meetings, and curriculum discussions.

In the non-academic areas data indicate an increase in graduation rate from 53.8 in 2005 to 73.3 in 2006. The 2007 rate is currently under revision by the state; however, during student and teacher interviews a higher rate is expected. The goal of TSB is for all students to graduate and a celebration is planned in May to honor all students and their accomplishments. Attendance rates are not calculated for TSB since many students live on campus during the week.

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

- TSB tracks all student progress, identifies areas of need, and makes program changes as

needed throughout the year.

- Eleventh grade students moved from 3.8 on the TCAP Writing Assessment in 2006 to score higher than the state in 2007 at 4.2.
- TSB had an increase in graduation rate from 53.8 in 2005 to 73.3 in 2006.
- Longitudinal studies are completed each year to evaluate progress of each student.

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

- Use comparison and trend data of student performance from comparable schools in other states in evaluating effectiveness.
- Promote active involvement (hands-on formative assessments) of students in the learning process, including opportunities for them to explore application of higher-order thinking skills and investigate new approaches to applying their learning.

**Finding:** Tennessee School for the Blind has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

## Standard 5. Resource and Support Systems

**Standard:** The school has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

The vision of Tennessee School for the Blind is to address the educational needs of their students who range from academically gifted to the developmentally delayed. The thrust of the program is to equip blind children with those special skills, techniques and methods needed in order to function at their optimum level in society. The instructional staff, including classroom and special area teachers, residential staff, support staff, Life Skills and Outreach staff implement this philosophy through a totally individualized program for each student.

TSB employs Highly Qualified professionals who are fully licensed as Teachers of Students with Visual Impairment-Blindness and/or Special Education and are dedicated to working as a collaborative team to fulfill the goals set forth in each child's IEP. Eighty-five percent of the faculty hold advanced degrees. The average teaching experience at TSB is 20 years. The combined years of teaching experience at TSB is nine hundred and forty-eight thereby creating a large pool of dedication, knowledge and experience from which to draw. Through numerous interviews with students and parents, the QAR team found that TSB has a procedure in place to ensure that qualified administrators, teachers and staff are in place to meet the diverse individual needs of the students served at TSB and those served by the Outreach Program. Professional development as documented in the Standards Assessment Report (SAR) and through staff and administrator interviews covers a wide range of activities such as state conference presentations, in-service opportunities, serving as cooperating teachers for student teachers, Metropolitan Nashville Education Association (MNEA), Tennessee Education Association (TEA,) holding workshops for parents and paraprofessionals, Unity Conference, serving on bias panels, summer workshops, Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Summer Institute and



numerous classes and workshops for local colleges and universities.

The staff at TSB is actively involved in the promotion and advancement of educational opportunities for visually impaired and blind students. Each summer the MTSU Summer Institute for Visual Impairment Training is hosted by TSB with many of their staff serving as trainers. Vanderbilt University trains students in their vision specialist program at TSB. Other groups providing resources of time/financial services are Friends of Tennessee School for the Blind, Inc., Lion's Clubs of Tennessee, Caring Hearts, and Donelson Christian Academy. Providing visually impaired students with the latest and most advanced technology is a top priority of the staff. The specialists in each field at TSB often field-test and critique cutting-edge strategies, assessments, equipment, and adapted/assistive technology giving their expertise to improve the lives and knowledge of their students. Collaborative IEP meetings are held at least once per year for each student. Students and their teachers have access to a myriad of services from a senior psychological examiner, a Student and Family Support Specialist, a clinical psychologist provided through TennCare/Medicaid Services, one of two speech pathologists, an occupational therapist, a physical therapist and a rehabilitation therapist from The Division of Rehabilitation Service. Each Friday classes end early to provide time for teachers and service providers to plan collaboratively for each child's program.

O&M training for students is taught by regular classroom teachers for self-contained students while cane skills and off-campus training on a one-to-one basis is taught by the O&M staff. Skills learned in O&M are reinforced by all instructional and residential staff as evidenced by observations during a school tour. Training can include use of the white cane and/or low vision devices, travel inside buildings on campus, residential travel, and commercial/downtown area travel for older students. Students have traveled to Aspen, Colorado for a ski trip with instructors and guides.

The Resource Center for the Visually Impaired (RCVI) is located on the campus of the Tennessee School for the Blind. The role of the Resource Center is two-fold. The center conducts the annual Federal Quota Registration of legally blind pupils in public and private schools in Tennessee and assists local education agencies in providing accessible instructional materials to students with visual disabilities. Instructional materials include Braille and large type textbooks and ancillaries. Non-book instructional materials provided include Braille and bold-line paper, cassette recorder/players, Braillewriter and bold-line paper, low-vision materials, tactile devices, and kits that include sensory development items. Services of RCVI personnel are available to public school systems, eligible private non-profit local education agencies and to state special schools across the state. The inventory of the RCVI includes 22,000 Braille and large type textbooks and ancillaries and non-book instructional material. Over 850 students with visual disabilities are provided service each school year. In excess of 1200 requests for adapted educational materials are processed each year.

The Outreach Program of the TSB offers both assessment and direct educational services to over 100 children with visual impairments across the state of Tennessee. School districts not employing a certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments and/or an Orientation and Mobility Specialist are eligible for direct services through this program. Priority is given to those students with safety issues resulting from the visual impairment, those who are near graduation from high school and those younger students who would gain the most from early intervention. Many students at TSB require a residential environment due to the nature of their disabilities and/or distance from home. Residential students stay five nights per week going home each Friday and returning on Sunday evening. Experienced cottage Youth Services Workers (YSW) work with teachers, parents, clinic staff and therapists to ensure safety and continuity of

students' educational programs. A YSW is awake at all times in each cottage home checking on students hourly. Security staff is on duty twenty-four hours per day. Each of the ten cottages accommodates twelve students with two to three YSW's, depending on the level of student need. Each cottage has a living room, playroom, kitchen/dining area, four bathrooms and six individual bedrooms. YSW's follow a curriculum that emphasizes activity of daily living skills planned in conjunction with teachers, therapists, parents, and student need. Seniors having completed the Family Consumer Science class and demonstrated proficiency in ADL are given the opportunity to participate in the Semi-Independent Living Program. Parents, students and staff expressed the beliefs that this program works to the advantage of the residential students educationally, socially, physically and, mentally.

Student safety and security is of paramount importance to the faculty and staff of TSB. The six nurses who make-up the clinic staff focus on preventing illness and injury, and promoting health and assisting with rehabilitation. Also employed are three physicians including an ophthalmologist, a dentist and a medical doctor. The clinic is open whenever children are present to assist physicians, dispense medications, provide treatments and attend to sick or injured students. Students, staff and parents interviewed indicated a strong sense of safety and security at TSB.

Campus life for TSB students is well-rounded through a wide array of extra-curricular activities including Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, ham radio operation, TSB radio station, golf club, exercise club, forensics, after-hours tutoring, hay rides, cheerleading, chorus, private piano lessons, voice lessons, dances, Easter egg hunts, Prom, school trips, 4-H Club, horticulture, swimming, track and wrestling. Faculty and staff work long beyond the regular school day to keep each student as involved in school life as possible.

TSB has a very strong ally in Friends of Tennessee School for the Blind, Inc. Funds donated to this group supplement state appropriations by enhancing and enriching the educational, vocational, special skills, and social development of students enrolled in the Tennessee School for the Blind. Recent projects of the Friends of Tennessee School for the Blind include raising over \$100,000 for new handicapped accessible playground equipment, the Wonder (Sensory) Room, \$20,000 for replacement band instruments, replacement band and chorus uniforms, and the Electronic Library Initiative.

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

- The faculty and staff at TSB are a select group of highly qualified men and women who work collaboratively to meet the educational, emotional, physical and mental needs of the students in their charge. Many have made lifelong commitments to these students and their calling at TSB.
- The safety and security of the students at TSB is of paramount importance for faculty, parents and students as evidenced through observations, interviews and artifacts. From the residential cottages and the YSW's, to the clinic staff, the security staff and the O&M teachers, it is the passion of these individuals to provide for the needs of students attending TSB that allows them to adapt safely to the world outside the school's campus.
- TSB has many organizations working to provide services and funds to meet additional needs for the students. Friends of Tennessee School of the Blind is one such vital organization providing a wonderful playground for the students, uniforms for their musical groups and athletics, the sensory floor and more.

- All involved at TSB should be commended for the strong extra-curricular programs in place for the boys and girls who attend the school.

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

- The Resource Center is currently being expanding and moving to another building. The services provided for students in the state of Tennessee is invaluable. Funds should be sought to insure that materials, books and other ancillary materials continue to be made available in a timely manner to all in need this service.
- The Outreach Program is vital to students receiving services through LEAs. A third teacher has recently been added to the staff. The Director and Teachers are very dedicated to their tasks. Care should be taken to insure that the great distances traveled by these teachers to the LEA's to deliver services does not reduce the number of students who can receive their services or the level of service given.

**Finding:** Tennessee School for the Blind has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

## **Standard 6. Stakeholder Communications and Relationships**

**Standard:** The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

### **Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

TSB administration and personnel are committed to involving and collaborating with all school stakeholders. A myriad of avenues are established and utilized for providing stakeholders opportunity for collaboration and communication. The school fosters a learning community by involving all stakeholders and other members of the community to establish and maintain effective learning experiences. TSB systematically communicates information to stakeholders by utilizing newsletters, emails, the school website, IEP meetings, faculty and staff interactions with stakeholders, special school events and activities. During stakeholder interviews and examination of artifacts, the Team became aware of the high priority placed by the faculty and staff on communicating TSB's information and obtaining feedback and input from the school community. Correspondence from a variety of civic organizations, involvement of the Vanderbilt Special Education Department, involvement of the Cumberland University School of Nursing, minutes from the Friends of the TSB and the presence of a young volunteer from a nearby local high school further attest to the significance of active participation and community collaboration of those engaged in helping TSB develop and maintain effective learning experiences for its students.

The school's Outreach Program offers another route for communicating TSB's programs and services to the state's visually impaired children. However, from administratin and faculty comments and concerns, it is evident that many counties are not aware of the services provides by TSB.

Three specialists who are dually certified in vision, and O&M staff the Outreach Program. These specialists strive to expand TSB services and opportunities to the LEAs in counties not currently employing a certified teacher for students with visual impairments. A meeting with LEA supervisors begins the access TSB faculty needs in order to gather the necessary educational information to determine the most beneficial service or program needed by the individual student. Educational information is evaluated from the following sources if available: eye report, previous functional vision assessments (FVA), O&M assessments, current IEP, eligibility report, test scores, progress reports, and any other pertinent information that would aid in making accurate determinations for services.

According to student and faculty interviews, multiple extracurricular opportunities exist for positive student interaction with the school community to insure student needs are met at school in the classroom and outside the school environment. Some of those cited include music, art, forensics, goal ball, Scouts and the Special Olympics.

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

- The Outreach Program is an effective tool for communicating the opportunities that are offered to the State's visually impaired youth by TSB. It is also an asset to build strong ties with stakeholders, new and old, to the programs and services that make learning on so many levels attainable for all K-12 visually impaired students in Tennessee.
- TSB provides training to LEA's and its teachers which includes, assessment and evaluation services, currency in Braille materials, the latest assistive visual instruments in technology, and other innovative techniques and teaching strategies that engage students in the ownership and success of their own education and well being.
- The availability of school personnel and their efforts to be present when needed by students regardless of time constraints suggests that the caring and dedicated faculty epitomizes the statement from one stakeholder, "was better to behold than told".
- The determination of active stakeholders in renewing their efforts to get others outside the TSB community involved and knowledgeable about TSB students, mission and programs is further assurance that what is being done at TSB is notable, laudable and provides the educational equity for the positive influence on the future lives of visually impaired Tennesseans.

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

- Review, evaluate and update current practices for better communication opportunities among stakeholders.
- Assess suggestions of the student support specialist and initiate implementation of those suggestions as budget and other concerns allow.
- TSB administration and faculty acknowledge that TSB is one of Tennessee's best kept secrets. Explore new ways to market the school's curriculum, its services and programs, and its high rate of student success in entering the sighted world for both employment and higher educational opportunities. Find ways for those visually impaired children in other counties needing an effective academic and life skill program to utilize TSB campus offerings.

**Finding:** Tennessee School for the Blind has earned the overall assessment level of "Operational"

and has met this standard for accreditation.

## Standard 7. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

**Standard:** The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

**Description - The team noted how the school met the intent of the standard based on the preponderance of evidence:**

TSB establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance. Evidence of engaged continuous evaluation was evident in the review of documents, comprehensive stakeholder interview sessions and classroom learning experiences observed during the Quality Assurance Review visit. By design, school and program improvement planning is a continuous process for TSB. The student population of TSB is unique in that all students are served by an IEP which is developed with the parent, LEA, and TSB personnel. The IEP is updated annually or as needed to ensure the academic success of the student. TSB also serves infants, toddlers, and pre-school children in need of vision services.

The Tennessee Comprehensive System Wide Planning Process (TCSPP) is continuously implemented, reevaluated, and updated according to student performance and school effectiveness utilizing a collaborative process involving all stakeholders. The team found evidence of faculty/staff focus on student achievement based on formative and summative assessments. Frequent use of collaborative, task-oriented groups places students at the heart of the learning process. Weekly meetings with the school's pupil service committee are held as a means of monitoring student progress. IEP's are updated using the wizard on the Easy IEP program. Local educational agencies can monitor student progress in a "view only" component of the Easy IEP program. The Response to Intervention Plan which gives each elementary student two periods of math and language arts each day was developed in response to research with indicated that students with visual impairments require extended time for math and language arts.

TSB ensures that the school personnel are provided professional development and technical assistance to implement intervention and achieve improvement goals. Dr. LaRhea Sanford assists the school by working with teachers to develop improvement plans and provide appropriate instruction. Para-educators are trained and assigned to all elementary classrooms. The technology department of TSB provides leadership and assistance for both staff and students. New assistive technology devices are changing student engagement and providing enhanced opportunities for learning experiences. The technology staff continually collaborates with technology companies and often beta tests the latest new technology products before they even become available on the market. This places the school on the cutting edge in working effectively with technology to assist the vision impaired community.

TSB is a unique school serving the visually impaired across the state of Tennessee. Due to the organization of TSB with students from grade K through 12 possessing a wide range of disabilities, the school often operates and processes in various departments. It will be important for TSB to continue to seek ways to involve all stakeholders in the decision making process and to ensure that intentional opportunities to communicate and collaborate on school improvement.

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

- Engages in a continuous process of improvements with focuses on student performance and achievement.
- Provides information about students, their performance, and school effectiveness that is meaningful and useful to stakeholders.
- Ensures that the staff participates in a continuous focused program of professional development.
- Trained para-educators are provided for all elementary classrooms.
- The faculty and staff use best practices and research in providing appropriate learning for TSB students.

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

- Continue to seek opportunities to provide stakeholders meaningful roles in the decision-making process that promotes a culture of participation, responsibility and ownership.

**Finding:** Tennessee School for the Blind has earned the overall assessment level of "Highly Functional" and has met this standard for accreditation.

## Conclusion

The commendations and recommendations in this report are designed to focus the school on those areas that will have the greatest impact on student performance and school effectiveness. While powerful in potential, the commendations and recommendations only have meaning when acted upon by the school. The strength of this report lies in the school's commitment to using the findings to continuously improve. The key is action. The school is encouraged to use the report as a call to action, a tool to sustain momentum in the ongoing process of continuous improvement.

The team identified several recommendations for improvement that the school will need to address. Two years following this review, the school will be required to submit a progress report summarizing its progress toward addressing the team's recommendations.

The Quality Assurance Review Team expresses appreciation to Jim A. Oldham, members of the professional staff, students, parents and other community representatives for their hospitality throughout the visit. The team wishes the school and its students much success in the quest for excellence through SACS CASI accreditation with AdvancED.



# Appendix

## Quality Assurance Review Team Members

- Donna Youree, Chair
- Laura Harper, Team Member
- Linda Collins, Team Member
- Mary Dianne Mcbrayer, Team Member

## AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools

The AdvancED Standards for Quality Schools are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness. As schools reach higher levels of implementation of the standards, they will have a greater capacity to support ever-increasing student performance and organizational effectiveness. Each of the seven standards listed below has corresponding indicators and impact statements which can be accessed at [www.advanc-ed.org](http://www.advanc-ed.org).

### **Vision and Purpose**

The school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

### **Governance and Leadership**

The school provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.

### **Teaching and Learning**

The school provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

### **Documenting and Using Results**

The school enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

### **Resource and Support Systems**

The school has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

### **Stakeholder Communications and Relationships**

The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

### **Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.