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January 14, 2011

Ms. Ann Majestic
Mr. Jonathan Blumberg
Tharrington Smith, LLP
209 Fayetteville Street
P.O. Box 1151
Raleigh, North Carolina 27602

Dear Ms. Majestic and Mr. Blumberg,

I am in receipt of your letter regarding the accreditation review process to be conducted by AdvancED. First, and foremost, AdvancED recognizes the history and tradition of the Wake County Schools. However accreditation is a process focused on improvement of an institution's future. Our concerns and focus in the accreditation review process are to identify areas for improvement.

During the past six months, the leadership of Wake County Schools has maintained a confrontational attitude towards the accreditation process. The expectations defined through our standards, policies, and procedures are applied to over 27,000 institutions throughout the world. In no other instance has an institution or school system failed to cooperate in the accreditation process. In your letter you are asking for us to deviate from the policies and procedures that guide our work with all other school systems and their institutions. As indicated earlier, we respectfully decline your requests.

The accreditation process works when institutions and our independent reviewers operate in a collegial and collaborative manner. The accreditation process is not a legal process. It is an educational process designed to facilitate improvement. In order for this process to succeed we will insist that all parties engage in this process freely and openly.

As we have stated in the past, the focus of the accreditation review process for Wake County will be on Accreditation Standard Two: Governance and Leadership. The standard reads as follows:

The accreditation divisions of AdvancED are

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)

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GOVERNANCE

In fulfillment of this standard, the school operates under the jurisdiction of a governing board that:

- 2.1. Establishes policies and procedures that provide for the effective operation of the school
- 2.2. Recognizes and preserves the executive, administrative, and leadership prerogatives of the administrative head of the school
- 2.3. Ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws, standards, and regulations

LEADERSHIP

In fulfillment of this standard, the school has leadership that:

- 2.4. Employs a system that provides for analysis and review of student performance and school effectiveness
- 2.5. Fosters a learning community
- 2.6. Provides teachers and students opportunities to lead
- 2.7. Provides stakeholders meaningful roles in the decision-making process that promote a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership
- 2.8. Controls curricular and extracurricular activities that are sponsored by the school
- 2.9. Responds to community expectations and stakeholder satisfaction
- 2.10. Implements an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel

It is important to note that the standard clearly indicates the role of the governing board as a requirement. The governing board of the high schools in Wake County is the Board of Education. In addition, the review team has the responsibility to identify, if evident, violations of other AdvancED standards and policies that may be discovered through this review process.

As I noted in my last communication to Ms. Majestic, the core questions associated with the standards that will be the focus of the visit are:

- Is the governing board for the Wake County Schools effective in carrying out its roles and responsibilities?
- Is the governing board for the Wake County Schools following established policy related to the work of the board in fulfillment of its responsibilities?
- Does the governing board have appropriate controls and monitoring strategies to evaluate the impact of its adopted policies on the quality of the educational program?
- Does the governing board engage stakeholders in matters related to policy development and adoption? In particular, does the governing board provide authentic opportunities for the community to provide feedback to the board on potentially new or revised policies?



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- Does the governing board adopt and implement policy that is aligned and supportive of the school system's vision and direction including its expectations for student learning?
- Do the governing board and system leadership meet the criteria and expectations for Accreditation Standard Two?

These are legitimate questions within the scope of the accreditation standards, policies, and procedures. In addition, Review Team members will ask questions during the interview process that seek to gain evidence and clarity around how the board operates, the impact of board decisions on individual schools, and how the board institutes its policies. The focus of the inquiry is to not dictate policy to the Board of Education or to exert control over the governing powers and authorities. However, it is designed to help the Board of Education improve their effectiveness so as to benefit the schools for which it governs.

In addition I indicated our position on the current investigation by the Office of Civil Rights. The statement in my last communication was,

“The review will not be focused on the ongoing matter between the school system and the Office of Civil Rights. Outside of the mere fact that such a matter is ongoing we shall not make any determination, opinion, or observation related to such a matter. We have conducted reviews of schools and school systems that are concurrently involved in a legal matter. Our teams are instructed to refrain from any comment or observation related to the legal matter. Our teams are trained to focus on applying only the accreditation criteria in the review process.”

As such, the review process for Wake County Schools is to be conducted on February 17-18, 2011 by a team of professionals to be assigned by AdvancED. The team will likely be different than the initially appointed team due to scheduling conflicts and other professional responsibilities. We will inform you of the team appointments as soon as the individuals are confirmed. For those individuals of the Board and Senior Leadership that desire legal counsel present, one may be present but only as an observer. If this is not satisfactory the individual has the right to decline to participate. In addition, no member of the Board or Senior Leadership shall be required by the district to have legal counsel present.

Providing that the Wake County Board of Education decides to maintain its accreditation we will conduct the visit on February 17-18, 2011 with or without the cooperation of individual board members and professional staff. However it is our hope that the Review Team will have the full cooperation of the leadership of the school system so that a fair and objective visit can be conducted.

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Unless we hear otherwise, AdvancED will make appropriate preparations to conduct its review on February 17-18, 2011. In preparation for the visit please ensure the following:

- Identify and make available a contact person for communication and coordination with AdvancED
- Host the Special Review Team on the date requested by AdvancED
- Assist in arranging for stakeholders and other individuals to be interviewed as requested by AdvancED
- Make available artifacts, and if need be copies of the same, for the team's review
- Assist in coordinating and scheduling observations that may be requested by the team
- Make available the superintendent of schools, leadership team, high school principals, and Governing Board to meet with the Special Review Team as needed while on site

It is our hope and expectation that the Wake County Schools will remain committed to the accreditation process and proceed with the full cooperation of the Board of Education.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Mark A. Elgart'. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Mark A. Elgart, Ed.D., President/CEO