

13017 Wisteria Drive #457
Germantown, MD 20874
301-916-8460 (tel)
301-916-8485 (fax)
cape@capenet.org

www.capenet.org

**CAPE member
organizations:**

Agudath Israel
of America
American Montessori
Society
Association Montessori
International—USA
Association of Christian
Teachers and Schools
Association of Christian
Schools International
Association of Waldorf
Schools of N.A.
Christian Schools
International
Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
Friends Council
on Education
Lutheran Church—
Missouri Synod
National Association of
Episcopal Schools
National Association of
Independent Schools
National Catholic
Educational Association
National Christian
School Association
Oral Roberts University
Educational Fellowship
Seventh-day Adventist
Board of Education
United States Conference
of Catholic Bishops
Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod Schools
32 Affiliated State
Organizations

**Summary of Remarks by
Mark Elgart, President and CEO, AdvancED
Eddie Krenson, Vice President for Nonpublic School Services
at the CAPE Board Meeting
March 15, 2010**

Presentation by Dr. Elgart

Dr. Elgart began his presentation by providing an overview of AdvancED, making the following points:

- AdvancED works with over 27,000 public and private schools and districts in the United States, though approximately 90 percent of its schools are public. It also serves supplementary education programs and distance education corporations. It provides accreditation and school improvement services to Department of Defense schools around the world. Its reach extends to 67 countries, serving well over 15 million students.
- AdvancED is more than an accreditation agency, although accreditation of individual schools and systems of schools is a core aspect of its work. All accreditation is done through the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement [hereinafter NCA] and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement [hereinafter SACS]. About half the schools are accredited through an individual school accreditation model, and the other half through a systems model used in public school districts and Catholic dioceses.
- AdvancED's research division has drawn on its extensive data set to publish a study on the impact of accreditation on school improvement. It will soon release a study on the impact of its systems model on school improvement and student achievement. AdvancED uses its research to develop products and services, to modify its programs of accreditation and school improvement, and to provide support to other agencies, such as state education departments.
- AdvancED's information technology division develops customized software solutions in the area of school improvement. Its professional learning division provides workshops and conferences.
- AdvancED's growth is not chiefly in the area of accreditation, but in the development of products and school-improvement services and in its work with state education departments and other entities that operate schools. Its diverse staff of about 200 is growing at a rate of two to three per month, and it is building a new world headquarters in Atlanta.

- In its growth, AdvancED is not looking to put others out of work, but is looking to build on the leverage points it has within its network. It has strengthened its relationships with other entities to benefit its own work and that of others.
- AdvancED is governed by a nine-member board of trustees made up of business and education leaders throughout this country. Its accreditation commission includes about 37 members, who represent every aspect of accreditation. It has state councils in each of its states, and regional councils serving groups of schools that cut across regions. It is recognized for accreditation by the United States Department of Education for non-degree granting postsecondary institutions and is subject to certain rules and regulations in this regard. Its standards, policies, protocols, and governance structures cover PK through postsecondary.

Dr. Elgart described several major initiatives that AdvancED is undertaking:

- AdvancED is currently working on a Web-based knowledge management system that includes the school accreditation and improvement work of over 27,000 schools. The system includes the ability to drill down into a robust database of school information, allowing users to aggregate and disaggregate data. AdvancED uses the database, which provides both quantitative and qualitative analytics, for its own research, but it also makes the system available to its accreditation partners.
- One of AdvancED's accreditation partners is the Southern Association of Independent Schools [hereinafter SAIS]. AdvancED is also working on developing accreditation partnership agreements with the National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA), International Christian Accrediting Association (ICAA), and the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI).
- Another AdvancED initiative is ASSIST, the Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tools. Although ASSIST is included in accreditation work, it was principally designed for use with state departments of education. Of the 15 states that are finalists for the Race to the Top program, five states make reference in their applications to the name or work of ASSIST for use with schools and districts throughout the state.
- Another AdvancED initiative is the development of new standards, which it revises every five years. Standards are completed at least one year prior to implementation so that AdvancED can provide orientation and training to schools and districts that are required to use them. The five-year standards cycle corresponds to a five-year school/district accreditation cycle, so with each new cycle, schools potentially face a new set of standards. Over the years, the standards have evolved, becoming stronger, clearer, more coherent, and fewer. The standards push schools through a process of continuous improvement. The basic standards apply to all institutions, PK through postsecondary, that seek accreditation through AdvancED.

Dr. Elgart addressed the issue of co-accreditation, offering the following observations:

- Co-accreditation emerged with some significance in the 1990s. It was a process in which one accrediting association would lend its name to the accreditation work of another association so that a school could get multiple accreditations while only having to deal in principle with one accreditation body. The concept is not supported by the United States Department of Education at the postsecondary level. USDE accreditation criteria require an accrediting agency to have a direct relationship with the accredited institution and to demonstrate that the institution meets the agency's standards and criteria. An agency cannot allow its accreditation to be granted by another agency or through another agency's work. A lot of the reason why co-accreditation flourished was through the influence of the Commission on International Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA) and the National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA).
- When AdvancED acquired CITA, it decided it did not need another accreditation brand within its network that competed with the NCA and SACS brands. It decided to discontinue the CITA brand and to integrate CITA schools within the NCA and SACS network. The move opened the door for AdvancED to redefine co-accreditation, because there actually were no co-accreditation agreements between AdvancED per se and either CITA or NCPSA (or any other agency, for that matter) with the exception of SAIS. (All other co-accreditation agreements had been with pre-acquisition agencies.) From a legal standpoint, AdvancED had to renew under a different arrangement any co-accreditation agreement.
- In examining co-accreditation relationships, AdvancED asked how co-accreditation agencies should relate to one another, and it concluded that having one agency be silent and defer to the actions of the other was not in the best interests of the institutions being accredited. Schools make independent decisions to be accredited by two or more agencies, for example, a regional accrediting body and a body specific to the school's culture, like ACSI. The reasons behind a school seeking both regional accreditation and some additional accreditation are not the same.
- In reexamining co-accreditation, AdvancED looked at the strengths that both accrediting agencies would bring to the process and sought to create a partnership that would leverage those distinctive strengths, enabling two accreditations while not requiring schools to go through duplicate processes. AdvancED knows what it is and what it isn't. It is not, for example, a Christian accrediting association and is not going to try to act like one. It is an organization that accredits a lot of different schools, public and private, throughout the world. A group like ACSI, for example, handles some aspects of accreditation better than AdvancED could ever do, while there are things that AdvancED, NCA, and SACS do that ACSI does not do. The goal is to leverage the capacities of both agencies in a very powerful way to make both active in the process. AdvancED has sat down with several agencies to discuss accreditation partnerships in a way that elevates the work of both agencies and does not diminish one below the other.

Presentation by Dr. Krenson

Dr. M. Edward (Eddie) Krenson described accreditation partnerships as follows:

- AdvancED's accreditation partnerships are based on four essential elements of an effective accreditation process: (1) Quality Standards. These are research-based standards that are applicable to a number of different organizations and associations. One of the big improvements in AdvancED's standards is that they no longer address discreet elements such as the number of hours of instruction or the specific credentials of teachers. The partnering organization now defines the discrete elements it requires of its schools and that relate to its values. (2) Quality Process. There has to be alignment, harmony, and integration among the self-study process, the visitation process, and the post-accountability process. Further, everyone who is involved with each stage of the accreditation experience has to understand that process. (3) Cultural Competence. Given the variety of types of schools, a critical element is that the visiting team must understand the cultural context of the school. The quality of the accreditation experience is much higher and can be transformational if the visiting team has an experiential and intuitive knowledge of the heart and soul of the institution. The partnering agency brings this cultural knowledge to the table, and for this reason, AdvancED believes it can accredit nonpublic schools better through partnerships, rather than alone. (4) Procedural Competence of the Chair. At the least, the chair of the visiting team has to be a process expert. But if the chair possesses both cultural competence *and* procedural competence, the visitation process is all the more enhanced.
- In its work with future accreditation partners, AdvancED will first talk with the potential partner to see if there is something both parties can bring to leverage the experience for their schools. Assuming an agreement is reached, AdvancED will then train representatives of the partnership agencies in the AdvancED processes and standards. Those representatives will also bring the cultural competence to the process.
- Each of the partnering relationships, even though built on that same framework, will be a little different from one partner to the next. The development of the partnership takes hard work, with each party bringing their values to the table and deciding whether there is a good basis for the relationship. Both sides then assume mutual responsibility to help make the relationship happen. The goal is to have an accreditation experience that each party separately would never be able to achieve on its own.

Questions and Answers

Members of the group asked Dr. Elgart a series of questions. A summary of the key points made in those questions and responses follows:

On a practical level, what is the distinction between the new partnerships and the old co-accreditation agreements?

- As a starting point, partners are asked to accept AdvancED's standards and indicators, which are secular and which apply from PK to postsecondary. Partners are asked to analyze their own current accreditation standards and indicators in relation to AdvancED's standards and indicators in order to identify the overlaps, gaps, and differences. Standards and indicators not covered by AdvancED are incorporated into the process, with some being classified as "assurances." For example, a Christian school might have to assure that its teachers are active Christians committed to their faith. Such assurances might be addressed during the self-study. Another assurance might relate to a school's admissions policy. In short, the gaps between AdvancED's standards and the partner's standards are filled through a variety of mechanisms, with evidence determined as to what would constitute meeting the standards.
- Partners also commit to a process that includes self-study, peer review or evaluation, and a follow-up. Agreement is then reached on a timeframe for the procedure so that there is one cycle that the institution would go through, not multiple cycles. AdvancED then provides training on its standards and indicators. Also, AdvancED offers and provides the agency with access to its data management system, which would enable them to do research on their network of schools.
- The partners bring forth the cultural competence to the experience, and also contribute the volunteers who engage collaboratively with both agencies in the training. In the end, the school will have a single accreditation experience.
- A memorandum of agreement between AdvancED and the partnering agency spells out what AdvancED will provide and what the partner will provide. The partner brings forward leverage points that are important to the network of schools that it represents.

My understanding is that in partnership arrangements, AdvancED will train the chair in procedural competence, the partner will train the team in cultural competence, and AdvancED may or not provide training to the team. Is that correct?

- Absolutely. And AdvancED is working to provide support to the agency to train those team members, too. The training may be face-to-face or through webinars or other distance strategies. AdvancED believes that team members have to be oriented to the process before they go in. AdvancED sees its job as ensuring that the team knows the process, and sees the partnering agency as ensuring that the team has cultural competence.

What steps should an agency take to partner with AdvancED?

- Contact AdvancED. Meet with AdvancED at its offices or yours to share the process and expectations and to determine if there is the potential for moving

forward. AdvancED is very open to any agency that would want to engage in a partnership, including any NCPSEA member.

Given the Obama Administration's new blueprint for ESEA and its Race to the Top program, do you see AdvancED's data collection efforts as coming more into play?

- Absolutely. The blueprint extends the notion of how you define and identify student performance beyond a single test. It uses the term “complete education,” and in a day and age where we are seeing public schools narrow the educational offerings, the term suggests something much broader. Other encouraging and relevant components of the blueprint include: the commitment to college and career readiness; the notion that school quality is not measured by a single test but by multiple factors of student performance as well as factors associated with the quality of the institution, including school climate, leadership, professional development—factors that are in AdvancED's standards. Also referenced in the blueprint was the expectation that schools will be reviewed by high quality review teams—the notion of peer evaluation coming into play. Another change is the notion of moving away from just holding schools accountable, to introducing district and state accountability. The document also recommends that a new national convening authority be established to evaluate and monitor state departments of education.
- The blueprint is suggesting that state departments of education return to their technical assistance role, for which they were principally designed, as opposed to having them serve as evaluators and judges of schools, which is the case under NCLB. Some states do not have the human capital to conduct school-level evaluations. Independent third parties should be doing diagnostic evaluations of schools and school systems, and there are many in the private sector that can do that.

Please provide the pros and cons of regional accreditation on the one hand and national/international accreditation on the other.

- Regional accreditation was never set in law. The U.S. Department of Education defines the regions upon which the postsecondary accreditors are limited for purposes of Title IV. At the K-12 level, regional accreditors in the past honored their regions through gentlemen's agreements. But regional accreditation has never been “regional” outside the country. When the regional agencies first started to accredit outside the United States in the 1930s and 40s, there was huge controversy and conflict among the regionals because they were starting to go outside their traditional domestic-only accreditation activity. Initially, some regionals rejected the notion that accrediting bodies should be outside the country. But since the 1960s, the regionals have been very competitive abroad. Today, even within the United States, some of the regionals accredit outside their regions.
- A lot of the delivery of educational services is no longer state-specific or region-specific. Trans-state providers are showing up at the postsecondary level and the

PK-12 level. Primrose, for example, started in Georgia, but now has early childhood centers across the country. It has been said that the regions were defined by how far one could reasonably travel by train in a day. Today, given the advances in travel, communications, and networks of schools, regional accreditation no longer makes sense and is likely to fade.

What states currently recognize AdvancED?

- AdvancED does not accredit under the name of “AdvancED,” though it may do so in the future. NCA, SACS, and the other regionals are noted in 50 state codes over 800 times. But AdvancED itself has not sought recognition in state statute because it does not accredit using the AdvancED name. If it were to accredit under that name, it would pursue state recognition.

Please explain district-wide and association-wide accreditation.

- AdvancED does not have association-wide accreditation, only district-wide or system accreditation, which applies to schools under a single jurisdiction, such as a public school district or a Catholic diocese. About half of AdvancED’s accredited schools are covered under the system approach. In systems with less than 12 schools (about 70 percent of the public school districts it accredits), every school is visited. But in the system approach, it is not only the individual schools that are evaluated, but also the system as a whole, so the central office and board of education are visited as well because they have a lot to say about how schools operate, how they are administered, the curriculum, the structure, the practice, the pacing of instruction, etc. The individual schools are a body of evidence on how the system operates. AdvancED’s research shows that the success of an individual school is directly related to the capacity of the system, and you really cannot understand the success of an individual school unless you understand the context in which it operates. Within a system, a school’s governance, policies, administrative procedures, etc., are all defined external to the school. District-wide accreditation has been the fastest-growing part of AdvancED’s work. Over 80 percent of the public school systems that AdvancED accredits use the district model as a prime driver for meeting and monitoring their accountability requirements. They are finding that they are getting much more out of the district model than the school-by-school model.
- In one Catholic school system, every school was defining and delivering its own curriculum, but as a result of the diocese preparing for the system model, its schools are now implementing a cohesive diocesan-wide curriculum, with teachers being brought together in collaborative and cooperative ways to deliver the curriculum to children. Still, not every diocese is interested in the system accreditation, and AdvancED still has the school-based model available for those who want it.

Please elaborate on the data collection component of AdvancED's operation.

- When schools go through self-study and self-assessment, they respond to the standards and indicators in a qualitative way; they describe the practices that they engage in to meet those indicators. AdvancED is looking deep into that data to see what schools are doing, how they're doing it, and what they're doing extremely well. AdvancED is also identifying where schools are having problems or challenges. At the same time, AdvancED has a quantitative aspect to its data, which allows a look at the data over time in a much more efficient manner.
- The benefit of peer review is demonstrated when you look at the comparison of assessment ratings that schools give themselves and the ratings the teams give them. There is a significant and statistical difference between the two, and that is where the growth comes, through the recommendations that schools are asked to implement. A professional tension is created that stimulates growth. The data are showing that.

What is the intention of AdvancED when it comes to publishing the data it collects? Are there concerns about such things as intellectual property, financial status, and school confidentiality?

- AdvancED does not publish confidential information. It publishes information about schools in relation to its standards. Financial information is not published for private schools, nor is any information that would be a violation of the school's privacy.

My own experience is that everything you described about accreditation partnerships is exactly what we have been experiencing through co-accreditation. Please address that point.

- In some of its co-accreditation agreements, AdvancED was asked to be a silent partner in the relationship, and those partners were troubled when AdvancED said it wanted to get involved in the accreditation process....

But there was disagreement within the membership of NCPSA about meeting the terms articulated by AdvancED.

- That's fine. I do not begrudge NCPSA for going its separate way. I put those terms in writing based on what was discussed at a meeting we had. I did not find the terms problematic, and ICAA, ACSI, and ISACS did not have difficulty moving forward. But NCPSA decided not to work through what was to be a very open and transparent process of trying to establish a relationship between NCPSA and AdvancED, and that's fine. We are going to work with the agencies that want to work with us.

I always saw the advantages of SACS and NCA as being independent accrediting agencies not beholden to other interests, but your presentation suggests a corporation that could be influenced by other interests and revenue streams. I would appreciate your response to that observation.

- It is correct to say that AdvancED is more than an accreditation agency. The very people who made up SACS and NCA were the principal drivers to create AdvancED. There is a firewall around the accreditation work, so the other work of AdvancED does not influence the accreditation work or modify it in a way that diminishes it. The accreditation is delivered by a volunteer base, a model that NCA and SACS had for nearly 100 years each, so from that standpoint, the accreditation work has not been negatively altered because of the corporate structure. Moreover, because AdvancED is not a membership association, it is not governed by the institutions it accredits, giving it greater independence when it comes to accrediting schools. Still, it is working in the best interests of the institutions it accredits in that its accreditation policies are determined by an independent commission. In addition, because of its other revenue streams, AdvancED's growth is not dependent on the accreditation of additional institutions. In fact, although AdvancED has grown in the past few years, its accreditation work has remained fairly constant. In addition, because of its growth in other areas, schools get added benefit through access to such products as the knowledge management system, which cost several millions of dollars to create and which is made available despite the fact that accreditation fees have seen little change in the past seven or eight years.

When a school contracts for accreditation, with whom is it contracting?

- That is defined through the partnership. The SAIS-SACS partnership, for example, allows for schools to use a single process and receive accreditation by both agencies. If a partnership breaks down, the institution is still accredited by each entity, except that in the future, the accreditation process would no longer be integrated and seamless. An individual school has three options regarding accreditation from two partnering agencies: it can contract with agency 1 for accreditation; it can contract with agency 2, or it can contract for an integrated accreditation process, receiving dual accreditation through a single process. If the partnership disintegrates, it does not destroy the individual contracts that the institution has with each accrediting agency.

Is there a conflict of interest between AdvancED's work to improve schools and its accreditation operation?

- The two operations are separate and different. In Michigan, for example, there are about 4,000 public schools, to which, through a contract with the state education department, AdvancED provides school improvement services. But AdvancED only accredits about 1,200 public schools in the state. Where there is

- overlap, AdvancED has an agreement with the state so that a school does not have to duplicate efforts because accreditation corresponds to the state requirement. But the remaining 2,800 schools in the state are not accredited by AdvancED, just served in their school improvement. Some are Title I schools, some have not met AYP and require technical assistance. They are separate contracts, using separate staffs, and separate departments within AdvancED.
- In Wyoming, the state uses AdvancED's accreditation process as its school improvement process. It is a seamless, integrated structure. All public schools in the state must be accredited through AdvancED. They also use ASSIST to strengthen their programs. The Department of Defense also uses AdvancED to accredit all their schools. So the arrangement depends on the agency, but there is no conflict.

As with Wall Street firms that got in trouble because they provide both accounting services and financial consulting services, is there the potential for AdvancED to tell a client, we will only accredit you if you improve, and we have the improvement tools that could help you?

- AdvancED is very aware of that issue and that is why we have placed a firewall around our accreditation division. The other divisions are managed separately and have different personnel.

How did AdvancED get started?

- In 2004 in Salt Lake City, the executive committees of NCA and SACS sat down and talked about the future. The groups realized they were both struggling separately. There was a need for additional technical resources and there was also a desire to engage in more research that could be turned into action at the school level. NCA, SACS, and the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) eventually came together. SACS had acquired NSSE because most of NSSE's research was being done for SACS, rather than for the other regionals that had originally helped create it.
- The purpose of the new group was not just to create a large accreditation agency. The world of school improvement is a vast ocean, especially in the public arena, and accreditation is an island within that ocean. Over 90 percent of AdvancED's work is in the public schools, and its greatest area of growth is in working directly with state departments of education to help them deliver school improvement services under state or federal programs.

Is AdvancED offering a static model of school improvement that is not big enough to bring about the huge changes that are necessary for real growth in education? Does it focus too much on narrow input criteria?

- If you look at AdvancED's standards, 12 years ago there were about 270 standards that included very discreet requirements that were largely

- discriminatory against private schools, because they were really designed by public-school people. A quantum leap was made in 2000 in that we went down to 10 standards with some corresponding indicators. We started to move away from very particular requirements. In 2006, we went down to seven standards, removing all discrete requirements relating to such things as class size, time allocations, and the qualifications for staff. And some volunteers and staff were nervous, believing that we would lose schools. But we believed that there were different types of schools and strategies upon which schools can be successful, so we had to broaden the entry point. So AdvancED moved from the “5,000 foot level” of specificity to the “30,000 foot level,” with seven standards or lenses upon which schools are evaluated. The process now asks, for example: What is the school’s vision, purpose, values? Is the school adhering to its mission? (AdvancED does not define the vision, the school does. It helps the institution understand who it is and what it is about.) How does the school govern? What is its leadership structure, and how does the leadership structure operate in order to ensure the continuous improvement of the institution? What are the school’s expectations for teaching and learning? What results is the school getting, and how are the results used? What resources are being deployed? How are stakeholders engaged? Is the school committed to continuous improvement? These are the kinds of issues that our accreditation looks at.
- AdvancED is currently revising its standards and may go from seven to five, based on what the research is showing, by taking continuous improvement and stakeholder engagement and integrating them as themes throughout the other five standards. So, AdvancED is more open to multiple models of school improvement, engagement, and delivery than ever before. And it was the private school community that really pushed AdvancED in that direction. SAIS argued that the old standards discriminated against private schools because, for example, the quality of teachers does not depend on certification, it depends on what they know and how well they are able to deliver instruction. And SAIS won that argument and played a big part in getting AdvancED to the point it is today. So I thank them for what they brought to us from the independent school perspective.