



# Fort Thomas Independent Schools

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Fort Thomas, Kentucky (USA)

**April 18 – 21, 2021**

**System Accreditation Engagement Review**

215236

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# Cognia Continuous Improvement System

Cognia defines continuous improvement as "an embedded behavior rooted in an institution's culture that constantly focuses on conditions, processes, and practices to improve teaching and learning." The Cognia Continuous Improvement System (CIS) provides a systemic, fully integrated solution to help institutions map out and navigate a successful improvement journey. In the same manner that educators are expected to understand the unique needs of every learner and tailor the education experience to drive student success, every institution must be empowered to map out and embrace their unique improvement journey. Cognia expects institutions to use the results and the analysis of data from various interwoven components for the implementation of improvement actions to drive education quality and improved student outcomes. While each improvement journey is unique, the journey is driven by key actions.

The findings of the Engagement Review Team are organized by the ratings from the Cognia Performance Standards Diagnostic and the Levels of Impact within the i3 Rubric: Initiate, Improve, and Impact.

## Initiate

The first phase of the improvement journey is to **Initiate** actions to cause and achieve better results. The elements of the Initiate phase are defined within the Levels of Impact of Engagement and Implementation. Engagement is the level of involvement and frequency of stakeholders in the desired practices, processes, or programs within the institution. Implementation is the process of monitoring and adjusting the administration of the desired practices, processes, or programs for quality and fidelity. Standards identified within Initiate should become the focus of the institution's continuous improvement journey toward the collection, analysis, and use of data to measure the results of engagement and implementation. Enhancing the capacity of the institution in meeting these Standards has the greatest potential impact on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

## Improve

The second phase of the improvement journey is to gather and evaluate the results of actions to **Improve**. The elements of the **Improve** phase are defined within the Levels of Impact of Results and Sustainability. Results come from the collection, analysis, and use of data and evidence to demonstrate attaining the desired result(s). Sustainability is results achieved consistently to demonstrate growth and improvement over time (a minimum of three years). Standards identified within Improve are those in which the institution is using results to inform their continuous improvement processes and to demonstrate over time the achievement of goals. The institution should continue to analyze and use results to guide improvements in student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

## Impact

The third phase of achieving improvement is **Impact**, where desired practices are deeply entrenched. The elements of the **Impact** phase are defined within the Level of Impact of Embeddedness. Embeddedness is the degree to which the desired practices, processes, or programs are deeply ingrained in the culture and operation of the institution. Standards identified within Impact are those in which the institution has demonstrated ongoing growth and improvement over time and has embedded the practices within its culture. Institutions should continue to support and sustain these practices that yield results in improving student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

# Cognia Performance Accreditation and the Engagement Review

Accreditation is pivotal in leveraging education quality and continuous improvement. Using a set of rigorous research-based standards, the Cognia Accreditation Process examines the whole institution—the program, the cultural context, and the community of stakeholders—to determine how well the parts work together to meet the needs of learners. Through the accreditation process, highly skilled and trained Engagement Review Teams gather first-hand evidence and information pertinent to evaluating an institution’s performance against the research-based Cognia Performance Standards. Review teams use these Standards to assess the quality of learning environments to gain valuable insights and target improvements in teaching and learning. Cognia provides Standards that are tailored for all education providers so that the benefits of accreditation are universal across the education community.

Through a comprehensive review of evidence and information, our experts gain a broad understanding of institution quality. Using the Standards, the review team provides valuable feedback to institutions, which helps to focus and guide each institution’s improvement journey. Valuable evidence and information from other stakeholders, including students, also are obtained through interviews, surveys, and additional activities.

## Cognia Standards Diagnostic Results

The Cognia Performance Standards Diagnostic is used by the Engagement Review Team to evaluate the institution’s effectiveness based on the Cognia Performance Standards. The diagnostic consists of three components built around each of three Domains: **Leadership Capacity**, **Learning Capacity**, and **Resource Capacity**. Results are reported within four ranges identified by color. The results for the three Domains are presented in the tables that follow.

Color	Rating	Description
Red	Insufficient	Identifies areas with insufficient evidence or evidence that indicated little or no activity leading toward improvement
Yellow	Initiating	Represents areas to enhance and extend current improvement efforts
Green	Improving	Pinpoints quality practices that are improving and meet the Standards
Blue	Impacting	Demonstrates noteworthy practices producing clear results that positively impact the institution

Under each Standard statement is a row indicating the scores related to the elements of Cognia’s i3 Rubric. The rubric is scored from one (1) to four (4). A score of four on any element indicates high performance, while a score of one or two indicates an element in need of improvement. The following table provides the key to the abbreviations of the elements of the i3 Rubric.

Element	Abbreviation
Engagement	EN
Implementation	IM
Results	RE
Sustainability	SU
Embeddedness	EM

## Leadership Capacity Domain

The capacity of leadership to ensure an institution's progress toward its stated objectives is an essential element of organizational effectiveness. An institution's leadership capacity includes the fidelity and commitment to its purpose and direction, the effectiveness of governance and leadership to enable the institution to realize its stated objectives, the ability to engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways, and the capacity to implement strategies that improve learner and educator performance.

Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.1	The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	4	EM:	
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	4	EM:	
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.7	Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
1.8	Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	

Leadership Capacity Standards										Rating
1.11	Leaders implement a quality assurance process for their institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	

## Learning Capacity Domain

The impact of teaching and learning on student achievement and success is the primary expectation of every institution. An effective learning culture is characterized by positive and productive teacher/learner relationships, high expectations and standards, a challenging and engaging curriculum, quality instruction and comprehensive support that enable all learners to be successful, and assessment practices (formative and summative) that monitor and measure learner progress and achievement. Moreover, a quality institution evaluates the impact of its learning culture, including all programs and support services, and adjusts accordingly.

Learning Capacity Standards										Rating
2.1	Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	3	EM:	
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	3	EM:	
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	

Learning Capacity Standards										Rating
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	3	EM:	
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to the demonstrable improvement of student learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	

## Resource Capacity Domain

The use and distribution of resources support the stated mission of the institution. Institutions ensure that resources are distributed and utilized equitably, so the needs of all learners are adequately and effectively addressed. The utilization of resources includes support for professional learning for all staff. The institution examines the allocation and use of resources to ensure appropriate levels of funding, sustainability, organizational effectiveness, and increased student learning.

Resource Capacity Standards										Rating
3.1	The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	4	EM:	
3.2	The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
3.3	The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
3.5	The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	

Resource Capacity Standards											Rating
3.6	The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	4	
3.7	The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	4	
3.8	The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	4	

## Assurances

Assurances are statements that accredited institutions must confirm they are meeting. The Assurance statements are based on the type of institution, and the responses are confirmed by the Accreditation Engagement Review Team. Institutions are expected to meet all Assurances and are expected to correct any deficiencies in unmet Assurances.

Assurances Met		
YES	NO	If No, List Unmet Assurances by Number Below
X		

## Accreditation Status and Index of Education Quality®

Cognia will review the results of the Accreditation Engagement Review to make a final determination concerning accreditation status, including the appropriate next steps for your institution in response to these findings. Cognia provides the Index of Education Quality (IEQ) as a holistic measure of overall performance based on a comprehensive set of standards and review criteria. This formative tool for improvement identifies areas of success and areas in need of focus. The IEQ comprises the Standards Diagnostic ratings from the three Domains: Leadership Capacity, Learning Capacity, and Resource Capacity. The IEQ results are reported on a scale of 100 to 400 and provide information about how the institution is performing compared to expected criteria. Institutions should review the IEQ in relation to the findings from the review in the areas of Initiate, Improve, and Impact. An IEQ score below 250 indicates that the institution has several areas within the Initiate level and should focus their improvement efforts on those Standards within that level. An IEQ in the range of 225–300 indicates that the institution has several Standards within the Improve level and is using results to inform continuous improvement and demonstrate sustainability. An IEQ of 275 and above indicates the institution is beginning to reach the Impact level and is engaged in practices that are sustained over time and are becoming ingrained in the culture of the institution.

Below is the average (range) of all Cognia Improvement Network (CIN) institutions evaluated for accreditation in the last five years. The range of the annual CIN IEQ average is presented to enable you to benchmark your results with other institutions in the network.



## Insights from the Review

The Engagement Review Team engaged in professional discussions and deliberations about the processes, programs, and practices within the institution to arrive at the findings of the team. These findings are organized around themes guided by the evidence, with examples of programs and practices, and suggestions for the institution's continuous improvement efforts. The Insights from the Review narrative should provide contextualized information from the team's deliberations and analysis of the practices, processes, and programs of the institution organized by the levels of Initiate, Improve, and Impact. The narrative also provides the next steps to guide the institution's improvement journey in its efforts to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all learners. The findings are aligned to research-based criteria designed to improve student learning and organizational effectiveness. The feedback provided in the Accreditation Engagement Review Report will assist the institution in reflecting on its current improvement efforts and to adapt and adjust their plans to continuously strive for improvement.

The Fort Thomas Independent review was conducted entirely through Zoom as a remote Engagement Review given the restrictions for meeting safely in person. The Engagement Review Team (team) engaged in information gathering sessions that included a thorough review of evidence provided by leadership, several pertinent online resources, and an introductory presentation delivered by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents for Teaching and Learning and Student Services. Additionally, interviews were conducted with representatives of community and district stakeholder groups. School leadership, staff, students, parents, board and community members informed team deliberations. Based on a collaborative process, the team identified themes of strength and opportunities using the Cognia standards to provide guidance. The areas of strength relate directly to the district's commitment to stakeholder involvement and their vision as a driving force throughout all areas of the organization. Those opportunities to guide the improvement journey the district is actively pursuing is found in the inclusion of an instructional framework and the formalization of assessing the Portrait of a Graduate.

**The commitment to stakeholder involvement is reflected in all aspects of district and school improvement.** An interview with the district leadership team revealed that many changes had occurred since the previous engagement review visit, including a new superintendent and district leadership team tasked with three specific board goals: increase national and international recognition, fund a new school, and prepare students for the future workplace. The new leadership team engaged multiple stakeholder groups to achieve these goals. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to help understand district students to discern where they were as far as achievement in comparison with other students across state lines to the assessment of graduates five or more years following their high school experience. The collection and analyses of multiple data from multiple stakeholder groups revealed findings that helped inform improvement efforts, resulting in defined operational processes that not only improved the quality of education for all students but also the experience.

Many opportunities to engage with multiple stakeholder groups were initiated. A leadership retreat with the Board of Education (BOE) and school and district leaders during the summer provide collaborative opportunities to engage in strategic planning and establish goals for the upcoming school year. With a change in BOE members, retraining is an important part of the process so the role of BOE member is understood. The BOE retreat is how the improvement plan is monitored and adjusted. Board members operate under a written code of ethics and understands their role in ensuring adherence to policies

supporting system effectiveness. Board policies are located on the system's website and are updated on a regular basis per state requirements.

The Superintendent's Council was established as an opportunity for the superintendent to engage in two-way communication with a cadre of parents, teachers, students, department leaders, and community members. These opportunities were put in place to address concerns and seek input about topics that are important to each group. An open-door policy is maintained to encourage communication, foster good relations, and promote trust. Engagement with stakeholder groups and individuals helped identify specific district needs around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Based on this feedback, a guiding coalition was formed and the creation of Inclusion Excellence, a plan for the district to be "more inclusive, to be more welcoming to students and families from diverse backgrounds" was created.

Interviews with school leadership revealed that implementing site-based councils to gather feedback from school stakeholders was a way to promote shared leadership. Principals would meet with parents, staff, students, and community members to gather ideas and discuss school improvement planning goals. Decisions about students and how to meet their needs were made as a result of these meetings. Relationships with parents and community members developed which resulted in increased community involvement and more active participation in school activities.

In addition to meeting directly with district and school stakeholders, district and school leaders administered surveys to gather data on topics that would directly impact the student experience. Leadership recognized the lack of data on social-emotional health of students, so the district partnered with Children's Hospital in 2018 to begin collecting, monitoring, analyzing data on their well-being. Through the analysis of the Resiliency Survey data, leadership understood the need to create mental health programming and establish trauma plans which included the hiring of additional counselors to ensure students established connections with adults in the schools. Making teachers available to students before and after school and virtually as needed was also a priority. Many forms of touchpoints have been established with teachers, peers, and administration to address the social-emotional needs of students.

At the high school, department chairs meet to discuss students, ensuring they are on track and supported. School counselors track social-emotional learning data and meet with teachers and staff to identify those students who need additional assistance. Interviews with high school staff members confirmed educators' commitment to student success. Multiple forms of data collected over the years have resulted in improvement in programs. For example, educators and leaders worked collaboratively to implement Bluebird Academy, a credit recovery initiative that provides opportunities for students to engage in coursework to complete required classes necessary for graduation.

Fort Thomas Independent Schools leadership engages with stakeholders in a systematic way, analyzing data and making decisions in ways that positively impact students. This is illustrated by the increase in dual-credit courses, growing career pathways, the Girls in Stem program, Robotics club, among other opportunities that prepare students for the future workplace. The team encourages the system to continue its inclusion of all stakeholders in the continuous improvement process.

**The vision, *Rich in Tradition with a Focus on the Future*, is embraced by all stakeholder groups and is embedded in all aspects of school and district programs and operations.** Interviews with business leaders and members of the school board revealed an unwavering commitment to community, a sense of responsibility to serve, and an engaged responsiveness to leadership requests of support for district initiatives that would help enhance opportunities for students and staff, preparing them for the future. Cultivating leadership throughout the district and community was viewed as an expectation in which several examples were shared. For instance, some members of the board were district alumni who also volunteered in the schools. Other community members served on the Education Foundation or

participated in some way in community partnerships. One described the district as a place where tradition lived, remaining “mindful of the past while looking to the future” while another believed that Fort Thomas had an engaged community where academic excellence was central, emphasizing the belief that “It’s cool to be smart.” The ongoing process of identifying staff needs and staff retention is part of the strategic planning process. Staff retention remains high in the district.

Another example of the community’s commitment to its school district is evidenced in the operation of the district’s school cafeterias. The only allocation of funds necessary for cafeteria operations is in the stock of food and supplies, for volunteers make up the cafeteria staff. They prepare and serve food items to students and staff and engage in other duties as necessary, such as stock shelves, clean dishes, and maintain sanitary practices as required by law.

In addition to staying true to tradition, district and school leadership remain focused on the future as evidenced by their participation in Ed Leader 21, a network that engages and connects education leaders and educators, promoting 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and skills that will prepare students to *thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Visiting other school districts to gather ideas about other ways of enhancing opportunities for students is yet another way the district and school leadership enriched their own understanding of how to cultivate a learning experience that reflects the world in which students will engage, work, and grow.

Another way the district is focusing on the future is through the experiences they create in the schools. Interviews with students revealed a culture of inclusion with a deep-seated commitment to caring for another. Students shared reasons why they liked their school. One said she “liked how we include others.” Another described her school as “excellent with super nice teachers.” Students from each elementary school joyfully sang their school song, each with an emphasis on school pride and doing their very best. Students shared how they appreciated new routines and an organized schedule because Covid was a disrupter in the way schooling had previously worked. Students admitted that working in groups occurred more often this year than in years past, which was positively embraced. Teachers were described as cheerleaders who promoted the “we are all in this together” philosophy. Additionally, students exhibited excitement when describing content area instruction. For instance, science instruction might include a trip outdoors, working collaboratively with peers on projects, and participating in learning games.

Increasing opportunities for students also illustrates the district’s desire to expose students to multiple post-secondary possibilities. Career and Technical Education (CTE) Pathways allow students to prepare for careers in Accounting, Administrative Support, App Development, Business Analytics Flight, Culinary and Food Service, e-Commerce, Early Childhood Education, Engineering and Technology Design, Entrepreneurship Flight, Fashion and Interior Design, Health Innovations, Information and Support Services, Management and Entrepreneurship, Cinematography and Video Production, and Teaching and Learning. Also available are clubs for Girls in STEM, world language, robotics, among others. Student advisory councils exist for students. These pathways provide real-world experiences so students can made decisions about post-secondary pursuits with contextual information now at their fingertips.

Opportunities for leadership extend to staff as well. Teacher advisory councils are active and meet annually with the school board via a “Council to Council” group. The superintendent mentors new principals while school-based Action Teams focus on Leadership, Academics, and Culture at the building level. Leaders participate in the annual leadership retreat.

The system is steeped in quality assurance processes. Stakeholder feedback is collected on a regular basis and has become party of the district’s culture. Work is evaluated and shared with the board at the annual leadership retreat. Professional development for teachers is based upon student and teacher

need. Feedback is solicited through stakeholder focus groups and a voting system. Action teams at each school are tasked with focusing on specific building initiatives. The utilization of digital and instructional coaches supports and assists educators in meeting pedagogical goals. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meet regularly, focusing on students' instructional needs. Professional development topics could be gathered from observation data to align with what teaching strategies are expected.

District improvement efforts are a collaborative process involving multiple stakeholders. During the improvement planning process, leaders focus on priority needs, district funding, and closing achievement gaps between identified subgroups of students. When implemented with fidelity, the Comprehensive District Improvement Plan (CDIP) cultivates an environment that promotes student growth and achievement. Data collection could become a more formal process.

The team found community commitment in partnerships that helped support students in a number of ways. The Autism Training Center is one example. Each partnership reflects a commitment not only to students but adults as well. Professional Learning Community (PLC) structures allow for common planning for curriculum alignment and professional development, each of which supports preparing for new trends and innovative pedagogy. Professional Development Academies promote training in areas of pedagogy, curriculum alignment, and assessment. Late arrival days are utilized for horizontal and vertical curriculum mapping and alignment, among other staff training needs and district/school initiatives. The district is encouraged to continue its focus on its vision of *Rich in Tradition with a Focus on the Future*.

**A common research-based instructional framework utilized throughout the system is lacking.**

The adoption of a research-based instructional framework in each of its five public schools is an opportunity for Fort Thomas Independent Schools to improve its approach to classroom instruction. The use of a common instructional framework would allow the development of a common language to describe teaching and learning in all K-12 classrooms, the opportunity for K-5 teachers in each elementary school to collaborate across grade levels and between schools, a learning culture that promotes consistent and equitable learning experiences for all students in all classrooms, and the alignment between professional learning opportunities and the instructional framework.

While no data on an instructional framework or pedagogical approach was found, the team did learn that teachers use technology applications to measure standard mastery. For example, Schoology and IXL are tools with which teachers measure progress. Another way students' skills are assessed is using self-reflections in which students measure their own progress and set goals. Academic growth for students enrolled in 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade is measured through Data Tracker. Students also collect "artifacts" for their Portrait of a Graduate portfolio so progress over time can be realized. Student success is also measured by standardized assessment with Highlands High School achieving an "average combined Junior ACT score [of] 23.5, as compared to the state average of 19.0."

Technology and support for the integration of technology is deeply embedded in the district culture. While teachers are members of collaborative teams where agency, autonomy and ownership of learning are clearly present, no documentation of best pedagogical practices that include the measured results of specific instructional strategies gives teachers and instructional leaders a framework to guide organizational effectiveness. A commitment to these practices will not only align with the district vision and school mission statements but will cause stakeholders at various levels to hold one another accountable for improved teaching and learning.

**Fort Thomas has not yet created/developed a systematic process to understand graduate experiences as aligned with the Portrait of a Graduate (PoG) to inform the impact of current practices and ultimately improve strategies that prepare students for post-secondary success.**

Fort Thomas began the planning process of the Portrait of a Graduate by examining research and collaborating with multiple stakeholders to determine the qualities with which all graduates should leave high school. A courageous leader, creative problem solver, curious critical thinker, empathetic collaborator, and global communicator are demonstrable qualities with which graduates are expected to have when leaving high school. Based on interviews with multiple stakeholder groups, most specifically parents and administration, the district's expectations for students are consistent with those qualities as part of a long tradition of excellence. These expectations also appear to be deeply embedded in the district culture with *Rich in Tradition with a Focus to the Future* known by many stakeholders.

Moreover, leaders and teachers are attempting to measure student growth and achievement through various measures, from grades to standardized tests and even portfolios. While the district excels at measuring the qualities of a high school student based on the PoG, the measurement of these qualities in a graduate five years removed from high school painted a different story, with only fifty percent of high school graduates graduating from post-secondary program.

Knowing this statistic, Fort Thomas implemented a district-wide set of strategies that are helping to meet the needs of each student through several initiatives and programs. Social-Emotional learning, Inclusion Excellent Coalition and futures-thinking initiatives work in conjunction with one another to ensure the needs of all students are met. The district established multiple initiatives to promote leadership throughout the system from students (Leader in Me) to school and district leadership (Ed Leader 21). Cultivating leadership throughout the district and community is illustrated by their extensive stakeholder investment, involvement, collaboration, and responsiveness to stakeholder feedback. Using the stakeholder voice to shape and inform improvement efforts in all aspects of district improvement planning is a strength.

Another strength are the programs and initiatives that align directly with the qualities of the Portrait of a Graduate (PoG), each signifying an important life skill necessary for future success. Data show that the PoG is fully embedded and integrated across the K-12 system; however, the PoG is based on the experiences of graduates, so having a process in place to collect and analyze graduate experiential data will help inform future pedagogical practices and adjustments needed to support high school graduates as they engage in post-secondary pursuits. *Traditions* is the publication that leadership can use to connect with graduates as a start to developing a systematic process to survey, collect, analyze and interpret the graduate experience.

The district focuses on a positive, creative, and innovative learning culture. Students are provided with the attitudes, beliefs and skills necessary for success. Interviews collaborated this deeply held belief. Teachers lead teachers in professional development and conduct peer observations. Advisory classes and the program *Leader in Me* allow for the development of positive relationships between adults and students. Students set goals for themselves and adhere to the high expectations of the district's curriculum. Pacing guides and learning target documents are provided throughout the district. Staff use benchmark data to ensure students' learning needs are met. Data Tracker documentation provides student performance information. Adjustments to curriculum documents are made on an as-needed basis with the update of curricular resources done at the middle and high school on a rotating cycle. Staff shared ownership of curricular resources and described the update process during interviews.

In summary, Fort Thomas Independent Schools illustrate a strong commitment to stakeholder involvement. What they do reflects a vision in which most know and believe: *Rich in Tradition with a Focus on the Future*. Many from various stakeholder groups shared some traditional beliefs and ideals that remain embedded in the district system. The team also discovered a futures-thinking ideology where social-emotional learning initiatives and Inclusion Excellence, both of which reflect the importance of student self-awareness of emotional health and issues of social justice, are protected and practiced,

and align to the qualities of the Portrait of a Graduate. A next step for improvement is creating or adopting an instructional framework that is known and practiced by all educators. In addition, formalizing a process to assess graduates based on the PoG qualities will ultimately promote district and school accomplishments by building on the many successes for which the district is known.

The culture of Fort Thomas Independent Schools reflects the unwavering commitment among all stakeholder groups to serve students and staff in a way that supports their growth and success. As the district moves through the challenges of COVID, it is a prime time to initiate and enhance improvements for teaching and learning and assess the graduate experience to inform district improvement efforts. The Portrait of a Graduate reflects specific qualities that serve as indicators necessary to measure whether school and district goals are being achieved. The team also encourages new leadership to continue with current established practices that give credence to stakeholder voice and the continued commitment to the district vision, *Rich in Tradition with a Focus on the Future*.

The team greatly appreciates the virtual hospitality of the students, staff, community and school board members, and school and district leadership during the review. The engagement review team commends the Fort Thomas Independent Schools district leadership team and all stakeholders engaged in improvement efforts that reflect the district's *Rich in Tradition with the Focus on the Future* vision.

## Next Steps

Upon receiving the Accreditation Engagement Review Report, the institution is encouraged to implement the following steps:

- Review and share the findings with stakeholders.
- Develop plans to address the areas for improvement identified by the Engagement Review Team.
- Use the findings and data from the report to guide and strengthen the institution's continuous improvement efforts.
- Celebrate the successes noted in the report.
- Continue the improvement journey.



## Team Roster

The Engagement Review Teams are comprised of professionals with varied backgrounds and expertise. To provide knowledge and understanding of the Cognia tools and processes, all Lead Evaluators and Engagement Review Team members are required to complete Cognia training. The following professionals served on the Engagement Review Team:

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
<p>Dr. Jim Evans, Lead Evaluator</p>	<p>Dr. Evans is the former Superintendent of Lee County Schools (2008-2019). The first college graduate on both sides of his family, he began his career as an instructional aide, bus driver, then worked as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal, transportation director, federal programs. In 2015 Lee County was the recipient of KSBA’s PEAK Award and one of fifteen districts in Kentucky to be named District of Distinction. Evans was named KSBA 2015 Kids First Advocacy Award, 2016 KEDC Outstanding Superintendent of the Year, 2017 finalist for KASA Superintendent of the Year, 2017 KSBA F.L. Dupree Superintendent of the Year and 2018 recipient of KASA Superintendent of the Year. He now works full time at KEDC.</p>
<p><b>Dr. Lori Franke-Hopkins, Associate Lead Evaluator</b></p>	<p>Dr. Franke-Hopkins serves as a Director for Cognia. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Speech Communication, Master of Science in Secondary English Education, Education Specialist in School Administration, and concluded her educational path at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, earning a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. Dr. Hopkins served as a military police officer in the United States Marine Corps. She taught English, speech, and drama at Carrollton High School, coordinated the testing program at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, directed teacher education and clinical placements at Blackburn College, and served in several administrative positions in the Jersey CUSD No. 100 school district, concluding her tenure as superintendent. She is the author of <i>Transforming District Office Culture: One Strategy at a Time</i> and recently released a children’s book: <i>I Want to be Just Me</i> that encompasses the idea that each child is unique and can change the world.</p>

Team Member Name	Brief Biography
<p><b>Dr. Fiona Hinds</b></p>	<p>Dr. Hinds is an equity advocate with extensive experience in education management and improvement systems for schools, districts and state education agencies. Her expertise includes school quality, urban education, and strategic planning. Dr. Hinds has worked with Cognia for 12 years and currently serves as Senior Vice President of Client Services. Prior to joining Cognia Dr. Hinds was a school leader in a charter school system, serving as an education management organization advisor, principal, curriculum leader and teacher. Dr. Hinds has been recognized for innovative leadership practices including business partnerships, career preparation and developing highly effective collaborative cultures. Dr. Hinds served as the Board President for Learning Forward Michigan and was an adjunct professor and curriculum advisor for a middle school STEM program for girls at Wayne State University in Detroit.</p>
<p><b>Dr. Dylan Smith</b></p>	<p>Dr. Smith joined Oldham County Schools in 2018 and now serves as the Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning. He leads the Student Learning Division and is responsible for curriculum, instruction, professional learning, academic and behavioral intervention, special education, support for English Learners and support for gifted and talented students. Dr. Smith has worked in the field of education for 16 years and is passionate about helping students reach their full potential. He has a comprehensive understanding of school systems, procedures and safety protocols. He is deeply committed to creating values-driven learning environments that support the whole child and strengthen the relationship between students, teachers and families over time. Dr. Smith has worked to support both public and public charter schools to engage in program reviews, self-study and reaccreditation leading to significant academic gains for students.</p>



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