



Gainesville City Schools System

Gainesville, Georgia

March 6 - 9, 2022

System Accreditation Engagement Review

215131

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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:	4	SU:	2	EM:	
1.2	Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learning.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	2	EM:	
1.3	The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
1.4	The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	2	IM:	3	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
1.5	The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.									Impacting
	EN:	3	IM:	4	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	
1.6	Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	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:	3	SU:	2	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:	2	EM:	
1.9	The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	
1.10	Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.									Improving
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
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.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	4	
2.2	The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving.										Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	2	RE:	2	SU:	2	EM:	3	
2.3	The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs, and skills needed for success.										Improving
	EN:	2	IM:	2	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3	
2.4	The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.										Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3	
2.5	Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.										Improving
	EN:	2	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3	
2.6	The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is clearly aligned to standards and best practices.										Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3	
2.7	Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3	
2.8	The system provides programs and services for learners' educational futures and career planning.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	4	SU:	4	EM:	4	
2.9	The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.										Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3	
2.10	Learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.										Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3	

Learning Capacity Standards										Rating
2.11	Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to the demonstrable improvement of student learning.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
2.12	The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	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:	3	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:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	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:	4	RE:	3	SU:	2	EM:	
3.4	The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.									Impacting
	EN:	4	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	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:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
3.6	The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.									Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	
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:	3	IM:	4	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	

Resource Capacity Standards											Rating
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.										Improving
	EN:	3	IM:	3	RE:	3	SU:	3	EM:	3	

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.

Institution IEQ	333.71	CIN 5 Year IEQ Range	278.34 – 283.33
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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 Cognia Engagement Review Team conducted a three-day Engagement Review for the Gainesville City Schools System during March 6-8, 2022. During the review, the team developed several themes to support the system in its continuous improvement journey.

Gainesville City School System (GCSS) parents and community are active, engaged, and work closely in alignment with the system to best serve the needs of the students in preparation for post-secondary education and employment opportunities. Different interviews with parents and the community corroborated the overarching state of engagement with the school district. Comments were made regarding support for the school district and schools in support of preparing students at all levels for their continuous improvement journey through K-12 and beyond. The parents and community recognize that Gainesville City quite uniquely has a lot of students that remain or return to the area as adults in their careers. As such, they recognize the importance of best assuring that the student community graduates from the system prepared to contribute productively as employees and citizens. The team suggests that the system continue to explore avenues to maintain and increase engagement with the parent and community stakeholder groups.

The system's diverse student population is engaged and committed to their preparation for post-secondary academics and/or a career path. Interviews separately with different levels of students noted their desire for high-quality education. The students appreciated and embraced the wide-ranging diversity within the ethnic makeup of the school system. They recognized the support offered for academics (such as supplemental resources and activities) and overall social-emotional well-being for themselves. The students at the secondary level also appreciated that in larger schools, there are a lot of voices for opinions to be offered, and they were welcomed. The team suggests that the system maintain and increase student engagement on a focused path for students' academics and/or careers beyond high school graduation.

The school board recognizes its roles and responsibilities that permit the experts to manage education while appropriately providing guidance, input, and oversight on behalf of the community at large. Interviews with school board members confirm that they work specific to their lane to assure the district has an appropriate budget and policies while also recognizing they are representing their constituency. The superintendent noted that he is not concerned when board members visit schools for specific reasons because there is no motive other than the reason they are present. A review of school board meeting recordings also reflects a school board in action within appropriate roles and responsibilities. The team suggests that the school board members continue to individually reflect upon their job-embedded activities regularly to best assure that they continue to focus on guidance, input, and

oversight while also continuing to permit the education experts to manage the day-to-day operations of the school system.

The staff is committed and caring to students' best interests as the center of its teaching and learning practices. Interviews with teachers throughout the district confirmed that they consistently framed their work in education around the best needs of the students. This aligns with the information principals provided in that the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Coordinator meets bi-weekly with teachers to review individualized student goals and discuss support. Student interviews revealed that teachers are nurturing academically and social-emotionally. They also noted that they had advocates at their school that knew them by name. The team encourages the staff to continue to individually examine its roles, nurturing relationships with students to continue to provide such an environment for students.

The system's 'Hub' is an innovative, full-service, and community-oriented operation that is designed to meet the academic, social-emotional, and physiological needs of system stakeholders. With its own strategic plan, the 'Hub' is organized to become an embedded part of the school community. Teachers mentioned that the Hub provides an opportunity for students to develop communication skills, dispositions toward learning, and self-direction and monitoring. Students can also get tutoring there. Staff and school administrators commented on career planning that also occurs through the 'Hub.' The team suggests that the system continue to analyze and examine how the 'Hub' can continue to grow in services in supporting evolving needs of the system's community and student stakeholders into the future.

The superintendent, a stable leader, continues to lead the system through a period of transition for the makeup of the student body and overall community to one of increased diversity. Interviews with the school board exemplified confidence in the leadership of the superintendent. This confidence permits the school board to adhere to appropriate roles and responsibilities. Student enrollment data clearly shows a school system transitioning from a minority to a majority in the student population. Students, parents, and staff all emphasized this shift in diversity as a strength of the school system. It is the strength of the leadership of this superintendent to navigate this transition effectively. The team suggests that the superintendent regularly reflects upon his role and responsibilities to continue to meet the changing needs of stakeholders that make up the system's community.

The system encourages and incentivizes staff to earn an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) endorsement to best meet the needs of its student population, which is commendable. The System Overview presentation and interviews with the superintendent, academic cabinet, school administrators, and staff referenced the system's goals for ESOL Endorsements for staff. The system also has a plan identifying the partnerships with post-secondary institutions, individuals who qualify (academics and wraparound), the status of the system calling for the need of a plan, an incentive for becoming ESOL endorsed, and identification of the funding source. Given that ESOL strategies are commonly accepted and respected as quality teaching overall, this initiative should simultaneously support the education of ESOL students, special education students, and the general student population. The system is targeting its growing number of ESOL students and indirectly supporting education in general. The team suggests that the system continue to support educators, including future new hires, in earning their ESOL endorsement and other qualifying credentials based on the diverse needs of the student population.

The system lacks engaging in documented processes for collecting, analyzing, and making decisions with available data over a longitudinal period (minimum 3-years) to support reflection, planning, and decision-making related to academic achievement, programmatic effectiveness, and non-instructional measures. The interview with the academic cabinet, along with evidence

provided by the system, revealed that the system is data-rich. It was also revealed that there is some review of data in certain areas as often as on a quarterly basis. An example of this is data aligned to federal programs. Areas, where there exist processes in place for data collection, analysis, and resulting data-based decision-making, can be leveraged for expansion into all appropriate areas minimally aforementioned. The system also could leverage existing processes that may be required from other entities to create a more effective process best meeting the needs of the system. The system is urged to consider tracking, monitoring, analyzing, and learning from data annually to build and serve a longitudinal history to always be able to reference. The team encourages the system to comprehensively organize itself around processes for reflection, planning, and decision-making to learn about individual program effectiveness within academics and other non-academic/non-instructional measures.

The system lacks creating processes to ensure seamless horizontal and vertical articulation of curriculum across all grade levels and subject areas. Interviews with school administrators and teachers highlighted that there are differentiated levels of horizontal and vertical articulation at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The greatest amount of articulation effort occurs at the elementary school, followed by the middle and high school. Given that the system is going to have a new middle school opening soon, vertical and horizontal articulation is going to grow in importance. It is noteworthy that the articulation should developmentally grow at all levels across grade levels and subject areas and between schools (elementary to middle school and middle to high school). This cross-level communication and planning will afford a higher quality curriculum experience for students and simultaneously a more effective education in general. The team suggests that the system perform grade-level articulation activities, with a product of documentation for all grades, including transition grade levels from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school.

The system lacks formulating and evaluating the effectiveness of a high-quality professional learning community (PLC) model at each level of education (elementary, middle, and high schools). Principal interviews noted that PLCs are implemented and during common planning times as they can. The superintendent interview also revealed that the PLC status at the elementary, middle, and high school levels currently varies. At some levels, system staff meets with schools to review the status of PLCs. Sometimes system staff attends and observes PLCs. The Atlas Protocol is the decided process for PLCs within the system. The next step for the system is to collect data related to PLCs at all levels and analyze the data to measure the effectiveness of the PLCs. Additionally, the data analysis can further be used to make data-based decisions regarding the future direction of PLCs. Ultimately, the PLC structure should be executed to the same level of effectiveness at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The team encourages the system to analyze professional learning communities' models for each level (elementary, middle, high) and formalize processes within each level and across schools at each level for consistency while leveraging the strengths of a model at one level for potential implementation at another level.

The system lacks creating a process and schedule for the review of curriculum at all levels to ensure that there is a formal research-based system-approved curriculum and resources in all classrooms throughout the school system. Teachers, students, and school administration confirm that curriculum resources are in place at all levels within the school system. Teachers noted that they could supplement the curriculum at their local level as they find appropriate. An example of this includes supplements for Studies Weekly at the primary grade levels for social studies and subjects with only one teacher system-wide at the secondary level. The system level should consider leading the facilitation of a process of reviewing and approving all curricula implemented as core or supplemental programming. The process would include educators such that there is input from the local school and classroom levels. Research-based core programs should be the same throughout the system for the same subject areas. Supplemental curricula could be where local schools can select from system-approved research-based

options. The team suggests that the system formulate processes for the evaluation of curriculum being considered for implementation where there is representation from site-based educators as part of the process for a recommendation where the system has formal approval authority.

The Engagement Review Team commends the Gainesville City School System for its commitment to educating students. The themes in the Insights emerged from an analysis of quantitative and qualitative data and provide direction as the system continues to address continuous improvement. System and school personnel are encouraged to glean the information and data within this report to celebrate success and inform the next steps on the system's continuous improvement journey.

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 (Lead Evaluator Only)
Dr. Mark Quintana, Lead Evaluator	<p>Dr. Quintana has been a professional in education for 27 years. He served 18 years in the positions from teacher to program coordinator to a district-level administrator for Broward County Public Schools, Florida. In his last position, he was a leader in the district's Curriculum Department and the head of the Office of School Improvement (where he was also the system's lead for accreditation and continuous improvement and liaison to the Florida Department of Education for academic accountability purposes). Upon his departure, Dr. Quintana spent 3.5 years as a senior education consultant for Promethean, as an account manager for district-wide instructional software and supporting school districts with technology integration. Currently, Dr. Quintana is a Vice President for Cognia, managing seven states from departments of education to district/school support for continuous improvement. Dr. Quintana also has 23 years of experience working as a college/university adjunct professor. Dr. Quintana holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from the State University of New York College at Oswego, a Master of Education in exceptional student education (special education) from Florida Atlantic University, an Educational Specialist Degree in educational leadership, and a Doctor of Education in child and youth studies from Nova Southeastern University.</p>
Donald Amonett, Deputy Superintendent/Dalton, GA Public Schools	
Cindy Free, Director/School Improvement, White County, GA Schools	
Dr. Jaime Garrett, Principal/Calhoun Elementary School, Calhoun City Schools	
Andres Martinez, K-12 Solutions Specialist, Cognia	
Christina McCreary, Louisiana/Oklahoma Director, Cognia	
Dr. Wendy Pooler, Principal/Rutland High School, Bibb County School District	

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